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**Youth ‘at-risk’ and ‘resilient’ to crime: Sharing the  
perspectives of young women who engage in crime in  
Aotearoa**

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## Abstract

The perspective of young people, and especially young women who engage in crime has been under-represented in risk and resilience research and policy interventions in New Zealand and in other developed nations. This limits understandings of why young people might engage in crime as well as the effectiveness of interventions that aim to reduce youth crime. In response, this thesis presents insights on youth crime, risk and resilience gained from interviews with eight young women who have engaged in crime between the ages of 15 and 20 years old and lived in Auckland, New Zealand. This thesis sought to examine participants' understandings of their pathways into and out of crime, the terms 'at-risk' and 'resilient' as well as what these young women desire for their futures. An analysis of the interviews reveal how the experiences and perspectives of young women who engage in crime contextualises and extends the dominant, individually-focussed view of risk and resilience. This view tends to locate the cause of crime within the individual and their immediate context. Participants' stories add nuance and deepen the understanding of how 'risk' and 'protective' factors influence young women to engage in crime. Their stories support the incorporation of an ecologically-focussed view of risk and resilience into mainstream literature and policy. Participants realise that external factors including social, structural and political factors shape their environments, constrain their personal agency and influence their involvement in crime. There is an obvious awareness of how the high-risk neighbourhoods normalise pathways that eventuate in crime and negatively influence thoughts and behaviours. Some participants discussed the importance of replacing their role of 'offender' with socially accepted roles including mother, romantic partner, employee or church-goer in their efforts to reduce their involvement in crime. While participants were aware of being associated with the term 'at-risk', none of the participants had heard of the term 'resilient'. Participants' understanding of these terms reflect notions of individual responsibility indicating that risk and resilience terminology may stigmatise and marginalise youth offenders. Participants revealed that they have socially desirable goals such as access to wealth and resources and having a family. Yet their circumstances (e.g. poverty and lack of formal education) limit their ability to achieve these goals through socially acceptable methods. Listening to young women and utilising theories of structuration and habitus, may encourage future researchers to balance their approach by refraining from an exclusive focus on risk and protective factors tied to the individual and including environmentally-located factors in risk and resilience literature. The key recommendation is to develop existing risk and resilience literature and advance policy by addressing structural issues such as poverty and unemployment alongside factors linked to the individual such as anti-social behaviour and family criminality.



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## Chapter One: Introduction

Based on popular media inference and political rhetoric, it would seem that youth crime in Aotearoa is becoming an increasingly serious problem. News headlines such as “Gang of youth thugs strike again” (NZPA, 2007, p. 1) and “Police bust youth crime ring” (Feek, 2010, p. 1) reflect a tone that young people are threatening society. Contemporary media accounts have prioritised young women as being ‘out of control’ and requiring constraint. The media’s negative portrayal of young women is evident in recent headlines proclaiming “Female violent crimes on the rise” (Lynch, 2009, p. 1), “Girl mob stalked and bashed victim ‘for fun’” (Greymouth Star staff, 2013, p. 1) and “Cops get tough on she-crims” (Hurley, 2011, p. 1). Political rhetoric around crime has emphasised the need to be tough (Bartlett, 2009), further strengthening the view that young people are threatening society and that action is necessary. Prime Minister John Key announced that the Government must “act now to defuse these unexploded time-bombs” (Key, 2008b, p. 1). Fringe political party New Zealand First claimed that “Police must deal with [the] youth crime *epidemic*” (Mark, 2009, p. 1)(emphasis added). Victims’ advocate group, the Sensible Sentencing Trust, has pointed to the “Inability of the current system to address the problem [of young offenders]” (2011, p. 1) and urged the introduction of a ‘three-strikes’ sentencing model.

The belief that the best way to address issues of youth crime is through the identification of ‘risk factors’ in the lives of young people, has become increasingly common in Aotearoa and other developed nations (Armstrong, 2003; Bottrell, Armstrong, & France, 2010; Muncie, 2007). It is largely driven by the idea that the identification of risk factors allows for accurate targeting of programmes to those most likely to offend. Targeting ‘at-risk’ young people enables timely and cost-effective interventions. The issues that result in crime and a life trajectory towards an expensive term of incarceration can be addressed, and if effective, stop the young person from offending in the first instance or at the early stages of their criminal career,(Armstrong, 2004; McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter, & McWhirter, 1998). Consequently, the public concern about youth crime has resulted in a large body of risk and resilience literature and a wide array of education, social policy and practise initiatives that strive to foster resilience among young people deemed to be ‘at-risk’ of offending in the United Kingdom, United States, Australia, Aotearoa and other developed nations (Bottrell, 2009a; Hine et al., 2012; Sanders & Munford, 2007; Ungar, 2012a). However the risk and resilience literature that informs the multitude

of youth crime reduction initiatives in Aotearoa has tended to; exclude young offenders' and particularly young female offenders' understandings of what, as well as how, various factors influence their involvement in crime; focus exclusively on young men who engage in crime; and neglect to consider how addressing structural factors such as poverty might reduce youth offending.

This thesis examines how young women who engage in crime in New Zealand understand their pathways into and out of crime as well as the terms 'at-risk' and 'resilient'. Drawing on existing theory and literature as well as qualitative research, this study considers the factors that young women recognise as influencing their decision to engage or disengage in crime. The opportunity is taken in this thesis to learn from young women and explore how they understand their involvement in crime as well as what they seek for their own future. Building on these findings, recommendations are made as to how youth crime intervention strategies based on risk and resilience research might be more effective in reducing youth crime statistics in New Zealand and overseas.

### **Rationale for the study**

Despite steady declines in overall rates of youth crime in recent years, Aotearoa continues to invest a significant amount of public funding and effort into research and programmes that foster resilience in youth, and in particular youth deemed to be 'at-risk' of crime (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). This is evidenced by the current funding of resilience research provided by the Ministry of Social Development's 'Social Policy Evaluation and Research Committee' (SPEAR, 2012) as well as the incorporation of resilience-building strategies into programmes such as the Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2004) and the New Zealand Secondary School Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2009).

Although it is acknowledged that pathways into and out of crime are influenced by social and structural factors, official reactions to youth crime have been driven by an individually centred concept of 'risk'. For instance, the resilience-building strategies employed by the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2004) and the Ministry of Education (2009) ensure that young people are given an opportunity to develop individual personality traits associated with resilience, such as self-esteem and self-efficacy. However these resilience-building strategies negate to consider changing cultural, social or structural factors that shape the young person's environment (Ministry of Education, 2009).

A number of researchers claim that youth risk and resilience research has committed testimonial injustice against the young people that it studies and labels as being ‘at-risk’ (Bottrell, 2009b, 2010; Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012; Bottrell et al., 2010; Foster & Spencer, 2010; Martineau, 1999; Massey, Cameron, Ouellette, & Fine, 1998; Ungar, 2012a, 2012b). It appears that research in Aotearoa is almost completely void of male and female youth offenders’ perspectives. Other than one female youth offender whose perspective was included amongst five male youth offender’s perspectives in Carpenter’s (2012) criminology thesis about desistance from crime in New Zealand, the perspective of young women who engage in crime appears to be absent and marginalised, even more so than that of young men who engage in crime in youth crime literature.

The marginalisation of the perspectives of young women who engage in crime is concerning for several reasons. Firstly, it is concerning because there is no certainty that young people perceive their actions or experiences in the ways portrayed by those describing them (Carpenter, 2012; France & Homel, 2006). For example, Foster and Spencer’s (2010) conversations with young people who engage in crime revealed that many of the young people interviewed held socially desirable and ‘normative’ goals such as gaining full-time employment, despite common misconceptions about the goals of young offenders. Supporting this, Bottrell, Armstrong and France (2010) argue that the way that young people may talk about their experiences and desired futures might constitute important feedback to governance systems. Bottrell, Armstrong and France (2010) contend that listening to young offenders provides insight into offending factors that are emphasised in policy or other factors both in and beyond an individual’s immediate context, which may not present themselves in alternative research approaches. Therefore listening to young peoples’ accounts may bring to the fore the meanings of situations, routines, events, relationships and personal agency significant to offending, which might assist in understanding the broader relations to youth offending, as well as how best to implement prevention and intervention strategies (Bottrell, Armstrong, France, 2010; 2012).

Secondly, the marginalisation of the perspectives of ‘at-risk’ young women is concerning because the majority of risk and resilience programmes are based upon research that has dealt with male criminals and the factors that encourage young men to engage or disengage from crime. Crime committed by women has often been considered secondary to the importance of male offending due to the smaller

number of female offenders who appear in official statistics (Cunneen & White, 2007). As a result, the influence of gender has been overlooked in many studies of youth crime and specifically the desistance from crime. Consequently, little is known about female offending patterns over time and whether the same risk and protective factors identified among young men can be extended to young women (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002; Runggay, 2004).

Finally, the growing proportion of female youth offenders compared to male youth offenders in New Zealand and other Anglophone nations heightens concern around the missing voice of young women who engage in crime and the inability to accurately extend the male-dominated risk and resilience research to women. While the overall youth apprehension rates have trended downwards since 1995, this decline has been slower for females (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). The result is that the proportion of female to male youth apprehensions is increasing and a greater proportion of young women will be affected by policy decisions and services provided to foster resilience to crime.

Considering the reasons outlined above, it is imperative and timely to ensure that young women who engage in crime are given the opportunity to have their perspectives, experiences and understandings heard. In this way, their insider perspectives might inform policy development, as well as the interventions that this growing proportion of young women who engage in crime will engage with. Listening to female youth offenders' accounts and relations to crime might permit a wider understanding of the societal pathways that influence the chances, choices and opportunities available for young women who engage in crime. Listening to the youth voice also has the potential to widen the scope and effectiveness of the interventions aimed at building resilience among youth offenders. Learning more about how and why young people offend and why they stop offending is crucial in order to limit the number of people entering the adult prison population. With this thesis I seek to interrogate extant youth notions about risk and resilience. This will be done by providing young women who engage in crime with an opportunity to share their experiences, views and understandings of what it means to be 'at-risk' of engaging in crime.

### **Thesis Outline**

In this chapter, I have outlined the foundations for this research project. I have presented the research aim as being of international relevance, as well as local

importance. It is relevant outside of New Zealand as youth crime literature around the world lacks the insight gained from the perspective of young women who engage in crime. However this thesis will be particularly interesting to people in New Zealand, as this study extends understandings of female youth offending and risk and resilience research in the unique context of Aotearoa.

Chapter Two details the representations of youth crime in New Zealand over time. Despite declines in rates of youth offending in recent years, the behaviour of young people has been conceptualised as threatening and worrisome from the mid-nineteenth century through to the present. This public perception that youth are threatening has serious implications for political responses that try to contain the ‘problem’ of youth crime. Historically youth offenders and those deemed to be ‘at-risk’ were removed from their communities and placed under state control. This trend was altered in 1989 when the Children and Young Persons Act emphasised diversion away from the judicial process. Yet as this thesis illustrates, reducing youth offending requires greater investment in young people and their communities than simply diverting young people away from official sanction avenues. This chapter unravels how the systematic marginalisation of young people from ethnic minority groups, low socio-economic areas and the female population is intrinsically linked to issues of poverty, class, and gender. Analysing youth offending within Aotearoa’s historical, social and structural changes indicates that youth offending strategies need to address the broader, structural factors that create environments conducive to crime. This may be controversial as discourses surrounding young people and crime emphasise the need for control, and are generally incompatible with this idea of indirectly targeting youth offenders through macro-level change.

Chapter Three sets the foundation for this thesis by examining the main factors that risk and resilience researchers along with policy makers have identified as influencing the pathways into and out of crime for young people. It defines the inter-related constructs of ‘risk factors’, ‘protective factors’ and ‘risk factor analysis’. This chapter also provides examples of how New Zealand policy-makers have incorporated these constructs into youth initiatives. This chapter pays particular attention to the differences between the dominant individually-focussed view and the increasingly popular ecologically-orientated views held by risk and resilience researchers and policy makers. Concerns about individually-orientated methodology are explored, including how it: is exclusively focussed on the individual, is a window-dressing tool of government, is conducive to stigma, is incongruent with Maori ways of

understanding hauora (wellbeing) and how it excludes the perspective of the young people that the researchers and policy makers are attempting to assist.

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology and methods used in the study. It also reinforces the need to consider structural and individual risk factors when trying to reduce youth crime. Structuration theory and the concept of habitus are shown to account for the experiences of young women who engage in crime. This chapter alleges that the culture and unique environment in which people live influences the pathways and opportunities that young people might recognise as being available. This reiterates the need to allow young female offenders to explain their experiences of engaging and disengaging from their own perspective. This chapter also introduces the eight participants of this study and describes some ethical concerns about the research process.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the interviews. Participants' experiences of crime both contextualised and extended existing mainstream risk and resilience literature. The participants' unfamiliarity with the term resilience coupled with their awareness that they had been called 'at-risk' indicates that risk and resilience terminology might play a role in stigmatising and excluding youth offenders. Participants' explanations for engaging and disengaging from crime complicate and challenge the individually-centred view of risk and resilience that dominates literature and policy initiatives. Participants' understanding of their involvement in crime extends mainstream literature as they recognised the value of merging ecologically-centred and individually-centred views of risk and resilience. Participants identified risk and protective factors as being located within the individual (e.g. maturing), in their immediate context (e.g. family criminality) and in the structural and political spheres of their environments (e.g. rates of unemployment and benefit cuts). Contrary to the literature, participants realised that adopting pro-social roles of being a mother, partner, employee or church-goer helped to reduce their offending. Finally listening to the participants confirmed that despite their current behaviour, they desire futures characterised by wealth and resources earned through legitimate methods.

Chapter Six, summarises the research findings and the reviewed literature. It unpacks how listening to the perspectives of young women who engage in crime confirms, contextualises and extends existing risk and resilience literature. It also explains limitations of this study together with opportunities for future investigation.

## Chapter Two: Youth Offending in Aotearoa

Considering the burgeoning body of research, finances and policy attention invested into ‘at-risk’ youth and resiliency building programmes, both overseas and in Aotearoa, it is necessary to ascertain the extent to which youth crime is a problem and why young people have come to be perceived as problematic (Armstrong, 2004; France, 2008). For close to a century, the behaviour of young people, and particularly behaviour deemed to be deviant, has been a great source of intrigue for adult populations (Brown, 2005; Carpenter, 2012; France & Homel, 2006). At times young people have been perceived to be lacking self-regulation to such an extent that they are deemed “ungovernable” (Kelly, 2000, p. 303). Geoffrey Pearson’s *Hooligan* (1983), and Yska’s *All Shook Up* (1999) illustrate historical examples of fears associated with youth and criminal behaviour in the United Kingdom and New Zealand respectively. The clearest conclusion drawn from these cultural analyses was that “successive generations have understood juvenile crime as an entirely unprecedented phenomenon which reflects the breakdown of tradition” (Pearson, 1994, p. 1165). Armstrong (2004) and France (2008) support this claim as they suggest that the ‘issue’ of young people might generate a fear of lawlessness or call into questioning the quality of the social services offered to young people, their families and the direction of future generations. According to Sharland, it would seem that young people are continually viewed as a “barometer of social ills” (Sharland, 2006, p. 249)

This chapter considers a number of key viewpoints on youth crime, outlines the history of concern in Aotearoa and notes how the political and social conditions contextualise reactions to youth crime. The changing responses from policy makers in the youth justice system are assessed before attention turns to Aotearoa’s current state of youth offending. Despite increased efforts to direct young people away from the justice system towards the use of restorative justice practises, the central issues of structural marginalisation remain problematic for a core of offenders.

### Historical Overview

Before the colonisation of Aotearoa, Maori life was governed by tikanga; a broad system of custom, law and normative prescriptions. Tikanga employs a restorative approach to unlawful transgressions (Quince, 2007). The key dynamic in tikanga is to maintain equilibrium between all parts of the human and non-human world. Utu (or rectification) is required when a person’s actions negatively impact on

the mana (status) of a person or thing, and the victim's reputation, prestige or charisma is affected (Quince, 2007). The collective nature of Maori society means that the whanau (family) or iwi (tribe) of the actors are also affected by the offending. The wider family is affected because an imbalance in an individual affects that persons' ability to contribute to the collective. Tikanga realises that an offender's action (e.g. rape) not only impacts the victim's mana, but also the mana of the victim's family and iwi. Consequently, balance must be restored for all individual's affected. Notions of individual responsibility are not stressed in collectivist cultures such as the Maori way of life, and the recompense required to rectify the situation and repair damaged relationships are placed on the offender's wider family and iwi, as opposed to sole responsibility lying with the individual offender (Quince, 2007).

The colonisation of Aotearoa by the British heralded the demise of tikanga and had a devastating impact on the Maori way of life. Maori restorative means of dealing with youth offending were replaced with the colonial legal system. Initially, a classical approach was adopted where crime by young people and adults alike was viewed as rational act of free will. Consequently, punishment focussed on deterrence rather than reform (Watts, 2003). However the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century brought an acknowledgement that children and young people are uniquely vulnerable. Subsequently, there was a move towards a child-centred, welfare-based treatment of young people. In this welfare-based system, young offenders were seen as victims of their environments; they needed help not punishment (Watts, 2003). The 1925 Child Welfare Act established a discrete children's court with the aim that young people required protection and guidance rather than disciplinary punishment.

During this period, residential care was regarded as the best option for young offenders. Through residential care a vulnerable child could be rescued from the negative, crime inducing environment that they were living in. The imposition of this child rescue ideology by the dominant Pakeha culture led to the massive alienation of Maori and Pacific children from their families. The Maori and Pacific ways of doing family were not understood, and therefore viewed as dangerous by the monocultural laws and by the Pakeha law enforcers. In an attempt to protect Maori and Pacific children from their presumed negative environments, they were moved away from their families into welfare institutions and correctional facilities whose over-representation of Maori and Pacific children, amongst other issues, point to a system that is institutionally racist (Walsh, 2013). This welfare philosophy prevailed over the

next 50 years, reaching its height in 1974 with the Children and Young Persons Act (Watts, 2003).

Following World War II the economy and consumerism flourished along with public interest in the activities of deviant young people. Adult anxieties were further heightened in the wake of a number of incidents that prompted the Government to lead an inquiry into moral delinquency in the 1950s (Mazengarb et al., 1954; Yska, 1993). As details of a teenage sex scandal from the Hutt Valley near Wellington were unveiled, the nation was thrown into a frenzy of concern which prompted a report from a *Special Committee on Moral Delinquency in Children and Adolescents*, also known as the Mazengarb Report (Mazengarb et al., 1954). The investigation was initiated after the capital city's morning newspaper, the *Dominion*, featured reports of proceedings in the Magistrates Court at Lower Hutt against promiscuous youths charged with indecent assault upon girls under the age of sixteen (Mazengarb et al., 1954). The case followed a fifteen year old girl who reported her involvement in what she called "the Milk Bar Gang" which met "mostly for sex purposes" (Mazengarb et al., 1954, p. 8). The lead investigating officer described the Milk Bar Gangs behaviour as a "shocking degree of immoral conduct which spread into sexual orgies perpetuated in private homes during the absence of parents" (Mazengarb et al., 1954, p. 4).

Despite female teens making up only 17 of the 52 'Milk Bar Gang' members, it is interesting to note that the media coverage of the Hutt Valley scandal, the Mazengarb report, and the police inquiries all focussed upon the behaviour of girls who were involved. Statistics such as four-fifths of the girls and half of the boys involved admitted having sex were seized on as evidence that these 'Huntresses' were no innocents (Yska, 1993). When reporting on the Hutt Valley trial, the popular 1950s *Truth* newspaper noted that the defence focussed on the girls' behaviour. The police summaries show that the interviewers blamed the girls for being promiscuous and leading the boys on; perhaps the outrage with the females was that they not only broke the law but also flouted gendered norms of the subservient stay-at-home female (Yska, 1993).

National Prime Minister Holland commented almost prophetically in response to the Hutt Valley scandal, when he said, "There is, I regret to say grounds for believing that it is not confined to the Hutt Valley" (Yska, 1993, p. 68). In the same week as the media coverage of the Hutt Valley, Milk Bar Gang broke, two teenage girls of 15 and 16 years were accused of murdering one of their mothers in the Parker/Hulme

case. The media exposure of the Milk Bar Gang, Parker and Hulme's brutal killing, their lesbian relationship and Parker's sexual liaisons with a male border in her mother's house, stimulated fear and outrage amongst the public (Carpenter, 2012; Yska, 1993). The concern over youth delinquency was again heightened in the following year when two murders took place in areas dominated by loitering teenagers in Auckland (Carpenter, 2012; Yska, 1993). The media reporting on these murders focussed on the behaviour of the youth subcultures, namely the 'bodgies' and the 'widgies', who were groups of working class young men and women who shocked the public with both their behaviour and their fashion (Yska, 1993).

The suggestions put forward in the Mazengrab Report to explain the causes of youth delinquency are likely to constitute the first set of New Zealand-based risk factors for youth crime. The committee suggested that an individual's delinquent behaviour must be the result of both environmental and individual factors; or the interplay of structure and agency (Mazengarb et al., 1954). The committee argued that an individual can be predisposed to anti-social behaviour by things such as parental neglect. Precipitating causes that were considered to coax those predisposed to anti-social behaviour to act delinquently included seemingly trivial things such as; suggestive love songs, insufficient film censorship, paper-back crime stories and press advertisements featuring sex, horror and crime. Unsurprisingly, similar concerns are often raised in popular debate surrounding youth delinquency today. However the committee also noted that societal structures might play a pivotal role in determining the behaviour of young people. Schooling, community influences, the home environment and the need for family and religion were all highlighted as influences on adolescent delinquency. The recommendations in the report centred on many of these factors, and might be described as a somewhat holistic approach to issues of delinquency and morality. While the committee reinforced the importance of traditional gender roles, such as affirming that it is the mother's role to be home for her children, they also addressed structural factors. For instance the committee realised that mothers who live in relative poverty are likely to need to work as well as attend their motherly duties of being home for their children. In this manner, issues such as urbanisation and the quality of state housing areas were seen as needing to be addressed in conjunction with trying to alter the behavioural and cognitive patterns of mothers to 'improve' their mothering capacity.

As further examples of promiscuous, drunken or violent behaviour among young people became front-page news, New Zealand's perception of young people and

crime continued to darken (Carpenter, 2012). Fullbright scholar David Ausbel who visited New Zealand in 1957 noted there was an “unwarrantedly bitter, unfriendly and punitive attitude towards youth that prevails in so many adult circles” (Yska, 1993, p. 56). The general opinion amongst child welfare officers in the mid 1960s, were that adolescent girls admitted to institutions were “more truculent and promiscuous than their predecessors” (Dalley, 1998, p. 206). These young people were deemed to be in dire need of discipline, supervision and, less frequently, counselling (Dalley, 1998, p. 206). With an increase in government intervention, growing inflation and the rise in unemployment in the 1970s, the general disciplinary attitudes toward young people began to wane. The 1970s saw debate surrounding the rights of the child and with it a questioning of the treatment of children in residential institutions and the child welfare system as a whole (Dalley, 1998, p. 262). The broad discretion of welfare-based youth court was being questioned. The resulting reports such as the 1988 ‘Puao-te-ata-tu: Day break’ report detailed the institutional racism that was occurring within the Department of Welfare and their residential care policies, which bolstered support for a move away from the welfare based justice model which was introduced during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Dalley, 1998; Rangihau et al., 1988)

In the wake of significant political and social concern that young people were too readily criminalised and institutionalised, New Zealand introduced the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act (CYPFA) in 1989. Founded upon principles that are restorative in nature, the CYPFA revolutionised Aotearoa’s youth justice system. The guiding principles of the act emphasise diversion away from formal criminal proceedings while also stating that criminal proceedings should not be commenced solely for welfare purposes and that young people should be encouraged to accept responsibility for their behaviour. In contrast to the residential care policies, the CYPFA acknowledged the value of whanau care and has made attempts to reduce the institutional racism that Maori youth encounter when dealing with Aotearoa’s justice system (Dalley, 1998).

The success of Aotearoa’s restorative youth justice system and its Family Group Conferencing (FGC), which operates as the key mechanism for discharging the accountability and rehabilitation responsibilities, are renowned by youth justice researchers and practitioners world-wide (Becroft, 2007). The FGC allows victims, offenders, their families (whanau) and a FGC mediator to formulate a plan for the young offender to complete and bring about reparation. It is clear that the FGC

process reflects some elements of Maori dispute resolution and it has been praised for being more culturally sensitive than the system it replaced (Becroft, 2007; Lynch, 2007). While there are a number of criticisms, such as the FGC being tokenistic for Maori or holding little value for other ethnic minority groups, the FGC remains one of the keys to youth justice in New Zealand (Carpenter, 2012). It is viewed by many of its advocates, including Aotearoa's Principal Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft, as the most appropriate way to deal with youth offenders (Carpenter, 2012).

As well as the implementation of the FGC, the New Zealand justice system is praised for its focus on community based approaches, diversion at each stage of processing away from the formal youth justice system and its use of Police Youth Aid officers (Carpenter, 2012). However the initial benefits of the restorative system, such as the drastic drop in the number of young people held in residential facilities, and the diverting of young people from entering the formal court system where they often become trapped, appear to have become less persuasive as time has passed. While the CYPFA undoubtedly altered the discourse surrounding youth offending and the language used by justice practitioners and policy analysts, this use of 'enlightened' language did little to shift public opinion that youth crime is a pressing issue in desperate need of redress. A recent spike in prosecutions of young people forms the background to policies and rhetoric that oppose these diversion strategies (Carpenter, 2012).

In 1993, Mazengarb report committee member Nigel Stace confirmed the powerful role of the media in changing public perception. Stace commented that "It was just normal things that were happening, but in the Hutt Valley it had been blown up...it had been bolstered...by well meaning police activities and of course general press publicity" (Yska, 1993, p. 83). The fear that resulted from the reporting of the Milk Bar Gang, the Parker/Hume case and the numerous 'bodgies' and 'widgies' related reports that followed, illustrate the power of the media to fan into flame what otherwise might have been considered isolated events. The public sense of diminishing morals and a decline in the behaviour of young people was embraced and bolstered by the New Zealand Police and those charged with dealing with young people. For instance, when the New Zealand Police submitted their 1986 Ministerial Committee of Inquiry into violence "the youth of today" were highlighted under the section "Other major problems facing society today" (New Zealand Police, 1986, p. 56). In this same submission, Police noted that offenders were getting younger, increasing in number and becoming more violent. The apparent lack of

consequences for those youth under the age of 14 was also deemed to be problematic.

Not long after the CYPFA changes were made to the youth justice system, the media began to criticise its restorative nature as being too soft. For instance the *Dominion Post* opined “At present, all that can happen is a smack with a wet bus ticket at a family group conference” (Underclass of Young Crims, 2002, cited in Wright, 2010 p. 107). Along with the media, lobby groups such as the Sensible Sentencing Trust (SST) have attributed the youth crime ‘epidemic’ to Aotearoa’s ineffective and ‘soft’ justice system. SST spokesperson Garth McVicar credits the youth crime problem in New Zealand to his “generation who have allowed the youth justice system to become so liberal and so politically correct that we have removed all consequences for offenders” (McVicar cited in Howe, 2010 p. 1). In an attempt to diminish the reliance on the ‘soft’ Family Conference Groups and introduce more punitive consequences for youth offenders, the SST conducted an online poll to determine whether Aotearoa should introduce a ‘three-strikes’ youth justice system. Under the three-strikes system, a repeat youth offender would be liable for significantly longer terms of imprisonment and would have less leeway to negotiate their sentence. The 87% ‘yes’ vote (13,080 votes) in favour of introducing the three-strikes law was used by the SST to bolster their argument that the “National [government] got elected with a very clear mandate to get tough on crime but like most governments it appears they have forgotten their voters and are prepared to break their promise” (Sensible Sentencing Trust, 2011).

Along with the media and political lobby groups, politicians have expressed similar views on crime. In the run up to the 2008 general election, opposition leader, now Prime Minister, John Key, aligned his view with the presumed public apprehensions over youth as he claimed to be “extremely worried about the youth crime problem, with senseless violence and killings *seemingly* occurring on a daily basis” (Key, 2008b, p. 1) (emphasis added). He claimed that “good, law-abiding Kiwis end up paying the price” for the actions of young offenders (Key, 2008b, p. 1). Key further encouraged public anxieties about youth when he stated that youth crime “is something we should all be concerned about” (Key, 2008b, p. 1). Overlooking any selective reporting or media coverage, Key links the problem of youth crime with the “dangerous drift towards social and economic separatism” which cannot be denied as its “fruits are *seen in the daily media*” (Key, 2008a, p. 1) (emphasis added).

To uphold their electoral pledge to “act now to defuse these unexploded human time-bombs” of ‘dangerous’ youth, the National Government has implemented policies ‘tackling youth crime’ (National, 2011, p. 1). Among these are an array of ‘Fresh Start’ programmes which purport to address the root causes of each young person’s offending including issues of education and employment (National, 2011). However the programmes are largely centred around the individual while specific underlying issues such as poverty tend to be overlooked (Bennett, 2010; Carpenter, 2012; National, 2011). The focus on the individual is evidenced in their aim to instil “self-discipline, personal responsibility and community values” (National, 2011) by sending young offenders on three-month long military-style activity camps. This Fresh Start military-camp option for ‘at-risk’ youth echoes the corrective training sentences first introduced for juvenile delinquents in 1981 (Carpenter, 2012). In the wake of a report from the Department of Corrections (1997, cited in Becroft, 2009) which revealed that correctional trainees had the highest reconviction rate of any sentence at 92%, the popularity of military style discipline and activities had declined from 1997 until they were completely abolished in 2002. Surprisingly, with the aforementioned reoffending statistics, the National Government re-introduced military style discipline in 2010. In conjunction with these camps, National also introduced longer sentences for youth offenders and extended the powers of the Youth Court to deal with teenagers as young as 12 years old who are charged with serious offences (National, 2011).

This overview demonstrates the dichotomous nature of the youth crime debate in Aotearoa. On the one hand, a loose conservative coalition of the popular press, citizen-based lobby groups and politicians paint a disturbing picture of ‘youth crime out of control’ and the ‘youth justice system as a failure’. On the other hand, in stark contrast, a liberal coalition including youth justice practitioners, juvenile justice researchers and policy analysts paint a more optimistic picture as they commend Aotearoa for adopting a world leading approach to youth crime (Bradley, Tauri & Walters, 2006).

The conflicting discourses surrounding youth crime pose complications for those dealing with youth ‘at-risk’ of crime. When discourses that support the notion that young people are out of control and are somehow mocking the existing justice system, then individualised approaches that emphasise personal responsibility and instil discipline remain attractive to politicians and voters alike (Cunneen & White, 2007). In such an environment, attempts to address both the individual and the

structural factors which influence youth offending are likely to be deemed insufficient in ‘the time of need’. France, Bottrell, and Armstrong (2012) argue that when tough punishments are used to address the issue, such as long and harsh terms of imprisonment, then this can actually damage social institutions such as family and employment that do the most to protect ‘at-risk’ youth from involvement in criminal activity. Furthermore, the perpetuation of ‘tough on crime’ discourse can mean that interventions with minimal stigmatisation, although effective in reducing offending become politically untenable (McAra & McVie, 2010).

### **All Just a Moral Panic?**

Having detailed some of the historical representations of youth crime in Aotearoa it is necessary to take a step back and ascertain the extent to which youth crime is a problem nowadays and the relevance of Stanley Cohen’s seminal theory of ‘moral panic’. As evidenced above, Aotearoa has been saturated with fear about young people and youth crime for a very long time. Yet, it is also evident that the majority of young New Zealanders are not involved in crime.

In 2000, Anne Carter, the Acting Chief Executive of the Ministry of Youth Affairs, confirmed that the public were disproportionately concerned about the ‘problem’ of Aotearoa’s youth when she said, “Offending by young people is of great concern to New Zealanders, particularly given the *perception* that serious and violent offending by young people is increasing” (cited in McLaren, 2000, p.3) (emphasis added). Contrary to popular opinion, there has been a marked decline in child apprehension rates for all crimes since 1995. Over three quarters of young people in Aotearoa never offend and of the 25% who do, the vast majority (80%), only offend once or twice. As the majority of youth offenders stop offending by their mid twenties, youth offenders are typically ‘adolescent limited’ offenders (McLaren, 2000). Consequently there is a very small proportion of Aotearoa’s youth, (approximately 4%), who are considered to be persistent youth offenders over the course of their lives (McLaren, 2000).

Despite these positive youth crime statistics, the media continues to portray youth crime as a problem for Aotearoa and, as public outrage builds, policy tends to respond in an increasingly punitive manner (Shuker, Openshaw, & Soler, 1990). Since the 1960s, criminologists and social scientists have traced links between crime statistics, media representations of youth as problematic and delinquent as well as youth justice policy changes (Armstrong, 2004). These contextual analyses conclude that the same positive relationship between public concern and societal responses to

youth crime which is evident in Aotearoa now, has existed in several other developed nations, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia and China for some time (Armstrong, 2004; Bakken, 2004; Burney, 2005; Cyr, 2003; Hier, 2002). For example resiliency researchers, Armstrong (2004) and Burney (2005), explain that despite a steady drop in most types of recorded crime over the last few decades and low participation rates of young people in these crime statistics, there has been little to no let up in the reporting of youth crime in the United Kingdom's media. They also state that media hyperbole about youth crime has given rise to a disproportionate societal response in the United Kingdom. Armstrong (2004) details how, in response to public and political (misguided) opinion, the United Kingdom justice system has become increasingly punitive and custodial towards young people who engage in crime. Numerous international and national researchers have utilised Stanley Cohen's theory to explain this dissonance.

Cohen defines a moral panic as:

A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as *a threat to societal values and interests*; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the *mass media*. . . Sometimes the panic passes over and is forgotten, except in folklore and collective memory; at other times it has more *serious and long-lasting repercussions* and might *produce such changes as those in legal and social policy* or even in the way society conceives itself (Cohen, 1972, p.9) (emphasis added).

The unrelenting reporting of youth crime combined with the political and social attention given to young offenders indicates that the focus on 'at-risk' youth and the presumed need to bolster their resiliency may be part of a moral panic. Despite this moral panic conclusion being widely published for sometime, governing bodies in Aotearoa and overseas have been reluctant to divert their attention away from the 'problem' of youth (Armstrong, 2004). This indicates that there is political advantage in sustaining the moral panic surrounding youth (France, 2008, Armstrong, 2004). It is likely that resilience research and resulting early interventions have been used as a political tool for electoral popularity. That sustaining the moral panic might be a political tool will be explored in more depth in Chapter Three.

While the intensity of political and social attention to youth crime may be unwarranted, it is important not to prematurely dismiss risk and resilience research as being useful in understanding or preventing young persons from engaging in criminal activities. Resilience research has the potential to assist the small proportion of young people who do engage in criminal behaviour. Ecological perspectives of resilience

offer an opportunity to understand and remedy the inequities in Aotearoa's society, which are brought to the fore by the systematic differences in crime statistics across different ethnic groups, genders and the locations of young people. To ensure that public monies are spent effectively, and that the systematic inequities in Aotearoa are minimised, the remainder of this chapter will delineate the groups of people who are over-represented in youth crime statistics and marginalised in society. This chapter will also outline some theories as to why these groups of young people are over-represented in youth crime statistics – paying particular attention to the lack of political attention given to social class and the lack of academic consideration given to young women who offend and their experience of crime.

### **The Current Face of Youth Offending**

Having detailed some of the historical representations of youth crime in Aotearoa, this section turns its attention to the current face of youth offending and the justice system. In Anglophone nations the standard construction of young people most frequently found in the criminal justice system are young men who are drawn from minority ethnic communities who have a low level of academic qualification, are poorly paid, are unemployed or work in casualised employment and experience strained familial relations (White & Cunneen, 2006).

This section seeks to unravel the systematic differences in New Zealand's youth offending population by evaluating the identity of young people who engage in crime with regards to their social class, gender and ethnicity. Youth offenders in Aotearoa frequently experience marginalisation and significant problems relating to family, school and community (Carpenter, 2012). Structural relations of power associated with class, gender and ethnicity indicate that unless marginalised young people are provided with meaningful opportunities, it will be difficult for them to direct their pathway away from crime (Bottrell, 2010). To truly bolster resilience among the young people of Aotearoa it is necessary that young people are seen within the context in which they live.

#### **Social Class**

It is crucial to realise the central place of social class in understanding the marginalisation and criminalisation of substantial sections of the youth population in New Zealand and other developed nations (White & Cunneen, 2006). White and Cunneen (2006) argue that "Class has rarely been more relevant to social analysis and

to any other consideration of youth justice in particular”, yet it is conspicuously absent in most discussions of youth who are ‘at-risk’ of, or resilient to crime. White and Cunneen (2006) define class as a social relation that is directly associated with economic, social and political power. This section briefly outlines social change in Aotearoa before evaluating the current position of disadvantage, poverty and unemployment faced by young people. It is argued that the failure to acknowledge issues of poverty in approaches to youth crime conceal social inequality. In turn, this boosts exposure to risk factors and hinders resilience for marginalised groups of young people.

The context of youth crime is heavily influenced by New Zealand’s changing economic climate. In the wake of the Great Depression, New Zealand cemented a commitment to social welfare as the Central Government increased its provisions to provide ‘universal security’ for New Zealand citizens. The provisions included wage and price controls, overseas borrowing and bureaucratic regulation of every day life (Pratt & Clark, 2005). As New Zealand’s debt levels escalated, the population level stagnated and the brain drain of increasing numbers of young people leaving the country gathered pace, which meant that the intensive involvement and regulation by the state became untenable in the 1980s (Carpinter, 2012; Pratt & Clark, 2005). The 1984 election of Labour saw Roger Douglas appointed as Minister of Finance and his implementation of ‘Rogernomics’, which authorised rapid financial restructuring. New Zealand quickly changed from one of the most regulated, protected and state-dominated systems to an extreme example of a free-market (Nagel, 1998). The so-called ‘Rogernomics’ emulated the philosophy of the new right taken up by in the United Kingdom and the United States under Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan respectively. The restructuring included floating the New Zealand dollar, the sale of state assets, the removal of subsidies to New Zealand manufacturers and exporters as well as considerable tax reforms (Kiro, 2000).

Following the deregulation of the economy came a sharp increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. Income inequality rose significantly and rapidly took New Zealand from well under the average OECD level of income inequality to well above it during the late 1980s to the mid 1990s (Perry, 2010). Over this time period New Zealand’s average income inequality rose more than in any of the 24 countries for which there is comparable data (Children's Commissioner, 2010). The rise in income inequality coincided with a sharp rise in child poverty rates (Children's Commissioner, 2010; Perry, 2010). In New Zealand, women, children and young

people have borne the brunt of this increasing gap between the rich and poor. The rise in income inequality has been associated with several negative outcomes, including increases in 'risk factors' among youth. The increases in risk factors include: lower levels of participation and performance in education, higher levels of teen pregnancy, domestic violence, child mortality, alcohol and drug addictions and importantly higher rates of imprisonment (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wynd & Johnson, 2008). As New Zealand has low average family incomes and high rates of child poverty by OECD standards, relative disadvantage or comparative poverty remains a significant problem for young people today (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009).

There are systematic differences between those who are most affected by income inequality. For instance children and young people from ethnic minority groups are most likely to be affected by poverty. Perry (2010) substantiates this when he calculates that Maori and Pasifika children are up to two times more likely than Pakeha children to live in poor households. Young people living in poverty are also likely to be geographically marginalised, congregating in suburbs of larger urban centres. In summing up neighbourhood segregation in New Zealand Wynd and Johnson (2008, p. 98) describe the "Overall picture as being one of children and teenagers, especially Maori and Pasifika children, increasingly living in overcrowded, low-income households which are becoming more confined to low-income suburbs".

France and colleagues (2012) argue that place and space are hugely influential in determining the likelihood of a young person becoming involved in crime. The reality of social and physical isolation along with a limited sense of trust and community support associated with impoverished areas is crucial to the understanding of young people deemed to be 'at-risk' or resilient to crime. The social structures in these areas harbour disadvantage and inequality by limiting the options available to the young people living in these disadvantaged communities (Bottrell et al., 2010). Shabby neighbourhoods, with little prospect of improvement coupled with media images illuminating the gap between the rich and the poor can be devastating for the self image of young people (Wynd & Johnson, 2008). Wynd and Johnson (2008) realise that the stigma attached to where a young person comes from has the potential to play a very significant role in determining that young person's self-identity. Therefore place and community form a crucial yet conspicuously overlooked aspect of youth crime discussions.

From the late 1980s, unemployment (and underemployment) increased drastically. The unemployment rates for young people aged between 15 and 24 years old doubled between 1987 and 1991 (from 8% to 16%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). The rise in unemployment disproportionately affected young people and Maori and Pacific peoples making deprivation an even bigger issue for these groups. Unemployment rates for young people have been consistently higher than for the total population between 1987 and 2006 (Statistics New Zealand, 2010). For many young people the stigma of poverty is overlaid with their Maori and Pasifika identity (Wynd & Johnson, 2008). As a result of New Zealand's integration into the world economy, there has been a re-structuring of the type of work available (KIRO, 2000). The slowing of the manufacturing and primary production industry and the increase in processing and service industries has shifted the type of employment opportunities available and simultaneously eroded the concept of a 'job for life' (Department of Labour, 2011).

The re-structuring and consequential rise in unemployment impacted some groups of New Zealanders more profoundly than others. For young people in particular the collapse of full-time labour market has been devastating. The decline in manufacturing industries, competition from older (and especially female) workers and the increased use of casualised labour as opposed to full-time employment have all served to diminish the employment opportunities for young people (White & Cunneen, 2006). While the total unemployment rate is 6.6%, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15 to 19 years old stands at 6.8%, and 11.7% for those aged 20-24 years old (Department of Labour, 2011). These realities are differentially experienced as the figures for Maori and Pacific young people in these same age brackets stand at 25.7% and 29.6% respectively (Department of Labour, 2011).

Several risk and resilience researchers have noted that 'at-risk' youth aspire to have a conventional life and uphold mainstream goals (Bottrell, 2009b; Bottrell et al., 2010; Foster & Spencer, 2010). In a wage-based economy, survival is contingent on paid employment. If paid employment is not available then a number of social problems are invoked, including crime (White & Cunneen, 2006). Considering that young people desire conventional things such as material goods and there are high levels of unemployment among young people, it is not surprising that shoplifting constitutes one of the largest categories of offences for which young people are apprehended by the police (White & Cunneen, 2006).

Despite the economy being subject to growing inequality and high rates of youth unemployment, the focus of resilience based interventions remains on getting individuals into paid work (White & Cunneen, 2006; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Wynd & Johnson, 2008). The criminal justice system mirrors this focus on personal agency as it encourages young offenders to take responsibility for their actions while failing to address the social structures that put young people at risk of offending in the first instance (France et al., 2012). Simply, for employment to be a catalyst for decreasing youth crime (or bolstering resilience) then jobs must be available for young people (Carpenter, 2012). Although risk and resilience literature frequently cites structural factors such as poor work choices in the community or dangerous neighbourhoods as putting a young person 'at-risk' of engaging in crime, no such political solutions are offered to address these structural issues. Instead resilience-building strategies tend to focus on improving the individual (Armstrong, 2004, 2006).

### **Gender**

Youth crime, like adult crime, is subject to gender imbalance, with males making up 75% to 80% of police apprehensions (McLaren, 2000) and boys between the ages of 14 and 17 years old being close to four times more likely to appear in the youth court than their female counter parts (Ministry of Justice, 2012). This gender imbalance, commonly referred to as the masculinity of criminality, is a widespread phenomenon. For instance Carrington (2009) reports that the masculinity of criminality occurs in England, Scotland, Australia and the United States.

Although males have a higher rate of youth crime than females, the overall rates of youth crime have been in decline for sometime. The number of apprehensions recorded by the police decreased by 23% between 2002 and 2011 from 43,225 to 33,481 apprehensions (Ministry of Justice, 2012). Apprehension statistics of young people and children in New Zealand illustrate that while the overall rates of youth apprehension have trended downwards since 1995, this decline has been slower for females (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). The result is that the proportion of females to male youth apprehensions is increasing despite the decline in actual rates of offending. This closing of the gender gap in male and female delinquency is also evident overseas (Carrington, 2009).

As evidenced by the newspaper headlines in Chapter One, the New Zealand contemporary media portrays young women and girls as being out of control and

increasingly violent. This increasing interest in female involvement in violent behaviour is seemingly verified by the increasing proportion of female youths engaging in violent crimes (Carrington, 2009; Ministry of Justice, 2012). The irony is that most academic studies, policy development and program funding focus on, and target, the situations and experiences of boys and men (Schaffner, 2006). The smaller numbers of female offenders in official crime statistics tend to render female involvement in crime as less important than male offending. As a result criminological theories have typically focussed on males and the role of masculinity and failed to address female youth offenders (Cunneen & White, 2007). Schaffner (2006) argues that the lack of research on girls' experience of crime has exacerbated ill-conceived notions of gender as well as misinterpretations of both the statistical data and the accounts of girls' decisions.

Interventions aimed to assist those 'at-risk' are built upon generally accepted theories of crime. It is therefore important to question whether the generally accepted theories of crime that are based on male statistics and experience apply to females (Carrington, 2009). This is important for several reasons. Firstly, accurate knowledge about female criminal careers is fundamental to criminological theory; ignoring half of the population is poor criminological method. Secondly, the different average age for starting and stopping from engaging in crime varies between males and females suggesting that females have different pathways into and out of crime, (see the 'Patterns of youth offending by gender and age' section of this chapter for more information). Thirdly, feminist scholars remind us that women are often caretakers for children, the elderly, and the sick. Carrington (2009) suggests that these caring responsibilities can motivate women to participate in crime. Supporting the feminist assertion, Ferraro and Moe (2003) found that "Women with children in their custody conceptualised crime as an alternative to hunger and homelessness" but women without children did not (p.19). As females tend to adopt central caretaking roles, their incarceration often has more devastating effects on others, namely those being cared for, than the incarceration of a male offender (Carrington, 2009).

Many researchers including, Belknap (2007), Hipwell and Loeber (2006), Hoyt and Scherer (1998), and Leonard (1982) have concluded that the landscape of research on female criminal careers is sparsely populated. There is little consensus among the researchers that have explored female criminality behind the changing patterns of female delinquency. Whether the statistical evidence of girls becoming increasingly more delinquent and violent reflects changes in the processing of girls through the

juvenile justice system, a change in gender-role expectations, or whether it reflects real qualitative changes in female behaviour is a matter of unresolved controversy (Carrington, 2009). This unresolved criminological conundrum of rising rates of female crime, limits the effectiveness of interventions aimed at reducing female youth crime and warrants further research (Carrington, 2009). Recently researchers have brought fresh insight to different offending patterns between male and female as they suspect that the factors that increase the likelihood of engaging in crime may be slightly different for males and females. The differential impact of these alleged factors will be explored in the Chapter Three.

### **Patterns of youth offending by gender and age**

When considering the differences between male and female offending it is important to address the different phases of life in which each respective gender engages and disengages with crime. Historically females have offended less than their male counterparts and those females who do offend tend to start offending later, desist from offending sooner and commit less serious offences (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2006). Official statistics from England illustrate that offending by young women is generally limited to their adolescence and that females tend to desist from offending earlier than males. At 14 to 17 years old and again at 18 to 21 years old the ratio of male to female offenders was 4:1, but at 22-25 years old the ratio of male to female offenders was much higher at 11:1 (Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2006). As rates of youth offending in New Zealand have tended to move in alignment with rates of offending in England, it is likely that these proportions are also apparent in New Zealand. The Dunedin Longitudinal Study provides some support of this presumption. The Dunedin Longitudinal Research has continued to study the lives of 1037 people born in Dunedin in 1972 and 1973. The study confirms that a greater proportion of young New Zealand males were convicted of a crime than their female counterparts: with a conviction ratio of 2.5 males: 1 female up to the age of 21 (Block, Blokland, van der Werff, van Os, & Nieuwbeerta, 2010). It is widely accepted that the majority of youth offenders desist from engaging in crime by their mid twenties, and that fewer females are involved in crime during their lifetime than males (Block et al., 2010).

The Dunedin Longitudinal Study and the Christchurch Health and Development study have revealed that youth offending tends to follow one of two types of developmental pathways. The first, and the most concerning, pathway is known as

the 'life course persistent offender'. These individuals have lives marked by multiple adverse influences, they exhibit severe problems from an early age and out of all offenders they are the most likely to offend into adulthood. From the experience of the Youth Court it is apparent that 82% of life course persistent offenders are male, at least 50% are Maori, up to 80% are not engaged with school and 75-80% have drug or alcohol problems (Foster & Spencer, 2010). Fortunately, only a small proportion of about 20% of youth offenders have life course persistent pathways of offending.

The second pathway is known as the 'adolescent onset offender'. Approximately 80% of all youth offenders are categorised as being 'adolescent limited' offenders (Becroft, 2009). During childhood these offenders are not markedly disordered, however during puberty behavioural issues begin to develop. Unlike their life-course persistent peers they generally experience the normal range of emotions and tend to 'grow out' of offending by their mid twenties (Becroft, 2009).

### **Ethnicity**

Young people from indigenous and ethnic minority groups are over-represented in crime statistics in New Zealand and in other Anglophone nations (Carpenter, 2012). Evidently it is critical to consider ethnicity in a discussion of youth crime in Aotearoa. It is well established that young people who identify as Maori or Pasifika have higher rates of official offending than young people who identify as being of Pakeha or Asian descent (Bradley et al., 2006; Clark, Robinson, Fleming, Ameratunga & Denny, 2011; Department of Corrections, 2007). As in other parts of the criminal justice system, Maori are over-represented in the youth justice system. Maori youth are three times more likely to be apprehended by police than Pacific or Pakeha youth, while Maori children's apprehension rates are more than five times that of Pacific or NZ European children (Ministry of Justice, 2010b) The number of Maori (2,147) who appeared in the Youth, District or High Court in 2008 was 1.6 times greater than the number of young New Zealand Europeans (1,349) and 4.9 times greater than the number of Pacifica young people (438) who appeared in court. The fact 35% of the Maori population are younger than 15 years old might help to explain this imbalance (Robson, Cormack, & Cram, 2007; Statistics New Zealand, 2007). However Maori have been over-represented in adult offending statistics for some time and thus further explanations are required to explain this trend. Since the

1970s, researchers have attempted to make sense of these racialised crime trends (Carpenter, 2012; Department of Corrections, 2007).

It is important to recognise that colonisation undergirds most explanations for the disproportionately negative statistics for Maori figures for virtually every negative outcome in education, child abuse, health, employment and of course, in crime. For Maori, colonisation resulted in a loss of sovereignty and the disposition of land, waterways and customary law (tikanga). This resulted in a climate of material and spiritual oppression whilst simultaneously increasing the vulnerability of Maori to factors such as poverty and unemployment, which are conducive to crime.

The Department of Corrections (2007) contend that there are two different, but not mutually exclusive, key explanations for the over-representation of Maori and ethnic minorities in criminal justice statistics. The first is that a bias operates within the criminal justice system. That is, systematic factors operate at one or more steps of the criminal justice process, which make it more likely for Maori to be apprehended, arrested, charged, convicted or imprisoned than persons from more dominant ethnic groups, i.e. Pakeha. The amplification posits that whatever the real state of criminal behaviour, the systematic processes result in a wider capture net and harsher consequences being used for Maori which results in an accumulation of Maori within the system. These processes have been described by various writers as the ‘unintended consequences of discretion’, ‘bias’ and ‘institutional racism’ (Department of Corrections, 2007).

As early as 1972, Duncan identified institutional racism as operating in a way that associated Maori identity with crime. He described a cycle whereby slightly higher rates of offending attract adverse publicity which reinforces negative stereotypes of Maori among the public and the police – who become hyper vigilant to the actions of Maori. Consequently, crime by Maori is more likely to be detected which in turn continues on the cycle. Fergusson, Horwood and Lynskey’s (1993) Christchurch-based longitudinal study exemplifies how institutional racism may result in higher rates of Maori in youth crime statistics. Their examination of self-reported histories of offending among New Zealanders under the age of 14 supports this idea of hyper-vigilance for crime in relation to particular ethnic groups. When an individual’s social background and self-reported offending was held constant, Maori offenders were found to be twice as likely to be subject to police attention compared to non-Maori offenders. Fergusson and colleagues (1993) also found that although self-reported or

parentally reported offending was higher among Maori and Pacific Island children than among Pakeha children, the difference was significantly less than the difference observed in police statistics. According to the self-reports Maori and Pacific children are 1.7 times more likely than Pakeha children to offend, whereas, according to police statistics, Maori and Pacific children are 2.9 times more likely to offend than Pakeha children. As early adversarial contact with the police is expected to increase levels of offending, this systematic bias may perpetuate the high rates of crime among Maori and Pacific youth as it makes it more difficult for them to resist engaging in crime.

The second major explanation that the Department of Corrections (2007) puts forward to explain the over-representation of Maori and minority ethnic groups in criminal justice statistics is that Maori and Pacific young people are subject to 'adverse early-life disadvantage'; that is that they are 'at-risk' of criminality. High numbers of Maori proceed along pathways that commence with adverse-early life disadvantage which are associated with involvement in crime during adolescence or adulthood. After reviewing the literature the Department of Corrections (2007) acknowledges that the following factors can increase the risk of participation in crime: low socioeconomic status; family structure, context and processes (e.g. being born to a young mother); individual characteristics and experiences of the developing child; educational participation, engagement and achievement (e.g. leaving school early); as well as the emergence of developmental disorders (such as antisocial behaviour). Researchers have put forward many reasons why Maori youth are disproportionately represented in these 'at-risk' factors. As noted above a widespread explanation is the disempowerment, loss of land, access to financial resources and the loss of mana that occurred through colonisation whose wide reaching effects still permeate society and put Maori at a greater risk of crime than their non-indigenous counterparts (Bradly et al., 2006; Department of Corrections, 2007).

The significance of these factors for the study of youth 'at-risk' is found in many areas. The youthfulness of the Maori population coupled with their history of colonisation and over-representation in negative risk factors enhances the likelihood that Maori youth will come to the attention of the courts and the police. Ethnicity also influences the way in which Maori are treated after entering the criminal justice system and the type of sentence they receive. The debate around ethnicity and criminality is complex and ongoing, but the consistent over-representation of Maori

in criminal justice systems signifies the importance of learning how best to assist Maori youth.

### **Conclusion – Heading Into Risk Factors**

The contextualisation and de-politicisation of youth crime in Aotearoa illustrates the public's threatening discourse surrounding youth offending and provides a backdrop to the political responses to moral panic about adolescent crime. The systematic marginalisation of young people from ethnic minority groups and female youth offenders is intrinsically linked to issues of poverty, class, and gender. The Government's re-structuring of social institutions and implementation of policy would benefit from focussing on these systemic inequalities when addressing issues surrounding youth offending. Chapter Three will explore how risk and resiliency literature have provided explanations for youth crime and influenced Government strategies and interventions aimed at reducing the 'problem' of youth offending in Aotearoa



## Chapter Three: Youth 'At-risk' and 'Resilient' to Crime

The growing concern of youth involvement in crime, coupled with the fact that children and young people who offend are not a homogenous group has fostered an urgency for early intervention strategies and the widespread use of risk factor analysis. As flagged in Chapter One, it has become increasingly common for developed nations, including New Zealand, to identify and analyse the presence of factors that might put a young person at-risk of, and protect them from, engaging in crime. It is thought that by engaging in risk factor analysis those charged with addressing youth offending could direct intervention strategies towards the young people most likely to engage in crime. Policy makers could employ strategies and programmes that interrupt the young person during the early stages of their criminal career and resolve the 'problem' of youth crime before it becomes serious, or ideally before it begins (Armstrong, 2004; Case & Haines, 2011; McWhirter et al., 1998; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Aotearoa, has invested a significant amount of public money and effort into research and intervention programmes that strive to bolster resilience among youth deemed to be 'at-risk' of engaging in crime (Armstrong, 2003; Bottrell et al., 2010; Ministry of Justice, 2002; Muncie, 2007).

The resulting body of risk and resilience literature and wide array of education, social policy and practice initiatives has leant towards an individually-focussed perspective (Bottrell, 2009a; Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2012b). From this perspective, researchers have sought to identify which particular biological, psychological and immediate contextual factors place a young person at-risk of, and protect a young person from, engaging in criminal activity (Denny, Clark, Fleming, & Wall, 2004; Farrington, 1996). Such a perspective positions the individual as the locus of change to their predicted negative outcomes (Bottrell, 2010; Bower-Russa, Knutson & Winebarger, 2001; Cohen, Mackenzie & Yates, 1991; Constantine, Bernard & Diaz, 1999; Denny et al., 2004; Roy, Sarchiapone & Carli, 2007; Shepherd, Reynolds & Moran, 2010; Ungar, 2012b; Watson et al., 2003). In contrast, evidence in support of a more contextualised or ecological understanding of human development is growing (Ungar, 2012a).

An ecological understanding has the potential to extend individually-centred views of risk and resilience, better inform policy and improve the effectiveness of current youth crime intervention strategies (Lerner, 2006). Researchers from around the world have recently begun to consider how broader, macro-level factors assist or

inhibit an individual from progressing along their predicted pathway of criminality. These factors include, politics (Armstrong, 2004; Bottrell, 2010; Bottrell et al., 2010; Bradley, Deighton & Selby, 2004; Foster & Spencer, 2010; Goldson, 2001; Martineau, 1999; Ungar, 2012b), social structure (Bottrell et al., 2010; McCreanor & Watson, 2004), class structure (Bottrell, 2007, 2009a; Martineau, 1999), culture (Bottrell, 2010; Massey et al., 1998; Ungar, 2012b), as well as more proximal factors such as connectedness with neighbourhood and local environment structures such as schools and street involvement (Fagan & Wright, 2012; Kolar, Erickson, & Stewart, 2012; McCreanor & Watson, 2004).

Researchers have illuminated several issues with the current status of risk and resilience literature. Firstly, the bulk of the literature fails to fully consider an ecological perspective towards resilience. This is concerning because the distal factors that surround the 'at-risk' individual are thought to be even more influential on an individual's outcomes than individual attributes such as their personality traits, cognitions or talents (Ungar, 2012a). The exclusion of ecological risk factors from the research means that interventions typically do not address macro-level factors and this is expected to profoundly limit the effectiveness of risk and resilience-focussed prevention and intervention strategies (Armstrong, 2004; Bottrell, 2009a; Clark, 2007; Martineau, 1999; Ministry of Justice, 2010b). Secondly, there is considerable debate about the accuracy and validity of identifying risk factors in the first place (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Recently researchers have begun to argue that the identification of risk factors by academics can become arbitrary if the way that young people understand risk factors is not considered. Inaccurate identification of risk factors opens up the possibility of inappropriate interventions being provided to a child or young person. Failure to consider the heterogeneity of young people who engage in crime, particularly with regards to gender and race, has been noted as limiting the effectiveness of interventions based on a generic set of risk factors. Thirdly, concern has been raised regarding the stigmatising effect that identifying risk factors in a young person's life may have (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002). As a considerable amount of resources and attention are given to risk and resilience research and intervention in Aotearoa (and overseas), it is timely to analyse the literature and policies regarding youth 'at-risk' of crime in Aotearoa to ensure that interventions that are effective in producing more positive outcomes for the 'at-risk' youth are being investigated and implemented.

This chapter will address these issues in risk and resilience literature. Firstly, it will define the inter-related constructs of 'risk factors', 'protective factors', 'risk factor analysis' and 'resilience'; paying particular attention to the differences between the dominant, individually-focussed, view of risk and resilience and the increasingly popular ecological understanding of risk and resilience. This chapter will also outline the various factors New Zealand agencies identify as putting a young person 'at-risk' of engaging in crime as well as those factors that protect a young person from offending. As women have tended to be ignored in risk and resilience research, attention will be paid to identify gender specific risk and protective factors identified in risk and resilience literature. This chapter will also highlight how individually-centred risk and resilience analysis can stigmatise and is incongruent with Maori ways of understanding hauora (wellbeing) and tends to commit testimonial injustice against young people, particularly young women.

### **Risk Factors, Protective Factors and the Construct of Youth Resilience.**

A fundamental problem regarding risk and resilience research, along with the associated 'at-risk' policy strategies and interventions, is that all of these areas that use the terms 'risk' and 'resilience' tend to gloss over risk and resilience terminology (Armstrong, 2004; Small & Memmo, 2004). What is identified, measured and managed as a risk and used as the premise for building resilience is constituted via pre-existing knowledge and discourses and this can never be fully objective (Armstrong, 2004; Foster & Spencer, 2010). Each term has its own history and is subject to the colouration of political movements, social perceptions and research methodology (Armstrong, 2003, 2004; Massey et al., 1998). With this in mind, it is perhaps artificial to provide a definition of these evolving terms. Consequently, this chapter will first provide a brief explanation as to what the constructs entail and their historical context before outlining the particular risk and protective factors identified by researchers (Ungar, 2012a).

#### **Risk Factors**

'At-risk' is a value-laden term that has been constructed through the categories used to describe it (Armstrong, 2004; Martineau, 1999). 'At-risk' young people are considered to exhibit and be exposed to a set of measurable and objective identifiers called 'risk factors' (France, 2008). Risk factors are typically defined as individual and immediate environmental markers that are used to predict the likelihood of young people exhibiting negative outcomes such as alcoholism, teen

pregnancy and criminal behaviour in later life (France, 2008; McWhirter et al., 1998; Small & Memmo, 2004; Watson et al., 2003). Some researchers identify the presence of risk factors in wider spheres than the individual's immediate environment or person. They consider dysfunction in more distal milieus, such as the community or society, to impact on the individual. For instance, Lisa Hema (1999) defines risk factors as:

Those aspects of an individual, family and or surrounding neighbourhood/society that contribute to the individual acting in spite of the possibility of harmful consequences for the individual or others (Hema, 1999 as cited in McLaren, 2000, p. 20).

Just as there are two types of offenders (life-course persistent, and adolescent limited) risk factors are usually divided into two groups (McLaren, 2000). The first group is 'dead' or 'static risk factors' because they don't change. Such factors include having already committed a first offence, gender, ethnicity and so on. The second group is 'live' or 'dynamic risk factors'. Dynamic factors are prioritised in intervention strategies as they can change: For instance, aspects of the individual or the environment such as impulsive behaviour, poor family monitoring and mixing with antisocial peers can be altered (McLaren, 2000). Typically academics, practitioners and policy makers focus on dynamic risk factors as they are malleable to interventions and to reducing youth offending (McLaren, 2000).

The likelihood of a young person engaging in crime is held to increase with the number and variety of major risk factors present in their life (Doone, 2000; Farrington, 1995; Rutter, 2012). The Christchurch Longitudinal Study found that children from families with 19 or more risk factors were 100 times more likely to end up with multiple problems as teenagers, including offending, than the 50% of the sample who had six or fewer risk factors (Becroft, 2009). Rutter (2012) clarifies the impact of multiple risk factors when he describes these factors as chains of events rather than a single episode. Rutter (2012) explains that the chains represent a great number of inter-linked biological, psychological and socio-political factors that threaten healthy development. Rutter (2012) argues that it is the process by which particular factors or chains interact, as opposed to their mere existence that enables a prediction of negative outcomes.

The process of identifying risk factors demonstrates that risk factors are viewed as social facts which are objective and can be measured (France, 2008). Such a process rests on the assumption that behaviour is dichotomous, being one thing or the other, such as there being objectively anti-social and pro-social forms of behaviour that can be measured (France, 2008). However Armstrong (2004), Foster and Spencer (2010) recognise that risk factors are not objective. Rather, researchers exert relative power over the young people whose lives they analyse (Armstrong, 2004; Foster & Spencer, 2010). Martineau's (1999) research supports this assertion as she found that there was dissonance between the narrative of 'at-risk' youth and the narratives of 'resilient adults'. Armstrong (2004) along with Foster and Spencer (2010) also recognise that risk factors are both difficult to identify and difficult to measure. There is little evidence that explores the interrelationship between risk factors and day to day life and which risk factors are more influential on life outcomes than others (Armstrong, 2004; France, 2008). Therefore the tick-box methods used to identify risk factors is problematic because the quantitative variables are in fact constructs of social phenomenon.

There is now a substantial body of fairly consistent and contemporary research in New Zealand and internationally that describes the risk factors associated with criminality (Doone, 2000). While the literature hosts a number of different risk factor lists, the lists are remarkably similar. This section will now explore some of the risk factors identified in international literature but will focus on the risk factors that have been identified and targeted through national policy and strategy in Aotearoa.

Two American researchers Andrew and Bonta (2006) have identified the best-validated risk factors for criminal behaviour and the best predictors of recidivism. Their wide-spread research is expressed in a framework known as the central eight. Table 1 is adapted from Andrew and Bonta's book *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* and depicts the factors of the central eight along with their key indicators. The indicators serve as a means of operationalising otherwise abstract factors. Within the central eight, the factors are further subdivided into the 'big four' and the 'moderate four' (Andrew & Bonta, 2006; Doone, 2006). Andrew and Bonta (2006) conclude that the big four (history of anti-social behaviour, anti-social personality pattern, anti social cognitions and anti social associates) are the most predictive of criminal behaviour while the moderate four have associations with criminal risk but are not directly predictive of criminal behaviour.

Table 1: Andrew and Bonta's (2006) Central Eight Risk Factors and their Indicators

|                   | Risk Factor                        | Indicators  |
|-------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| The Big Four      | History of anti-social behavior    | Early and continuing involvement in a number and variety of anti-social acts in a variety of settings |
|                   | Anti-social personality            | Impulsive, adventurous, pleasure seeking, restlessly aggressive and irritable                         |
|                   | Anti-social cognitions             | Attitudes, values, beliefs and rationalisation  |
|                   | Anti-social associates             | Criminal friends, isolation from pro-social others  |
| The Moderate Four | Substance abuse                    | Abuse of alcohol and/or drugs   |
|                   | Family/marital relationships       | Inappropriate parental monitoring and disciplining, poor family relationships                         |
|                   | School/work                        | Poor Performance, low levels of satisfactions   |
|                   | Pro-social recreational activities | Lack of involvement in pro-social hobbies and sports  |

Since 2000, various New Zealand Government departments have released sets of risk factors similar to the risk factors identified and validated by Andrew and Bonta (2006). There are three key local documents which contain risk factors that are currently used to direct policy and resilience interventions. Although only the main findings of each report are outlined here, examples of specific risk factors identified in each report can be found in Appendix A.

The first report, *Tough is not Enough*, was released in June 2000 by key researcher, Kaye McLaren (2000) on behalf of the Ministry of Youth Affairs. After reviewing national and international literature on risk factors associated with criminality, McLaren (2000) compiled a list of twelve risk factors which included substance abuse, performing and attending poorly at school, living in a poor and disorganised neighbourhood and living with a family that has poor parental monitoring. McLaren (2000) concluded that there are at least five broad types of risk factors. These include individual factors, family factors, school/work factors, peer related factors and community/neighbourhood factors. The risk factors identified in Government

reports which were released after *Tough is not Enough*, seem to largely fall within the first four of these risk factor categories with few specific community /neighbourhood factors being identified.

Two years after the release of *Tough is not Enough* a ministerial task force was established by the joint efforts of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Development. In 2002, the taskforce released the, still current, *Youth Offending Strategy*. Interestingly the definition of risk factors adopted by the *Youth Offending Strategy*, ignored the influence of broader community or neighbourhood risk factors. The strategy defines risk factors as “aspects of an individual’s characteristics, family and social circumstances that correlate with a greater probability of the individual offending” (Ministry of Justice, 2013, p. 1). The *Youth Offending Strategy* argues that inadequate or inappropriate parenting, child abuse and neglect, early childhood cognitive or behavioural problems and family poverty are among the strongest predictors of youth offending and that interventions should address these factors (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002).

Later on in 2002, the Ministry of Youth Affairs released the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). It does not deal exclusively with the problem of youth offenders, yet the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* is pivotal in discussions about youth at-risk of crime as it guides the Government’s youth policy and sets the targets and objectives that non-government agencies working with youth at-risk of offending must adhere to in order to receive financial support (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002). As the *Youth Development Strategy* strives to provide a strategy that will mitigate a raft of negative outcomes for New Zealand’s youth, the list of risk factors identified in the strategy are longer and less specific than those provided in the other reports (McWhirter et al., 1998; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

Despite the compelling research correlating the presence of multiple risk factors with crime, it is important to remember the age-old maxim: correlation does not imply causation (Doone, 2000). With a similar caveat, Anthony (1987) cautions that the impact of a barrage of risk factors in an individual’s life depends on how the individual perceives those risks. However, there is convincing research proving that active intervention to reduce or eliminate risk factors or building protective factors against risk factors, is likely to reduce offending or re-offending by young people and therefore it is worthwhile interrogating the impact of these risk factors.

*Gender specific risk factors?*

Before turning our attention to the other side of the risk factor analysis equation and exploring protective factors it is necessary to consider whether there are specific factors that might identify young woman at-risk of offending. As flagged in Chapter Two, criminological research has tended to ignore women (Block et al., 2010). Consequently tools such as the Youth Offending Risk Screening Tool used by Police Youth Aid teams is likely to have been based on male offending patterns and may not apply to female youth offenders (Becroft, 2009; Block et al., 2010). Although, the “general criminology perspective views the factors responsible for female crime as essentially the same as those for male crime” (Bonta, Pang, & Wallace-Capretta, 1995, p. 279), even authors who endorse findings that risk factors appear “highly similar for males and females” (p. 266) admit “the importance of school/work, personal distress, and non-criminogenic interpersonal targets remains unclear with women and minorities” (Andrew & Bonta, 2003, p. 321).. Such disclaimers imply that it is likely that there is at least some variation in the risk factors that direct the pathways of adolescent girls and boys towards criminality.

In 2004, Farrington and Painter investigated whether risk factors for offending differed between males and females. They did this by examining the brothers and sisters of the young men included in the seminal *Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development* (Armstrong, 2004; Farrington, 1995). Starting in the 1950s the *Cambridge Study* was a longitudinal study that explored the relationship between potential risk factors for criminality and eventual offending behaviour in over 400 teenage boys from East London (Farrington, 1996). When exploring risk factors among the siblings of the original *Cambridge Study* participants, Farrington and Painter (2004) found that the brothers and sisters of the original offender were influenced by a large number of the same risk factors. These include: low family income, large family size, attending a high delinquency rate school, parental criminality, a delinquent sibling, harsh or erratic parental discipline and poor parental supervision. However, Farrington and Painter (2004) also found that the following factors were stronger predictors of criminality for the original participant’s sisters than their brothers: low social class, low family income, poor housing, low praise by parents, harsh or erratic discipline, parental conflict, low parental interest in education and low parental interest in the children. This indicates that the gender of a young person influences the degree to which a specific risk factor might influence their involvement in crime. Farrington and Painter concluded that not only are risk factors gender-specific but

"risk factors are better predictors of the offending behaviour of sisters than brothers" and that "risk assessment using family factors is likely to be more accurate for females than for males" (2004, p. 3).

Scant research both internationally and within New Zealand has addressed gender differences in risk and protective factors for young people. However researchers are beginning to examine the etiology of offending across gender. While there is no conclusive set of factors that put young women at-risk of offending, evidence is being gathered. As I argue below, the following factors may be more persuasive risk factors for young women than for young men: sexual and physical abuse, including neglect; poor social bonding with regards to family, children and romantic partners; and low self esteem, as well as histories of depression and suicide attempts

A substantial amount of empirical research has established that the relationship between child abuse and subsequent engagement in crime by the victimised child serves as a risk factor for offending in young people. However recent research suggests that experiences of physical abuse (Benda, 2005; Moth & Hudson, 1999), sexual abuse (C. Giordano, A. Cernkovich, & L. Rudolph, 2002; Meda Chesney-Lind & Pasko, 2004; Loucks & Zamble, 2000; Odgers, Moretti, & Reppucci, 2005) and neglect (Makarios, 2007) are stronger predictors of offending in females than in males. For instance, English, Widom, and Brandford (2001) examined arrest records in a maltreated group of young people and compared them to a control group matched on socio-demographic variables, and although they found a significant relative risk indicating that males who were maltreated had a higher chance of engaging in of being arrested at some point during their lifetime, the relative risk among females who were maltreated was higher than that for maltreated males. Similarly, Benda (2005) found that women who were sexually abused before the age of 18 and were enrolled in a bootcamp programme for offenders in America had higher rates of recidivism than the male offenders on the same camp who were also sexually abused before the age of 18. The fact that child abuse in all its forms has a greater impact on young women is concerning as the New Zealand Women's Refuge (2013) estimated that women are twice as likely (one in four) as men (one in eight) to experience sexual violence or abuse in their lifetime, many of whom experience this abuse before the age of sixteen.

In line with Sampson and Laub's theory of turning points for desistance, recent researchers including Alarid, Burton, and Cullen (2000) have suggested that social

bonds, attachment to family, partner and friends, involvement with conventional activities and law-abiding beliefs, were more relevant to criminal behaviour among young women than for young men. Parental attachment and engaging in conventional activities were found to have a stronger inverse relationship with criminal behavior among young women than young men (Alarid et al., 2000). Similarly, Moth and Hudson (1999) found that the disruption to social bonding with family and those around them in early childhood through adoption, fostering or institutionalisation was found to have a greater influence on girls' criminality than boys'. Generally marriage or living with a romantic partner has been perceived as a protective factor that reduces offending behaviour (Giordano et al., 2002; Sampson & Laub, 1995). However recent researchers have unravelled that living with a romantic partner who is criminally orientated poses greater risk for a woman who lives with a man who engages in crime than for a man who lives with a woman who engages in crime (Alarid et al., 2000; Benda, 2005). There is inconclusive evidence to determine whether the role of parenthood is more powerful for women or men, but some researchers posit that motherhood is likely to be a stronger deterrent for offending than fatherhood (Benda, 2005; McLaren, 2000). Sex-role and feminist theorists argue that young women are more socially orientated than men and tend to be more highly motivated and supported by social relationships than their male counterparts (Benda, 2005; M Chesney-Lind, Morash, & Stevens, 2008).

Female cognitions, self perceptions and mental health are the final areas of risk factors that are emerging as having greater significance for encouraging young women, as opposed to young men, down a pathway of criminality. Some researchers suggest that low self esteem may be a risk factor for female involvement in crime (Hartman, Turner, Daigle, Exum, & Cullen, 2009). Kort-Butler (2009) reports that while high levels of self-esteem protect girls from criminality, it does not protect boys from engaging in crime. Others found that incarcerated young women were more likely than their male counterparts to endorse low-self esteem statements regarding their feelings of uselessness or being a failure (Belknap, 2007). Similarly, experiences of depression, prior suicide attempts (Loucks & Zamble, 2000) histories of self injury and admittance to psychiatric care (Moth & Hudson, 1999) are more frequent among female offenders than male offenders.

Currently, risk assessments in Aotearoa ignore gender-specific risk factors, although this might change in the near future (Department of Corrections, 2011). When discussing the New Zealand Criminogenic Needs Inventory (CNI), a tool used to

identify the risk factors of the New Zealand offending population, the Department of Corrections acknowledged that its presumption that the CNI is appropriate for females is unfounded. The Department of Corrections stated that "There is no direct evidence that in using [the CNI] the risk and needs of women offenders cannot be accurately identified, however, there has also been no adequate development of a specific women's gender risk prediction tool or needs assessment that takes into account any gender specific factors for female offenders" (2003, p. 4).

### **Protective factors**

All the above risk factors can increase the likelihood of a young person's offending, however, not all young people with multiple risk factors become offenders. The presence of a positive influence in a young person's life is sometimes enough to counter all the negative influences (Becroft, 2009). These positive factors are said to be 'protective' against the risk of offending and can foster resilience against adversity (Becroft, 2009). Protective factors are typically perceived as safeguards or buffers to the likelihood that an individual deemed to be at-risk will actually continue down their trajectory set towards negative life outcomes (Small & Memmo, 2004). Similar to risk factors, protective factors are used as probability makers for the likelihood of problem behaviour and thus need to be considered in risk factor analyses (Small & Memo, 2004). Rutter (1987) clarifies that protective factors are not just the absence of, or the opposite of risk factors, but that protective factors can only be present when a risk factor is present. For instance, having a parent in prison constitutes a risk factor as parental incarceration has been correlated with an increased likelihood that the child will engage in crime in the future. Yet, if a grandparent were to actively fulfil the financial and social support role of the imprisoned parent then this might buffer the impact of the risk factor and therefore constitute a protective factor (Gordon, 2011). Consequently the balance between risk and protective factors is believed to be important in determining which young people should be recipients of resilience-building interventions (Rutter, 2012).

The relationship between risk and protective factors is extremely complex as they are linked or interdependent and can be reliant on geography, social position, historical location and the interplay of particular relationships (Becroft, 2009). For example, it is well established that association with anti-social peers is a powerful risk factor for offending. However the impact of these relationships is strongly moderated if the individual has strong bonds to family or school, adequate parental monitoring or

strong communication skills. One study concluded that the risk factor of having an anti-social peer group only exerts an influence on the individual when the individual's relationship with their parents starts to deteriorate (Becroft, 2009). Similar studies have found that the protective factor of adequate parental supervision (knowing where your child is) is a stronger protective factor among lower socioeconomic groups than higher socioeconomic groups. Young people from lower socioeconomic groups are likely to interpret this parental supervision as a sign of care and concern whereas young people from high socioeconomic groups who are more likely to interpret parental supervision as a sign of not being trusted (Becroft, 2009). Another important protective influence on the lives of young people at-risk of offending is community connectedness. Involvement in community activities can help buffer other negative influences by providing a context for learning 'remedial' social skills that were not learned in a dysfunctional home. This could be through the association with well-adjusted peers and their parents who help to modify the behaviours of an 'at-risk' young person and their parents (Becroft 2009).

Studying protective factors is particularly important in situations where removing risk factors may be very difficult. Interventions designed to create positive relationships, community connectedness, or a sense of self-esteem, for example, may be more effective than attempting to remove anti-social peers, improving parenting practices or addressing community safety concerns (Becroft, 2009). Before turning our attention to specific protective factors, it is important to note that as with risk factor research, the majority of literature investigating the buffering power of protective factors has done so within the individually-orientated perspective. This limits the potential effectiveness of intervention strategies as they have neglected to consider how interventions might protect individuals against the macro-level factors conducive to offending. Considering that both risk and protective factors must be taken into account to predict future offending, it is interesting to note that there is significantly less research identifying protective factors than risk factors.

As early as 1999, Lisa Hema considered the influence of protective factors as she undertook a comprehensive review of risk factors for Aotearoa's Child Youth and Family Services (Hemma, 1999 cited in McLaren, 2000). Hema (1999, cited in McLaren, 2000) identified six factors that protect against risk. These include:

- Being female
- Having high intelligence

- Having positive social orientation
- Being of resilient temperament
- Having supportive relationships with family members or other adults
- Healthy beliefs and standards including family and community norms that are opposed to crime and violence and support educational successes and healthy development

Both the *Youth Offending Strategy* (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002) and the *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002) adopt a strengths-based approach to improving outcomes for young people. Both strategies consider it important to design policies and programmes that simultaneously reduce risk factors and promote protective factors so as to avoid defining the young person at-risk of crime as the problem (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

Interestingly, the *Youth Offending Strategy* fails to provide a comprehensive list of protective factors. Rather, the Ministry of Justice and Ministry of Social Development (2002) advocate that to avoid criminality in young people the four areas in which a young person develops (family, school/work, peer group and the community) should not host dysfunction. If dysfunction does exist then this should be remedied as soon as possible if healthy development is to occur. Despite this assertion, the *Youth Offending Strategy* does not provide any examples of remedial solutions. On the other hand, the *Youth Development Strategy* explains that protective factors “reduce the impact of unavoidable negative events and help young people resist risk-taking behaviours” (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002, p. 20). Supporting their claim the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002) provides a comprehensive list of protective factors that are thought to protect young people from a range of negative outcomes including truancy, unsafe sexual behaviour, self harm, drug abuse and of course, offending behaviour. These protective factors include:

- A large net of social support from wider family, teachers, school, workplace, church, youth organisations and leaders
- Faith that life holds meaning, optimism, aspirations, hopes and plans for the future
- Parenting that combines warmth with clear limits and firm consequences
- Safe, supportive neighbourhoods
- Staying longer at school and achieving well

- Being involved in extracurricular activities and having many interests and hobbies
- Having at least one close friend
- Having mainly law-abiding friends with positive interests
- Thinking skills, including problem solving and seeing things from others' perspectives
- Positive social interactions with other people
- Having high levels of attachment to the community and one's culture
- Meaningful employment

The *Youth Development Strategy Aotearoa* then goes on to specify a set of skills that young people need if they are to achieve healthy development. This set of skills is designed to help young people negotiate their environment and the four spheres of development (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). However, providing a list of required skills simultaneously implies that those that are not developing in a functional manner are 'lacking' these skills and it puts the onus of the problem on the individual to acquire these skills. The following list contains some of the skills noted by the Ministry of Youth Affairs as desirable for healthy development:

- Social skills: e.g. being able to communicate with others, appreciate others' perspectives, and resolve conflict peaceably
- Emotional skills: e.g. knowing how to recognise and deal constructively with a range of emotions
- Physical skills: e.g. being able to cope positively with physical and sexual development and manage fertility effectively
- Autonomy skills: e.g. understanding how to make decisions, seek advice, live independently and support themselves
- Work skills: e.g. developing a career, gaining relevant skills and qualifications and managing effectively in the workplace
- Intimacy skills e.g. being able to develop and maintain close relationships, both friendships and romantic
- Education: e.g. having a positive attitude towards education, motivating themselves to study and set and reach educational goals (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002)

The relationship between risk and protective factors becomes increasingly complex when considering gender-specific risk and protective factors. As there is limited

research on gender-specific risk factors, there is even less literature detailing gender-specific protective factors. Researchers are beginning to explore the role of gender in the resilience process and there is one theory that is noteworthy when considering how adolescent females 'at-risk' of engaging in crime might exhibit resilience.

Rumgay (2004) argues that gender norms and the stereotypes associated with traditional female roles might serve as protective factors for female youth offenders. Rumgay (2004) suggests that successful resilience or avoidance of crime might be rooted in the recognition of an opportunity (as perceived by an offending individual) to claim an alternative, desired and socially approved personal identity. For some fortunate females, an opportunity may be seized with immediate effect and this will immediately assist in protecting them from compelling risk factors present in their life. Such opportunities might include the changing of identity through the life transitions that adolescents experience such as leaving home, forming intimate partner relationships or having children. In adopting any of these new identities an individual is able to adopt the new role (such as mother) and its accompanying social script. The script acts like a skeleton of social expectations that the individual can adopt and attach their own conventional and pro-social identity to. That the presentation of a new role offers opportunity to desist from offending behaviour echoes Sampson and Laub's (1995) criminological theory of turning points that was flagged earlier. Evidently research on gender-specific protective factors is sparse and further research is required.

### **Resilience**

During recent years there has been a marked tendency for researchers, clinicians and policy makers to shift their focus from risk and protective factors to resilience (Rutter, 2012; Ungar, 2012b). Rutter (2012) explains that part of the motivation for this shift was to focus on the positive as opposed to maladaptive outcomes by fostering the successes of young people rather than treating the failures. However more cynical researchers such as Martineau (1999) proclaim that this shift in focus is nothing more than a nominal shift as the study of resilience investigates the same issues as the study of risk and protective factors (Martineau, 1999). No single definition of resilience exists (Bottrell, 2009b; France, 2008). Yet most scholars would agree that resilience is evidenced when an individual or group evades the negative outcomes predicted from risk factor analysis (Armstrong, 2004; Foster & Spencer, 2010; Ungar, 2004). Resilience is the desired goal of service providers who

work with youth 'at-risk' of negative outcomes. To be able to say that a young person is resilient or has demonstrated resilience indicates that they have not succumbed to the risk factors present in their life. This aligns with ministerial goals of promoting healthy development among young people and reducing youth offending (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

As flagged in the introductory paragraph there is tension between the bodies of research that align with the individually-focussed paradigm or the ecologically-focussed paradigm of understanding resilience and the way individuals evade predicted outcomes. Ungar (2012a) argues that while individual perspectives position resilience as a personal trait that individuals have or possess, ecological perspectives view resilience as a process that families, schools, communities and governments facilitate. The individually-centred view of resilience considers how an individual resists submitting to the influence of risk factors, yet it neglects to consider the processes of social productions that create conditions of vulnerability and risk in the first place (Ungar, 2012b). The emergence of ecologically-centred research is transforming the study of resilience by turning the focus away from the capacities of individuals to resist environmental stressors toward a more contextualised understanding of resilience (Ungar, 2012a).

The ecological perspective acknowledges that individual agency enables a young offender to navigate the psychological, social and cultural resources associated with resilience. Yet the ecological perspective contends that it remains the role of families, communities and governments to make such resources available to youth (Ungar, 2012a). Bottrell Armstrong and France (2010) explain that an individual's choice to engage or not to engage in offending behaviour is constrained by the societal pathways that are created from the interplay between the structural, political and cultural aspects of the young person's environment. Thus the ecological view of resilience does not dismiss the importance of dispositional traits but rather it extends narrow views of risk and resilience in order to consider the influence of macro-level factors (large-scale factors not directly linked to an individual) as well as micro-level factors (small-scale factors that closely linked to the individuals immediate environment) (Ungar, 2012b). This contextualised paradigm for viewing resilience builds on a tradition within psychology that explores the individual within nested layers of social context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

As research which supports the contextualised understanding of human development gathers from around the world, it is becoming increasingly clear that achieving resilience is just as dependant, and quite possibly more dependant on the social and physical ecologies that surround an individual than on an individual's cognitions and personality traits (Ungar, 2012a, 2012b). It is particularly concerning that researchers and policy makers in Aotearoa seem to have been slow to adopt a more contextualised perspective towards resilience in both research and policy. This marginalising of ecological perspectives misses the opportunity to understand and address the systematic differences in youth crime such as the disproportionate number of Maori or the growing proportion of female offenders in New Zealand's youth crime statistics. Individually-centred understandings of resilience are limited in their ability to explain these systematic differences but ecologically-based understandings of resilience may help to identify the factors that are conducive to a societal pathway that legitimises crime for these groups of young people. To truly bolster resilience among the youth of Aotearoa it is necessary that young people are seen within the context in which they live.

Before further unpacking risk and resilience research, it is necessary to consider the closely related, yet distinct, construct of 'desistance'. The key difference between desistance and resilience is the level to which they can be applied. Desistance is a behavioural concept that relates specifically to an individual's own cessation of offending, whilst emphasising the possibility of individual change in the future. Resilience is a far more general concept that could be applied to a variety of individual or structural factors that produce adversity in an individual's life, whilst emphasising the possibility of moving beyond this adversity in the future. Although desistance developed within criminology and resilience has its origins in the field of developmental psychology, there are many similarities between the terms. Recently more researchers such as Maruna (1999) are acknowledging that both constructs have developed along similar pathways and many of the underlying mechanisms that enable these two distinct processes to occur may be the same. Maruna (1999) encourages the sharing of ideas and theories across resilience and desistance research. Although this project is placed within the field of resilience research, desistance-related notions such as 'turning points', have been used to make sense of the resilience process (Sampson & Laub, 1995). Despite dealing exclusively with criminality and offending behaviour this research hopes to investigate factors conducive to crime that are wider than behavioural changes at the individual level.

Consequently this research project is firmly placed within the field of resilience research.

### **Current Interventions in Aotearoa**

New Zealand researchers and policy advisors realise that there is no definitive answer as to which particular intervention will work to reduce youth offending. However, one aspect of youth offending that is nearly unanimously agreed upon by researchers is that early intervention is necessary. The research shows that effective interventions are multi-faceted and multi-modal: in other words, they target multiple causes of offending (risk factors) using multiple techniques (Becroft, 2007; McLaren, 2000; Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

The Ministry of Youth Affairs (2002), the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Social Development (2002) recognise that effective interventions are holistic in their approach and touch on the four corners of a person's life: specifically these are family, school/work, peer group and neighbourhood. Despite recognising that neighbourhood factors contribute to putting a young person 'at-risk' of offending, the *Youth Development Strategy* fails to address potential interventions at the neighbourhood level, let alone address how interventions at broader ecological levels might influence an individual's offending. Put succinctly, the Ministry of Youth Affairs makes a disclaimer that "Neighbourhood factors are also risk factors for offending, although they are not looked at in depth in this paper" (McLaren, 2000, p. 12).

Similarly, the *Youth Offending Strategy* recognises that there are five key points of time where intervening in a young person's pathway into the criminal justice system can be effective. These five points fall: within the family, at school, during their first contact with the police, at a family group conference and at an individual's first youth court prosecution. It appears that none of these five time periods for effective intervention address the broader ecological factors that operate in the environment before, irrespective of the existence of the young person being dealt with. For instance all of these moments of intervention are centred on the particular individual who has offended: there are no time slots allocated to consider broader factors such as the economy which dictates the number of jobs available in particular areas which in turn influences how young people might spend their time (Becroft, 2007; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

Contrary to the theoretical push to address ecological factors in risk factor research and recognise broader political and societal factors in ministerial documents, the current New Zealand Government appears to have adopted an individually-focussed paradigm in their attempts to resolve the 'problem' of youth crime. As noted in Chapter One, the 'Fresh Start' programmes and the introduction of longer sentences for youth offenders are products of focussing on the risk factors that are located within the individual milieu and attribute criminal behaviour entirely to the individual. Extending this individually-centred approach to consider and address ecological factors that influence 'at-risk' youth is expected to improve outcomes for young people.

### **Exclusively focussed on the individual**

In light of the recent raft of ecologically-orientated research, the individually-focussed interventions employed by the New Zealand Government are particularly concerning. Studies from across six continents have resolved that macro-level factors are just as predictive, and probably more predictive, of a young person's eventual life outcomes than factors located in the individual's immediate context (Ungar, 2012a). Thus intervention strategies that strive to create conditions where risk factors are minimised and options for choosing to resist pathways into crime are readily accessible, are likely to have a greater impact on a young person's outcomes and for a larger number of young people than strategies that try to bolster an individual's personal capacity to resist their environment and demonstrate resilience when exposed to risk factors (France & Homel, 2006; Ungar, 2012a).

Empirical evidence is beginning to show that broad contextual factors are more predictive of resilience than individual or proximal factors to the young person (Ungar, 2012a). For example, the *Pathways to Resilience* study found that across 531 'at-risk' urban and rural youth from five different countries, contextual factors were the strongest predictors of positive outcomes (Ungar, 2012b). The researchers found that overall, 'contextual factors', which measured items such as having opportunities to develop skills that will be useful in later life and serving their community, were more closely aligned with positive outcomes than 'individual characteristics', 'relationships with parents or caregivers' and 'relationships with peers and mentors'. The researchers also found that the specific patterns of availability and accessibility to resources made a big impact on youth outcomes (Ungar, 2012b).

On this premise, it seems logical to conclude that preventions and interventions at the ecological level would be more effective than preventative measures at the individual level. Several studies support this assertion. As part of the United Kingdom's *Pathways Into and Out of Crime* project, France and Homel (2006) conducted interviews with youth identified as 'at-risk' due to their expulsion from school or through youth court referrals. The analysis of the interviews revealed that young people perceived programmes that aimed to change their lives through cognitive and behaviour changes offered little help outside of the teaching room. The young people reported that these programmes did not recognise the context in which young people must manage crime and other difficulties, such as living in a crime-ridden neighbourhood (France & Homel, 2006). After following close to 900 'at-risk' kindergarten students for ten years, the 'Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group' in America concluded that an intervention or change in a child's social ecology, such as providing more funding to local schools and parks, accounts for a greater amount of variation in that individual's life outcomes than an individual's inherent capacity for resilience (Bierman et al., 2004).

It is evident that adopting an exclusively individually-centred approach, to risk and resilience has wide-reaching consequences. Perceiving the individual as the locus of change severely limits potential for intervention. Resilience building strategies that try to foster individual traits associated with resilience (i.e. self-esteem) do not alter the young person's societal access route to criminality. Such strategies merely equip the individual with more tools to fight a trajectory set towards criminal behaviour. Conversely, interventions at the macro-level seek to influence the opportunities available and direction of the societal access route altogether. Providing young people with the tools to deal with their circumstances, but failing to change these circumstances is a short-term solution. Adopting a dual approach that deals with risks at the individual level as well as at the ecological level is likely to have the most influence on a large number of young people.

### **A Government Tool**

Understanding risk and resilience as a tool used by the Government helps to understand why the broader social factors have not, despite compelling research, been integrated into social policy (Bottrell, 2010; Martineau, 1999; Botrell & Armstrong, 2012). Framing risk and resilience within an individual's immediate context, and ignoring structural inequalities aligns with the neo-liberal discourse of

individual responsibility (Bottrell, 2010; Foster & Spencer, 2010; Martineau, 1999). Neo-liberalism is a set of economic policies that have become widespread over the last 30 years. Neo-liberalism is characterised by deregulation, having a free-market, reduced social welfare, as well as the replacement of the notion of the public good with 'individual responsibility' (Martinez & Garcia, 2000). Bottrell states that:

Policy framed by neoliberal aims and valorized individualism increasingly relies on and requires young people and families to accept and take responsibility for their own health, education, employment and civic participation as if how they fare in adverse conditions is principally a matter of choice (Bottrell, 2010, p. 3).

Neo-liberal policy discourse does not acknowledge the adversities that some families and young people contend with, but rather it problematises their adverse behaviour (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012). It resolves that criminal activity (and other negative outcomes) are the result of individual failings (France, 2008). By adopting this deficit-theory explanation for youth crime, the government fuels moral panic about youth being problematic to society (France, 2008). Simultaneously the government mitigates its responsibility to deal with the structural factors conducive to youth crime as it opens up opportunities for electoral popularity through simple crime management solutions focussed on the policy of containment through the morality of blame (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012; France, 2008).

Attributing the cause of crime to the individual and focussing on policies of containment for these 'dangerous' individuals, is important to governments as it provides an opportunity to be seen as 'doing something' about the problem of youth crime, without having to resolve the fundamental, and more expensive problems of society. Armstrong (2006) exposes government window dressing tactics when he states that: "Poverty, although recognised as a factor associated with high risk is countered, not by economic redistribution but by interventions aimed at supporting individuals at the micro-level with the management of their own risks" (Armstrong, 2006, p. 272). In alignment with neo-liberal rhetoric about individual responsibility and anti-welfare policies, the individually orientated view of risk and resilience justifies the surveillance and intervention of government into the lives of dysfunctional and 'at-risk' young people and their families (Armstrong, 2004).

Utilising the individually focussed view of resilience, policy makers turn a blind eye to mounting support for an ecological view of risk, resilience and criminality. The

New Zealand Government claims that through increasingly punitive responses to young offenders, increased surveillance and prevention programmes aimed at building up the trait of resilience in 'at-risk' youth, it is addressing the 'problem' of youth crime (France, 2008; McWhirter et al., 1998), thus winning the support of the public, which is caught up in the moral panic over today's 'problematic' youth (Bottrell, Armstrong & France, 2010).

### **Risk, Resilience and Indigenous Understandings of Wellbeing**

Maori young people have disproportionately high levels of engagement in criminal activity compared to other ethnic groups (Ministry of Justice, 2002). The question arises, whether simply being Maori could be a risk factor to offending? No evidence has been found to support such a contention (Doone, 2000). Doone (2000) argues that the disproportionately high rates of Maori in crime statistics are not surprising considering the over-representation of Maori in many of the risk factors that have been associated with offending behaviour. As discussed in Chapter Two, there is a wide body of opinion which supports the view that the colonisation of Aotearoa has led to significant alienation of Maori from their traditional culture and that this is likely to have contributed to the high frequency of risk factors to offending among Maori (Doone, 2000).

After critically reviewing risk and resilience literature, Terryann Clark (2007) asserts that individually-focused models of resilience do not align with Maori or indigenous perspectives of wellbeing. Clark (2007) realises that traditional Maori perspectives are more holistic than Western notions of wellbeing as they acknowledge the importance and interconnectedness of the family, community, environment, emotional wellbeing, physical body, spiritual forces, temporality, history, social and political context (Clark, 2007; Durie, 2001). It is apparent that individually-orientated views of resilience are in discord with Maori understandings of wellbeing. This phenomenon is not limited to Maori, as indigenous young people around the world host relatively worse health and social trajectories to their non-indigenous peers (Bramley, Hebert, Tuzzio, & Chassin, 2005).

Clark (2007), Kirmayer, Stéphane Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, and Williamson (2012) suggest that if the construct of resilience is to be applicable and useful for native communities and indigenous young people, it needs to align with indigenous worldviews. Risk and resilience theory and research that aligns with Maori ways of knowing is foundational for ethical and acceptable research that aligns with Te Tiriti

o Waitangi and is urgently required if Aotearoa is to address this social injustice against Maori (Clark, 2007; Manna, 2003). There is growing evidence to support the proposition that basing crime prevention programmes on Maori cultural values contributes significantly to the success of those programmes (Doone, 2000).

Evidently, it is necessary to expand the dominant individually-centred view of risk and resilience so that it aligns with indigenous, but specifically Maori, understandings of wellbeing. Kirmayer and colleagues (2012) suggest that indigenous perspectives are akin to ecologically-focused perspectives as both perspectives recognise that much of what seems to promote resilience, originates outside of the individual. The researchers also suggest that adopting indigenous theoretical models for understanding wellbeing would broaden the focus of current risk and resilience interventions and preventions so that the interventions alter the structural factors that shape pathways towards and away from crime. Working in partnership with Maori to extend the mainstream models of resilience to include more contextual factors has the potential to make a real difference for the youth of Aotearoa and specifically for Maori youth.

### **The Stigma Attached to Being 'At-Risk'**

Several researchers have raised concerns about the stigmatising effect on young people who are labelled 'at-risk'. Foster and Spencer (2010) point out that the relatively new terms of being 'at-risk' and 'resilient' carry the same negative connotations as the 'delinquent' youth described in the 1950s Cambridge Study (Farrington, 1996) and are not all that different from Cohen's 'folk devils'- a term used to describe the young people whose actions and presence posed a threat to societal values in the 1970s moral panics (Cohen, 1972).

The deficit-based rhetoric resulting from neo-liberal notions of individual responsibility beckons stigma as it locates the cause of crime within the individual (France, 2008). Bottrell & Armstrong (2012) explain that while individually-orientated resilience policy tends to apply to all young people, the young people who are doing well are differentiated from the minority of young people who are thought to be less resilient and need additional support to build their resilience against risk. Martineau (1999) expresses great concern at this differentiation. She considers that viewing resilience as an individual trait ignores the contextual differences of risk factors that young people encounter. She concludes that this demarcates the poor as being non-resilient and abnormal in comparison to the rest of the 'resilient' young

people whose more fortunate circumstances meant that their apparent resilience was not tested under the conditions of poverty. Bottrell and Armstrong (2012) consider that these 'abnormal' and supposedly non-resilient youth are subject to further stigma as public rhetoric considers expenditure on these inherently problematic youth as detracting from potentially better returns from investment in higher achieving and better behaving young people (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012).

Youth involved in the *Youth Council Care to Independence Programme* in New Zealand identify the stigma of being labelled 'at-risk' as being a big challenge to moving on with their life after foster care (Watts, Kumar, Nicholson, Kumar, & Youth Council Care to Independence Programme, 2006). The young people claim that encountering stigma encourages those at-risk to accept their lot in life and follow the 'well-trodden' pathway of at-risk youth to negative outcomes such as criminal activities. The young representatives argue that labelling children and young people has cumulative effects over time and that often the label becomes self-fulfilling. On this premise such labels should not be applied in the first place (Watts et al., 2006). This aligns with what Bordieu calls 'symbolic violence'- where a label ('at-risk') becomes attached to a person and that person's life is captured and defined by this conceptual language (Foster & Spencer, 2010).

It is particularly concerning that this labelling and self-fulfilling process of the labels 'at-risk' and 'resilient' might occur during the identity-forming period of adolescence. Erickson's (1968) widely cited psychosocial developmental stages, suggest that the essential developmental crisis of adolescence is discovering ones true identity. Failure to form a true identity during adolescence is thought to result in a self-image that lacks a central and stable core (Erickson, 1968). Erickson (1968) recognised that young people are vigilant to how others view them and the roles that they might fulfil as adults. Incidentally, the application of negative labels such as 'at-risk' during this critical identity-forming age increases the likelihood of these terms being incorporated into the young person's self-perception and the way that they transgress into adulthood.

### **Ignoring Youth Perspectives**

Several researchers purport that both individually and ecologically-focussed risk and resilience researchers have neglected to include the perspective of the young people studied and labelled as being 'at-risk' (Bottrell, 2009; 2010; Martineau, 1999; Foster & Spencer, 2010; Bottrell, Armstrong & France; Ungar 2010; 2012; Bottrell &

Armstrong, 2012; Massey et al., 1998). The perspectives of young women who engage in crime have been notably excluded. Other than the perspective of one female youth offender in Carepenter's (2012) criminology thesis about desistance in New Zealand, it appears that Aotearoa's youth crime literature is almost completely void of young female (and male) perspectives. This is concerning for several reasons. Firstly, the majority of youth crime literature and intervention strategies have been based on data collected from male delinquents, yet, as flagged earlier, there appears to be differences in the way young men and women perceive some of their actions and the factors that influence them to engage or not to engage in crime (Carpenter, 2012). Secondly the proportion of female to male youth apprehensions is increasing and therefore a greater proportion of young women will be affected by policy decisions and services provided that strive to bolster resilience among 'at-risk' youth (Ministry of Justice, 2010a).

Researchers have known for some time that much can be learnt from the first hand experience of young people who are or who have been involved in crime. As early as the 1920s, Shaw and Burgess (1966) recognised the value of youth offenders' stories when they were studying delinquent boys in Chicago. Shaw and Burgess (1966) advocate that a young offender's own story:

Reveals useful information concerning at least three important aspects of delinquent conduct (1) the point of view of the delinquent; (2) the social and cultural situation to which the delinquent is responsive; and (3) the sequence of past experience and situations in the life of the delinquent (Shaw & Burgess, 1966, p. 3).

Shaw and Burgess (1966) noted that it was not necessary to assume that people will provide a completely accurate or truthful account, but that it is important to learn from their interpretations of their situation. Similarly, Bottrell, Armstrong and France (2010) argue that listening to young people can assist in understanding youth offending and broader relations to crime, as well as how best to implement prevention and intervention strategies at the macro-ecological level. They consider that the accounts of young people may bring to the fore the meanings of situations, routines, events, relationships and personal agency significant to offending (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012). As Armstrong suggests, "it is necessary to examine the experiences of young people, including the social processes of criminalisation to which they are exposed and within which context they negotiate their identities and pathways through life" (Armstrong, 2004, p. 111 as cited in Bottrell, Armstrong &

France, 2010). The way that young people may talk about their experiences might constitute important feedback to governance systems regarding offending factors that are emphasised in policy or other factors both in and beyond an individual's immediate context that would not present themselves in alternative research approaches (Bottrell, Armstrong & France, 2010). With such limited literature available on gender specific risk and protective factors, coupled with the considerable amount of resources and attention given to resilience research and intervention in Aotearoa (and overseas), it is imperative and timely to seek the opinion of 'at-risk' youth as to the factors they consider to influence their decision to engage or not to engage in crime.

The fundamental assumption that there is nothing positively adaptive about youth crime and that offending behaviours are not part of 'normal development' requires interrogation. There is no certainty that young people, and particularly young women, perceive their actions in the ways portrayed by researchers (France & Homel, 2006). For instance, behaviours such as shoplifting, which are seen as delinquent by researchers and indicative of non-resilient behaviour, may be thought of as functional or even prosocial by the young person who receives commodities they couldn't otherwise afford as well as social inclusion from peers (Ungar, 2012b). Similarly, although young people may participate in criminal behaviours, this does not necessarily mean they do not hold socially desirable and 'normative' goals (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012). Bottrell and Armstrong's (2012) conversations with young offenders reveal the desire of several delinquents to gain employment and to be able to support themselves, and possibly a family, in the future. For instance one teen drug dealer who they talked to did not particularly want to deal drugs, but he saw it as one of the most feasible ways to earn enough money for a car and independence in his neighbourhood. For this teen, and other young people, criminal behaviour is not deemed 'life defining' but 'something that happens' because of the environment they live in. Crime simply serves as a means to an end (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012).

Research into risk and protective factors and resilience needs to be contextualised, acknowledging the complex and interconnected layers of influence on a young person and the opportunities available to them. To do this we need to start by reducing the credence given to 'expert' researcher knowledge and gain the perspective of those young people deemed to be at-risk (Armstrong, 2004). Bottrell, Armstrong and France (2010) suggest that engaging in discussion with young people

enables researchers to trace the perspectives of young people to distal influences. This opens up the possibility for effective interventions at the macro-ecological level. It is the interplay of macro-level factors which reveals the risks young people negotiate and the opportunities available to them. While the macro-level interaction shows how societal pathways away from crime can be created (Botrell, Armstrong & France, 2010).

### **Conclusion**

The social constructions of risk, resilience and protective factors are hugely problematic. They are individually-focused, value-laden terms that are coloured by political agendas. These constructions are methodological flawed due to an overemphasis on expert understandings far removed from the reality of those who live under their labels. In order to enhance the impact of current risk and resilience focussed interventions, policy makers need to stop turning a blind eye to the mounting evidence supporting ecological understandings of resilience. Researchers need to consider altering the macro-level factors, which are broad structural factors such as employment opportunities and social policies, which interact in such a way that they make crime an appealing option for particular groups of New Zealand's young people. Evidently a better understanding of how both individually-orientated and macro-level factors interact and influence the lives of young people and particularly young women within the context of Aotearoa is required. In order to have effective interventions, the theoretical constructs of risk and resilience need to be developed in consultation with young people and particularly with marginalised groups of women and Maori. We need to begin by asking 'at-risk' youth about their experiences and which factors that have influenced their pathway into crime.



## Chapter Four: Research Theory and Practise

The overarching purpose of this research project is to give voice to young women who have engaged in crime. This purpose orientates the research towards an epistemology (or a way of knowing) that realises that knowledge is subjective and bias is unavoidable. It also points the study toward an ontology (or a perception of reality) that advocates that no reality exists outside of our perceptions of it and therefore objective knowledge is unobtainable (Davies, 2006; Thomas & Hodges, 2010). With this realist epistemological stance, it is not surprising that an interpretive approach has been adopted for this research project. The interpretive approach is both qualitative and case-centric in its inquiry and inductive in its analysis. Unlike a positivist approach to research, an interpretive approach is subjective and wedded to the notion of the researcher as the explorer (Davies, 2006).

The research design of semi-structured interviews lends itself to the widely accepted style of qualitative research. Qualitative research tends to utilise an inductive approach in order to make sense of a rich data set collected from a small sample (Curtis & Curtis, 2011; Thomas & Hodges, 2010). This project is case-centric as it elicits in-depth and rich information from a small number of cases (i.e. the number of young women re-telling their relations to crime in semi-structured interviews). The very nature of listening to the stories of young people who have engaged in crime affirms a realist epistemology that acknowledges the existence of realities which are independent of an individual (e.g. that structural factors such as poverty do exist), even though individuals (participants) interpret these realities differently as they exercise their personal agency (Bottoms, Shapland, Costello, Holmes, & Muir, 2004). Therefore an interpretative approach is the most appropriate for this study and has significantly influenced the general approach to this study as well as the research methods employed.

Structuration theory and the theory of habitus are useful theoretical constructs to employ when trying to make sense of the pathways into and out of crime for young women. Both theories highlight the need to look both within and beyond the stories shared by young women who engage in crime. As discussed in Chapter Two, existing risk and resilience literature tends to be either individually-focussed or ecologically-focussed. This theoretical dichotomy has meant that the literature tends to portray young people who engage in crime “as either ‘super-agents’ who are free to act as they choose and can directly influence the outcome of their lives through decision

making, or as ‘super dupes’ who react to wider social forces and situations rather than helping to create these situations through their own actions” (Farrall & Bowling, 1999, p. 261). In an effort to bridge the gap between structure and agency, a number of risk and resilience researchers propose the application of Anthony Giddens’s (1984) structuration theory (Bottrell et al., 2010; Carpenter, 2012; Farrall & Bowling, 1999; France et al., 2012; France & Homel, 2006). Giddens (1984) argues that it is a mistake to view agents and structures as completely separate. Structuration theory advocates that individual ‘choice’ should be recognised as taking place within a particular context with particular structural constraints operating (France & Homel, 2006). In this research project I have employed structuration theory as I demonstrate how the stories shared by participants about their decisions and behaviours are influenced by external or structural factors in their environments.

Extending this concept, is the recognition that local culture influences the way that people view and justify their actions. Pierre Bourdieu (1977) coined the term *habitus* to describe the relationship of social norms or tendencies and how they guide behaviour and thinking. Habitus is significant when studying the pathways of young people into and out of crime as people seek social capital according to their own culturally influenced logic. Consequently social capital can both encourage and discourage participation in crime depending on the individual’s habitus or the norms and typical relations of their local area. If young people find social capital in their immediate crime-ridden environments, then this might affirm existing deviant beliefs and encourage criminal behaviour. Although not all people living in the same habitus and facing the same structural constraints such as poverty, unemployment react in the same way. Cultural context has been shown to significantly influence a young persons’ choices, chances and behaviour. For this reason the theory of habitus is useful when interpreting the narratives of young women who engage in crime.

Issues seen as most prevalent to engaging and not to engaging in crime for a small number of young women from Aotearoa are also discussed in this research. Instead of portraying the young women as passive victims of structural inequalities in society, or as actors rationally navigating around these imbalances, the overarching objective is to hear *real* stories of experiences of crime from the young women. Three specific research questions that this project seeks to answer include:

1. How do young women who engage in crime understand and describe the labels of being ‘at-risk’ and ‘resilient’ to engaging in crime?

2. What are the factors that young women who engage in crime identify as being influential in their decision to either engage, not to engage or to stop engaging in crime?
3. What do young women, who engage in crime, desire for their future?

### **Research Methods**

The methods used in this research project were employed to gain insight to how the participants, understand risk, resilience and their relations to crime. As a primary method, semi-structured interviews were employed as the best way to obtain the detailed and subjective information relevant to their experiences of crime.

The choice of semi-structured interviews provided a framework that permitted in-depth insights into the participants' opinions and feelings which encouraged discussion that contributed towards answering the research objectives and aims (Denscombe, 2010). Curtis and Curtis (2011) advocate that, "in-depth interviews are of most value in exploring an issue about which little is known, or to get a detailed picture of what people think" (p. 30). The exploratory purpose of this research project aligns with interviewing, and therefore the method of interviewing was prioritised. However, I expected that some young women might prefer to do the interview in a group with people that they know, as youth offenders typically commit crimes with peers and this might have been their first interview (Carpenter, 2012). Accordingly, I offered potential participants the options of participating in an individual interview with or without a support person of their choice present, a two-person interview with one of their friends who had also engaged in crime as the second interviewee, or a focus group with up to five of their friends who met the criteria for participation.

In total eight young women were interviewed. Five interviews were undertaken – three of which were two person interviews. No participants elected to bring a support person with them to the interview. An interview question guide (refer Appendix B) was developed using existing research. This was used as an initial guide for the interview, and in some cases it was used to sustain on-topic conversations with the participants. The interviews varied in length between forty minutes and one hour and thirty minutes. This was dependent upon the length of responses to the standard question structure, the extent to which the conversation expanded from the question guide and whether there were one or two people being interviewed.

Every interview was digitally recorded and an un-abridged transcript of each interview was personally typed. This provided me with the intimate knowledge of the contents of each interview (Bryman, 2012). Participants were given the opportunity to review and make changes to the transcript or withdraw part or all of their information from the data set. Participants who indicated on their consent form that they would like to view a copy of their interview were emailed a copy of their transcript within two weeks. From the date of receiving the transcript, participants had two weeks to contact me to withdraw all or part of their transcript, or to make changes to their transcript. No participants withdrew their information and only one participant made a small addition to her transcript by updating what she was currently doing.

### **Accessing the Participants**

Researchers working with young people are familiar with the difficulties associated with accessing participants (Carpenter, 2012). Given that females make up a very small proportion of youth offenders, the task of locating young women who had engaged in crime was particularly difficult. In anticipation of encountering difficulties when trying to recruit from a marginalised population for this research, the criteria for participants was kept fairly broad. Participants had to be aged between 15 and 20 years old and identify as a woman. The phrase ‘might have got you (them) into trouble with the police on two or more occasions’ was used to ensure that young people who do engage in criminal activities but have not been caught by the police or have been dealt with through other means, were not excluded from participating. It was important that participants had been in a situation where they might have gotten into trouble with the police on more than one occasion. This was in order to increase the likelihood of interviewing young women who do not consider engaging in crime as unfamiliar and are therefore considered to be more ‘at-risk’ of negative life outcomes and future imprisonment. It was made clear to participants before the interview that for the purposes of this research, activities that ‘might have got them into trouble with the police’ did not include parking illegally or exceeding the speed limit by less than 20km per hour.

During the interview participants were asked what factors had encouraged, as well as discouraged, their involvement in crime. Consequently it was not necessary, nor feasible, to limit the eligibility criteria to those who identified as having stopped or reduced their offending. Nor was it necessary to limit eligibility to offenders within a

tight age bracket within adolescence. As the age crime curve depicts, the majority of young women grow out of crime by their twenties (Hirschi & Gottfredson, 1983). This natural ceasing of involvement in crime was not seen to be a problem but the fact that most of the older participants, could be expected to stop offending at some point in the near future, was something to be aware of. The age of participants has been noted next to their quotes to assist with this. Although this decline has been described as ‘natural’, it is important to uncover the factors which may have encouraged this desistance process. This is to allow policy makers to ensure the inclusion and availability of such factors for young women in their attempts to reduce youth crime. For the practical reasons of travel and to be able to draw conclusions from participants that experience similar environments, participants were required to live in the wider Auckland area.

I recruited participants by asking social service agencies, school counsellors and social workers who work with youth offenders in Auckland to post flyers (refer to Appendix C) around their offices and distribute them to eligible young women. The names of the agencies and schools have not been provided in order to preserve the anonymity of the participants. Contact was initially made via email, followed by phone calls to 14 different social service agencies and three high schools. In some cases agencies only had contact with male youth offenders: for others the only contact they had with young offenders was in the young person’s home. Agency protocol limited social workers from distributing the flyers to potential participants in such circumstances. However, not all of these recruitment attempts were in vain. Four organisations were very interested in the project and made significant efforts to ensure that the young women who they worked with were aware of their invitation to participate in an interview. Contact with participants was made through three different organisations and the ‘snow ball’ effect. The snow ball effect occurred when participants told their friends about the research project and this proved to be the most useful method of recruitment (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010).

The flyer encouraged young women who were interested in participating in an interview or focus group to contact me with their contact details directly by text, phone call or email. Interested young women were then sent more information about the research (refer to Appendix D). A convenient location and time for the interview was then arranged. Typically the interviews were held in a private space at the organisation where the participant became aware of the research, or in café or fast-food restaurant chain that was local to the participant. At the beginning of the

interview, the voluntary nature of participation and the participant's rights were reiterated. Written consent along with the desire to receive a written copy of their interview or not was also received from the participant at this time. One participant was under the age of 16 years. In this case, her parent/guardian was sent information about the interview and the research project ahead of time, and written consent was obtained before the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

The six-step process of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify and understand the key themes of the interviews with the assistance of a qualitative analysis computer software programme called QSR NVivo 10. Thematic analysis is similar to the grounded theory approach. However this project was closely aligned with the accessible and theoretically flexible approach of thematic analysis which is not fully committed to theory development (Curtis & Curtis, 2011). The realist epistemological stance taken in this research project meant that the a combination of both semantic and latent approaches to data analysis were adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were mostly identified by their explicit meaning provided by the participants. However interpretation was required to unpack how structural factors may have influenced the participants' understandings of their relations to crime and therefore the interpretation was not purely semantic.

Six phases were implemented to complete the thematic analysis. Firstly I familiarised myself with the data through 'repeated reading' of the initial set of transcripts, in an active way – searching for meaning and patterns. Secondly, I produced initial codes, which identified the features of the data that were relevant to the research objectives. Such codes referred to the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information. Thirdly different codes were sorted into potential themes, with all relevant coded data extracts compiled within the identified themes. Fourthly, the themes were refined by deciding whether the collated extracts formed a pattern. If so, then the themes were considered as to whether they reflected the meanings evident in the data set as a whole. Then I wrote a detailed analysis of each theme considering how it fits into the broader overall 'story'. Lastly, I wrote the results and findings section (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for my research

The process of thematic analysis determines to some extent what is deemed most important by the researcher and not by the participants. Nevertheless, the alternative of presenting unstructured data would limit the opportunity to provide a meaningful

interpretation and explanations (Thomas & Hodges, 2010). Efforts were therefore made to ensure that the most pressing and pertinent factors presented by the participants were prioritised in the research findings. The content of the interviews was first considered when the initial analysis was conducted. It was important to evaluate the data as more interviews were conducted in order to remain grounded in the data and to mitigate the application of pre-conceived ideas (Thomas & Hodges, 2010). Along with theory informed by extant research and the question prompts, the key themes were identified during the initial analysis, then these findings guided the nature of the conversation during subsequent interviews.

### **Introducing the Participants**

Seven of the participants were aged between 17 and 20 years old. One participant was 15 years old, who was due to turn 16 the week after her interview. The ethnicity of those interviewed reflected the overall makeup of young offenders in New Zealand: Participants were Maori, Pacific and Pakeha young women. The offending histories of the women varied considerably. At the least serious end, offences were limited in number and might be considered a petty crime, such as shoplifting. At the more serious end, participants had engaged in a number of offences including assault and house burglaries. All of the participants came from working class backgrounds and lived in areas that were dominated by state (Government) housing in Auckland.

Please note that all names are pseudonyms to protect participants' identity (anonymity).

#### *Participant 1: Jordan*

Jordan is a 20 year old female who identifies as Maori. Jordan did not grow up with her biological parents but was whangai (informally adopted) by a lesbian couple who were friends with her mother. Her mothers had stopped engaging in crime by the time they adopted Jordan, but would still use cocaine around her. At various stages of her life Jordan lived with her older siblings. Jordan has a family history of crime and her brother taught her how to do house burglaries. She has a boyfriend who is currently on home detention. Jordan no longer steals cars, commits house burglaries or engages in fights. She does still shoplift. Jordan considers that it was her relationships with her social worker, her boyfriend and her new relationship with God that has encouraged her to reduce her involvement in crime. Although

Jordan left school before completing NCEA Level One, she aspires to be a social worker. Jordan is currently in the process of enrolling in courses where she can gain the NCEA credits required to begin training as a social worker.

*Participant 2: Simone*

Simone is an 18 year old female who identifies as Samoan. She is currently working in a bar and aspires to own her own small winery and perhaps become a social worker later on. Simone left school before completing NCEA Level One. She thinks that her street is boring and quiet because it is in the “nice part” of her neighbourhood. Simone did not grow up with her biological parents. She has mostly been cared for by her grandmother and at some stages of her life, she was cared for by her older siblings. Simone claims that her siblings are often involved in crime and that the police visit her home frequently. Simone did not discuss her involvement in crime in great detail. She has mostly been involved with shoplifting and has attracted police attention when drinking alcohol, as she says that the alcohol makes her more aggressive which gets her into fights. During the period of her life when she was committing the most crimes, Simone remembers being somewhat depressed.

*Participant 3: Tasmine*

Tasmine is an 18 year old female who identifies as being Maori and Dutch. She has lived in the same neighbourhood in Auckland her whole life apart from when she was in CYF's care where she lived in different parts of Auckland. Tasmine is proud to come from her neighbourhood and she wears particular colours to show others where she is from. Tasmine has never met her father and she described her mother as a “crack head” who has had 18 children (most of whom Tasmine does not know). Tasmine was raised by her grandparents and she has also lived in CYF's care. For a period she lived on the streets in her neighbourhood with other young people. Tasmine was expelled from school before completing NCEA Level One. She believes that the sexual assault that she encountered when she was 11 years old from a sports coach, is what sparked her involvement in crime, alcohol and drugs. Tasmine claims to have reduced how much she engages in crime but admits that in the past she has burgled houses, shoplifted, had physical fights in public and consumed alcohol and drugs in public. Tasmine recalls being suicidal and depressed when she was committing the most amount of crime in her life. Tasmine is currently unemployed and she feels as though her life is on hold ‘out here’ while her fiancé is

in prison. Other than wanting to be pregnant, Tasmine has no set plans for the future.

*Participant 4: Andrea*

Andrea is a 19 year old female who identifies as being Maori and Irish. She grew up in a small town in Northland with her father, mother and brother. At the age of 10 her father passed away and she moved to Auckland. In Auckland she lived with Aunty and Uncle. Andrea left school before completing NCEA Level One. It was when she had left school that she made friends with other young people who engaged in crime. Andrea calls herself the “black sheep” of the family. She believes that she was raised well and is not sure why she got involved in crime. She knows her father’s side of the family are involved in crime and excessive drug and alcohol consumption, but she does not spend much time with them. Andrea’s criminal activity mostly involves violence, drinking alcohol and smoking drugs in public as well as shoplifting. As a result of being pregnant Andrea has reduced her involvement in crime. She is still in a romantic relationship with the father of her (unborn) child, who is currently on home detention. Andrea takes her newfound role of motherhood seriously and wants to raise her children well, ensuring that they have access to everything that she never had. She has no immediate career plans and intends on seeing where her babies take her in the short-term. Eventually she wants to become a chef or a hairdresser.

*Participant 5: Naomi*

Naomi is a 17 year old female who identifies as Maori. She moved from another city in the North Island to Auckland four years ago to live with her Mum and two older brothers. She thinks her neighbourhood in Auckland is dangerous as there is a lot of violence. When living in the other city her step-mother used to physically abuse her. Naomi is in the middle of ten siblings. Her siblings live in different places across the North Island and two siblings have been whangai to other families. Naomi left school when she was 16 because she got bullied. Naomi has not been involved in any particularly serious crimes. She has shoplifted before and as a result she is currently banned from entering some of the local stores. Since leaving school she has recently completed a course for at-risk youth. Naomi thinks that both the course and attending Church have helped her to build her self-esteem and to reduce her involvement in crime. Currently Naomi is unemployed but she aspires to

work as either an early childhood teacher or as a flight attendant. Naomi would love to be rich and have a career established before eventually having children.

*Participant 6: Trieste*

Trieste is 18 year old female who identifies as European. When Trieste was 11 years old she was put into foster care and separated from her siblings and her mother while being moved around Auckland. At the age of 13, she moved back in with her mother and her brother for a short period of time before leaving and living with her boyfriend. Her boyfriend was about three times her age and she was teased about him at school. To avoid the teasing, Trieste left high school in Year 10, before completing NCEA Level One. After living with her boyfriend for two years, Trieste ended the relationship. She said that he was physically abusive toward her. Trieste has not been involved in any particularly serious crimes, but she used to drink alcohol in public and has engaged in a lot of violence in her neighbourhood. Trieste recognises that her recent participation in the course for at-risk youth, being whangai to a family who showed her love, as well as her biological family's involvement with Church, have been instrumental in helping her to reduce her involvement in crime. Trieste aspires to work in the social services area and specifically to work with 'youth at-risk'. She is currently completing a course to help her gain NCEA credits and entry into a social work course.

*Participant 7: Sarah*

Sarah is a 17 year old female who identifies as Maori. Sarah was born and raised in the same neighbourhood in Auckland and has only travelled north of Auckland. Due to her infrequent attendance, Sarah was expelled from her high school when she was 15 years old, before completing NCEA Level One. Sarah has a hostile relationship with her biological mother and lives with her father and stepmother. She has 10 siblings who she tries to stay in contact with despite the fact that several have been whangai and live in Northland. Recently Sarah had a miscarriage and lost her 5-month-old baby. Sarah considered her pregnancy and the upcoming role of motherhood to be hugely influential in her recent decision to reduce her involvement in crime. In the past Sarah shoplifted, engaged in violence and would abuse alcohol and drugs. She still smokes marijuana most nights in order to help her sleep. Apart from her uncle whom Sarah described as a "rapist with anger issues" (as he nearly killed her once), Sarah thinks that her family's involvement in crime is "not that serious". Sarah thinks that her family's tough image protects her

from the people in her neighbourhood who try to start fights. Currently Sarah is doing a Maori based home-school programme. She intends to enrol in a hairdressing course soon. In the long-term Sarah wants to be an airline hostess and travel the world.

*Participant 8: Nekeisha*

Nekeisha is a 15 year old female who was due to turn 16 the week after her interview. She identifies as Maori and African. In 2001 Nekeisha moved with her mother and her older sister (from her family home where her Dad still lives) to another area of Auckland. She sees her Dad about once a week. Despite living in an area typically associated with wealth, Nekeisha was adamant that her family is not wealthy and that they live in the poor part of their suburb, next door to alcoholics and drug addicts. Nekeisha left an all-girls school near the city centre because it was “too white” for her. She then left her second, co-education, school before completing NCEA Level One. When Nekeisha was 13 years old her casual marijuana smoking progressed into an addiction to methamphetamine (P). As she was young and had no income, she did sexual favours in order to gain access to methamphetamine and sustain her addiction. Despite having a family that she describes as supportive, Nekeisha would frequently run away from home so that she could access drugs. As well as her drug addiction Nekeisha was involved in a lot of fights. Currently Nekeisha lives at home with her mother, she is not using drugs and she has reduced her involvements in fights. She attributes this reduction in offending to an individual decision to stop engaging in crime. Currently Nekeisha is enrolled in an alternative education programme and is working towards completing NCEA Level One and potentially Level Two and Three. She is deciding whether to further her education and do a travel and tourism course or whether to become a flight attendant.

### **Research Concerns**

Research with young people and particularly with young people who have engaged in crime, raises a number of concerns. Such issues include: power dynamics between the participant and the researcher as they negotiate potential cultural, economic and geographic differences; filtering effects in selection and the voluntary nature of this study resulting in an having an unrepresentative sample of young women who engage in crime; as well as the expected reliability and validity concerns

that plague all research. This section will address each of these research concerns and detail the efforts made to reduce their impact on the research findings.

### **Power Dynamics**

This research project stems from an awareness that research which deals with young people who engage in crime is dealing with a group that constitutes, “two marginalised and maligned groups in popular discourse: ‘young people’ and ‘offenders’ (Holt & Pamment, 2011, p. 125). When trying to ‘give voice’ to a vulnerable population such as young women who engage in crime, it is necessary to be vigilant to inequality in the power relationship between the researcher and participants. Although all participants were at least 15 years old and participation was voluntary, the issue of power dynamics in the interview process remained. Carpenter (2012) notes that structural limitations such as age and personal status can limit the extent of equal participation in research with young people. Similarly, Ramsden (2002) acknowledges that ethnicity and cultural background hugely influence how actions and conversation can be perceived. Ramsden (2002) recognises that a researcher’s assumptions of what is normal and expected in an interview might impinge on the participant’s sense of equality with the researcher.

Approval from the University of Waikato’s Psychology Human Ethics Committee was sought prior to beginning the research. Preparing the research plan provoked the consideration of ethical issues before the interviewing process commenced.

Awareness of the power differential between the researcher and the participant led to efforts to engage individuals on an equal level and to express the need for their help rather than assuming their cooperation. I clearly explained what was requested from the participants: to hear their experiences and opinions, and the ultimate aim of the research, to make sure that perspectives from young women are included in policy making decisions. This was met with interest from those involved.

The interviewees had divergent views and backgrounds, typically quite different to my own. Anticipating that those involved would have as many questions about me as I would of them, I was open about my background and my studies. The overwhelming response from participants was that of acceptance. The fact that I am a young woman, with a maximum age difference of 8 years from the youngest participant was appreciated by the participants who said that they were pleasantly surprised to find that not all researchers were “old and boring” (Jordan, 20).

However culture-matching was not feasible for this project: nor is it a guaranteed method of removing cultural barriers that might hinder the interview process.

I undertook every attempt to be culturally competent and to provide a culturally safe environment for the interview. This was done by being upfront about cultural differences before the interview. I also asked for input from participants as to where and how to best conduct the interview in a manner that would make the participants feel comfortable when responding in ways that are appropriate for them (Ramsden, 2002). This was particularly important when I, a female Pakeha researcher, was interviewing Maori participants. It is possible that traces of the power differences that prevailed during the colonisation of Aotearoa are likely to have impacted on each of the participant's perceptions and willingness to share with a Pakeha researcher. To minimise the likelihood of this happening I placed a photo of myself along with a short biography which detailed my Pakeha ethnicity on the advertising flyer that participants read before contacting me to register their interest in participating (refer to Appendix C). Differences of educational attainment and access to finances were other factors which had the potential to encroach on the ability to engage as equals. However these differences were acknowledged and often laughed about during the interview, which helped to lessen the power differential between the researcher and the participant. It is important to note that while this section has acknowledged the drawback of the researcher being an outsider to the group that they are talking with, the outsider perspective can be advantageous as it does not take for granted what is considered normal by the insiders (Dahlberg & McCaig, 2010; Thomas & Hodges, 2010).

### **Unrepresentative Sample**

Due to the scale of the project, the sample of the research was not likely to be truly representative of female youth offenders. The process of selecting which particular young offenders were invited to participate, in conjunction with the self-selected nature of volunteering, may have further limited the generalisability of any findings. As explained above, employees of organisations who work with young people were contacted and asked to distribute flyers to young women whom they thought might be eligible and interested in participating. Inherent to this process is the presence of filtering effects. It is possible that staff members only invited young women who were confident when talking about their experiences, or perhaps only those who had positive things to say about the employee's organisation. To counter

this filtering effect, employees were also asked to display flyers where all of the young people that they work with might see them and therefore have an opportunity to contact me directly.

However, this recruitment method has its own sampling bias. Participants who registered their interest autonomously were, self-selected. The participants had to have seen the flyer about the research at some point and to have actively contacted the researcher in order to register their interest in participating. The participant then had to go through the process of reading the Participant Information Sheet (refer to Appendix D), and signing the consent form. From this process it appears that the young women who made up the sample had motivation for wanting their story to be told. Therefore, it is possible that this group might tend to be more empowered, more articulate and less alienated than the overall 'young women who have engaged in crime' population. This cannot be proven, but this possibility limits the generalisability of the research findings.

### **Reliability and Validity: Dependability and Trustworthiness**

According to Denscombe (2010) the criticisms of reliability and validity have plagued the qualitative, case-centric researcher for some time now. Reliability is concerned with the extent to which the results achieved are repeatable or dependable (Bryman, 2012). With case-centric research such as this project, it must be accepted that the ultimate findings can only be taken at a particular point in time. This study has involved a specific researcher, a unique set of participants, social settings and circumstances that are not frozen in time and can never be repeated. The very nature of interviews allowed for flexibility and the qualities of the researcher to become an integral part of the data collection method, which further reduces the reliability of the research (Denscombe, 2010). However, if other researchers had access to the same data then it is likely that they would arrive at similar conclusions. Establishing a clear research process doubled as an 'audit trail' and also assisted this study in meeting the qualitative criteria of reliability and dependability articulated by Guba and Lincoln (2005). In providing a thorough description of the research process by which conclusions are drawn, other researchers can assess for themselves how far the research methods constitute reputable procedures and reasonable decisions, which Denscombe (2010) asserts acts as a proxy for being able to replicate the research.

The issue of validity requires further consideration. Validity measures the extent to which the findings can be sustained by the data -it measures the trustworthiness of

the findings (Bryman, 2012). It is concerned with the integrity of the data and that the research measures what it intended to measure (Bryman, 2012). To ensure that in this project, the data, and in turn the findings are trustworthy, several considerations have been made. Namely participant confirmation and investigator triangulation.

The first area regarding participant confirmation involved checking the accuracy of data used for analysis by participants and ensuring that conclusions were drawn from factual accounts (Bryman, 2012; Denscombe, 2010). This method of triangulation checked the trustworthiness of the data by ensuring that there was corroboration between the participants' perspectives and experience and the data that was taken from interview (Bryman, 2012). As mentioned above, participations were given the opportunity to make changes or withdraw a part or the entire interview transcript from the data set. There were no major changes or withdrawals of information indicating that the transcripts and the themes that evolved from the transcripts that have been drawn from *real* stories.

The method of investigator triangulation was employed to affirm the trustworthiness of the data analysis process. Once the transcripts had been coded and sorted into themes, a postgraduate student from the University of Auckland, who was blind to the themes, was provided with the transcripts and asked to code them. There was significant overlap in the themes and codes identified by the University of Auckland student and myself. That two researchers identified many of the same themes and codes suggests that the themes and data analysis reflect the experiences of the young women interviewed and this improves the trustworthiness of the project (Bryman, 2012).

The data gathered and analysed through the process detailed above will be discussed in the next chapter.



## Chapter Five: Research Findings

It is imperative to hear from young women who engage in crime about how they understand risk, resilience and their experiences of crime if policy makers are to provide ‘at-risk’ youth with meaningful alternatives to engaging in crime. This chapter documents the perspectives of young women who have engaged in crime in relation to the three key research questions. The first part of the chapter unpacks how the participants understand the terms ‘at-risk’ and ‘resilient’ which are frequently used to describe them. The second section identifies and explores the risk and protective factors that participants consider to be most influential in their pathways into and out of crime. The third part of this chapter explores what participants desire to be and to do in the future. This section attempts to provide a space for ‘at-risk’ young women to insert their own desired futures and dreams into a literature dominated by researchers’ perspectives of these issues. All findings in this chapter derive from conversations with young women who have engaged in crime and an effort has been made to understand the issue from the perspective of the young women.

### **How do Young Women who Engage in Crime Understand and Describe the Labels of Being ‘At-risk’ and ‘Resilient’ to Engaging in Crime?**

As discussed in the Chapter Three, there is no one definition of risk or resilience in the literature that can be readily applied to young offenders. The power that attaching labels such as ‘at-risk’ or ‘resilience’ to an individual might have on that individual’s future behaviour has been explored for decades by both sociologists and psychologists (Sullivan & West-Newman, 2007). It is concerning that the attachment of a negative label such as ‘at-risk’ is believed to stigmatise the individual, influence the young person’s self-concept and encourage the young person to live up to that particular label, in this instance by engaging in risky behaviours (Sullivan & West-Newman, 2007). However as the perspectives of young people have been marginalised in youth crime research, it is unclear how much young people, and particularly young women who engage in crime, are aware of the terms, ‘at-risk’ and ‘resilient’. Neither is it clear how young people might comprehend the terms and potentially live up to these. This section unpacks participants’ understandings of ‘at-risk’. It also highlights how young women who engage in crime are completely unaware of the term ‘resilience’ and unwilling to define it.

### **At-risk**

As flagged in Chapter Three, a young person is considered to be ‘at-risk’ of engaging in crime when they exhibit or are exposed to factors that are associated with higher rates of criminality. Typically researchers and policy makers have located risk factors within the individual (e.g. personality traits), and at times their immediate context (e.g. family criminality). Recently this narrow view has been extended by researchers who argue that when considering a young person’s engagement in crime it is important to consider the impact of broader factors that are external to the individual (e.g. neighbourhood) (Bottrell et al., 2010; France & Homel, 2006). However, this wider view of ‘at-risk’ does not appear to have been adopted into New Zealand’s youth policies or youth intervention programmes.

Despite acknowledging the importance of external factors during their interview, participants’ definitions of ‘at-risk’ tended to align with the individually-centred definitions used by various institutions with which young people who engage in crime interact (e.g. the Police, Courts and other social service agencies). That participants’ definitions of ‘at-risk’ do not correlate with their own stories of offending indicates that the term ‘at-risk’ is an externally imposed label. Jordan (20) realises the widespread nature of the term ‘at-risk’ when she says that social service agencies such as CYFs and Police:

J: Just throw it out like it’s nothing. Like everyone was always ‘at-risk’ (Jordan, 20).

Jordan realises that ‘throwing’ around the term ‘at-risk’ does not result in ‘nothing’. Rather, Jordan notes that the extensive application of such a negative label might have devastating effects as young people live up to the negative labels applied to them.

Tasmine became aware of the term ‘at-risk’ as it was applied to her by CYFs and the Courts. It is interesting to note that despite having just discussed various external factors such as her “fucked up family” who encouraged her involvement in crime, Tasmine reverted to an organisational definition of being ‘at-risk’ which locates the presence of risk with her own individual traits and behaviour. For instance, Tasmine notes that it was her behaviour when she “was like suicidal and absconder” that determined whether she was ‘at-risk’ or not. Her poor family relationships and living conditions were not factored in the equation determining whether she met the requirements of being ‘at-risk’. Simone also equated being at-risk with her personal

behaviour of being “bad”. Although she recognised that her brother’s involvement in crime, her family’s poverty and her guardian’s inconsistent parenting style as factors which are conducive to crime, Simone does not consider herself to be currently ‘at-risk’. Simone evaluates the likelihood of being called ‘at-risk’ according to her own individual actions. She considers her shoplifting and excessive alcohol drinking to be “not that bad”. As a result she does not think she is worthy of warranting the label of being ‘at-risk’. She holds this view irrespective of the external risk factors that she acknowledges are currently operating in her life. Similarly, Trieste considers that although she was ‘at-risk’ before, she is “not so much” now. Despite still encountering difficulties with peer pressure from friends who engage in crime and familial relationships, Trieste considers that her own reduced involvement in fighting, smoking and drinking alcohol in public means that she is an individual who is no longer ‘at-risk’ of crime despite the circumstances she still encounters.

That participants adopted the individually-centred definition of ‘at-risk’, rather than reflecting on their own experiences and attributing risk to the influential external factors that they discussed is concerning for two reasons. Firstly, adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the way that others perceive and define them, often fulfilling and living up to the perceptions and labels they understand others have applied to them (Bourdieu, 1977; Erickson, 1968; Sullivan & West-Newman, 2007). Secondly, the individual focus aligns with mainstream literature and echoes the political rhetoric of individual responsibility which permits blame to be passed onto the young person (France et al., 2012). The deficit-based understanding of ‘at-risk’ that participants hold beckons stigma in its own right as it situates the cause of crime within the individual (France, 2008). Talking with young women who engage in crime indicates that there is stigma attached to the terminology used to define them, but that further research is required to unravel the severity of its impact.

### **Resilience**

Resilience is the desired goal for programmes and policies that intervene with youth ‘at-risk’. Most researchers agree that resilience is evident when an individual or group avoids the negative outcomes predicted by the presence of risk factors and absence of protective factors in their lives. As flagged in Chapters Two and Three, the New Zealand Government has invested in a number of ‘resilience-building’ strategies for young people identified as ‘at-risk’ of offending. Several of the participants in this study were recruited through such programmes. Due to the

participants' direct involvement with an organisation that strives to foster 'resilience', it was interesting to find that none of the participants had heard of the term 'resilience' or were willing to provide a definition of it. While Nekeisha recalls being called 'at-risk' to her face by social workers, none of the participants recall being called resilient. However, agency workers might have used other positive framings to describe the participants.

Once the participants had heard my definition of the term 'resilience', several of them identified either themselves or someone they knew as displaying resilience. That participants understand the concept of 'resilience' but do not know the specific term, suggests that young women who engage in crime do not have access to the social science terminology that sometimes defines them. Using terms that are inaccessible for young people is likely to disempower them from working collaboratively with risk and resilience researchers and policy makers. It might widen inequality in the power relationship between young people who engage in crime and the academics and policy makers who discuss them. This finding reaffirms the importance of this research project, which seeks to include and prioritise the marginalised perspectives of young women who engage in crime into academic literature.

As with the literature, the examples that participants gave of resilience could be distinguished according to where they located the origin of resilience. While some participants thought that resilience was the result of a protective individual trait, such as a change in attitude, others thought that resilience resulted from the presence of an external factor such as a positive relationship. For example, Tasmine considers that the 'resilience' she believes she now demonstrates is the result of a change in attitude from when she used to engage in a lot of crime:

T: Like not the same mindset, but back in the day and things everyone just had the like 'Fuck it, whatever happens, happens (attitude)'. Like, 'If we got locked up, we get locked up'... But after I thought about it... and we can see it now, the people that are still around here doing the same shit, like they haven't learnt, they haven't seen that side of it, like you're actually affecting other people (Tasmine, 18).

In contrast, Jordan attributes the source of her friend's resilience (or desistance from crime) to the external factor of needing to care for a child:

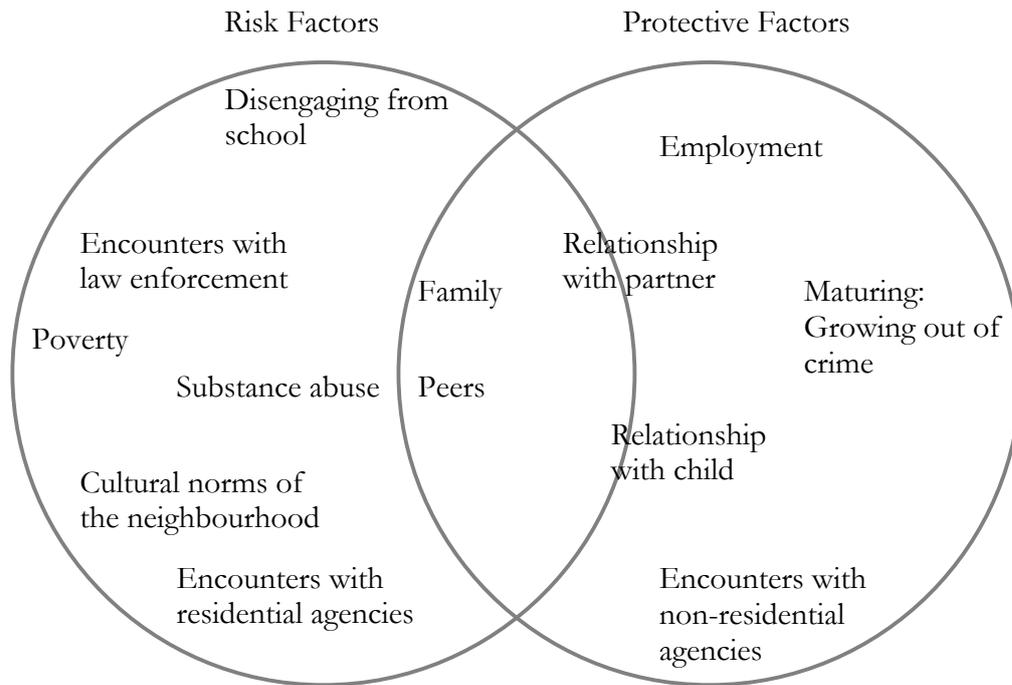
J: They've got to think about their kids. I think that's what stopped Lolo (Jordan, 20).

Discussions about risk and resilience terminology were brief but nonetheless groundbreaking in so far as this is the first time young women who engage in crime in Aotearoa have been asked how they view the terms that define them in official and academic texts. It appears that the dominance of individually-focussed and deficit-based risk and resilience literature and political strategies has tainted societal discourse to such an extent that participants consider a person's actions as determining whether they are 'at-risk' of engaging in crime. The young women do not consider the term 'at-risk' of crime to include the environmental circumstances that they thought played a significant role in their own decision to engage in crime (as will be discussed in the next section). While all of the participants had heard of the term 'at-risk', participants were largely unaware of the term 'resilience' or 'resilient' young person. This raises further concern about the exclusion of young women from academic discourse and the potential stigmatising impact of risk and resilience terminology. Further research is required to unpack this finding.

### **What are the Factors That Young Women who Engage in Crime Identify as Being Influential in their Decision to Engage or to Stop Engaging in Crime?**

This section presents participants' explanations for how each major element of their lives, or each major topic discussed, (e.g. family and cultural norms of the neighbourhood), was thought to influence their involvement in crime. Although the literature typically lists influencing factors according to their risk-inducing or protective nature, discussions with participants in this project revealed that influential elements, such as 'Family', could contain both risk and protective elements. For instance, within the topic of 'Family', an alcoholic parent might be considered a risk factor, while a family that can access money easily might be a protective factor. Due to the interconnected nature of risk and protective factors and the fact that separating these factors would de-contextualise participants' discussions in a project that is striving to prioritise the marginalised voice of the participants, it would make little sense to discuss risk or protective factors separately. Instead risk and protective factors are discussed together under the heading of each major topic discussed.

However, several of the major topics or elements discussed, were described as clearly more protective or more crime-inducing than others. For this reason, and for the sake of comparison with existing literature, I have included a diagram that depicts whether participants described an element as mostly risk-inducing or mostly protective against their involvement in crime.



It is important to understand that each element is inextricably interconnected with the other elements: participants realise that what occurs in one area of their life has an impact on the other areas of their life. The interconnectedness of the different elements makes the use of headings and structure seem somewhat arbitrary but it is nonetheless necessary to make the findings easily accessible and comparable to the already existing risk and resilience literature. I have attempted to discuss the bulk of each element under the relevant heading and where appropriate, I have flagged how a particular discussion or thought is influenced by another topic. Where possible these explanations are identified as either aligning with or diverging from extant risk and resilience literature.

## **Risk and Protective Factors**

### **Cultural norms of the neighbourhood**

All of the participants came from areas that are dominated by state housing and host high levels of crime. This is not surprising considering the strong correlation between low socio-economic status and higher levels of crime (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). When asked to describe their neighbourhood it became clear that the participants did not perceive their neighbourhood as safe. Rather they viewed their neighbourhoods as dangerous areas riddled with poverty, substance abuse and violence. For instance, Trieste acknowledges violence as a pressing issue in her area. She recalls that “just the other night”, her mother and her brother were walking in

her neighbourhood and for no reason they were held at knife-point by a local gang member. Similarly, Nekeisha acknowledges that witnessing people abusing substances (an issue she subsequently experienced her self) is a part of everyday life in her neighbourhood:

N: My neighbourhood, it would be, we have the alcoholics on one side, we have the drug addicts on the other side. It's ok. I mean you know...I see alkies (alcoholics) at the park and just walk away because they will probably grab you or whatever (Nekeisha, 15).

With few resources to re-locate, participants have limited options to protect themselves from their dangerous neighbourhoods. Akin to ecologically-orientated views of risk and resilience and in line with the theory of habitus, participants explained that in order to protect oneself from being victim of the dangers of their neighbourhood it was necessary to adopt their neighbourhood values which respect crime and violence (Bottrell & Armstrong, 2012; Bourdieu, 1977). Participants realised that in order to avoid being vulnerable it was important to establish a reputation of being “tough”. Being “known”, or being an “insider” in their neighbourhood was synonymous with having street credibility and was perceived as fundamental to ensuring their own safety. As predicted by habitus theory, the ways that the girls built up their reputation or their social capital varied depending on the norms of their particular neighbourhood (Bourdieu, 1977). Typically the pecking order in a neighbourhood was established through violence and the toughest girls would be left alone and therefore safer. In their joint interview Andrea and Tasmine explained to me how establishing street credibility was important for protecting their safety:

A: So, there is a lot of stuff that goes on around here and most times it's not safe, unless you know how to handle yourself, yea

R: How do you handle yourself?

T: You fight

A: Yea. To get your name around here you pretty much fight for your, ah, reputation. Whoever you are, just fight to make sure that no one will fuck with you in other words...

T: We have had quite a lot of fights around here, well I know you have...But that's all just to get like your name bigger.

A: To get your name out there (Andrea, 19; Tasmine, 18).

Although participants appreciate that establishing a tough street image through violence will protect them from further danger in their neighbourhood, it is clear that

their neighbourhoods also put them at risk of crime. Their neighbourhoods normalise violence to such an extent that young people believe it is necessary to engage in fighting and to be known as tough if they are to feel safe. For some women the importance of having an image of toughness among one's neighbourhood went so far as replacing their birth names with a street or "hit" name when among peers. The young women explained that a hit name is supposed to encapsulate a young person's tough street image. In their joint interview, Andrea and Tasmine and Naomi shed light on how hit names work:

A: Yea we've got different names that's how people know us around here

T: Yea I'm (real name) (said in a nice tone), and then I'm (hit name) and I will fuck you up (said in an aggressive tone) (Andrea, 18; Tasmine, 18).

Nekeisha expands on this explanation by describing the importance of living up to a hit name:

N: I know a girl that hits 'harrassem' because she harasses people. Some people don't live up to their name but you have to live up to your name, you have to do what your name means...Its got to have something to do with you, its got to be like you (Nekeisha, 15).

In order for a young person to become known: to get their name out there, and to maintain their reputation and safety, it was considered crucial that a young person who adopts a hit name lives up to the persona of to the image that they are projecting.

Participants recognised that in addition to their fighting reputation, a range of elements such as their family connections, peer connections, their ethnicity and their experience with law enforcement agencies contribute to their street image. When talking about fighting Sarah comments that her family's tough image helps to protect her and build up her own street image:

R: You said that you haven't really been in that many fights, why is that?

S: It's because they (people wanting to fight) don't ask because they know my family

R: They know that there is more than just you?

S: Yea, that my family will give them a hiding. They know my family will do it, so they don't mess with me (Sarah, 17).

Although participants and researchers (e.g. McLaren, 2000) perceive the criminality of family members as a risk factor for offending, Sarah also sees her family's criminal and rough reputation as a protective factor that helps her to keep safe. Sarah considers that her membership in a violent and crime-committing family discourages other people in her neighbourhood from trying to "mess" with her, as they have to deal with her tough family if they do. In this way Sarah receives the perks of being tough without needing to engage in crime or violence herself. Similarly Andrea considers her association with "naughty people" to have boosted her street credibility:

A: That's how your name really gets out because you know a lot of really naughty people and everyone's got connections (Andrea, 19).

Participants' perceptions of different ethnicities diverge from the literature. Being of Maori or Pacific Island descent has been recognised by both researchers and participants as being highly correlated with criminality (Ministry of Justice, 2010a). For instance, researchers have used statistics to support the claims that, being of Maori or Pacific Island descent is a risk factor for criminality (e.g. McLaren, 2000) and Jordan notes that it is "especially the Maoris and all the brown ones (youth, that) are doing crime". Tasmine and Andrea's comments about ethnicity in their neighbourhood contextualise assumptions that being Pacific Island or Maori is a negative characteristic with regards to crime:

T: It's hard being white because you've got to do more to get up to where everyone else is

R: Like street-cred-wise?

T: Yea, cause you're white

A: Streetwise yea (Tasmine, 18; Andrea, 19).

Contrary to common perception, Tasmine and Andrea recognise that in their neighbourhood being "brown" as opposed to "white" serves as a protective factor against the dangers and prejudice towards 'white' people that occurs in their neighbourhood. Tasmine considers that her fair complexion is a risk factor. She believes that she must do more crime and fighting to earn her the same level of street credibility as a brown person in her neighbourhood, which consists predominantly of Maori and Pacific Islanders. It is clear that the high levels of crime in Tasmine's neighbourhood have led Tasmine to believe that engaging in crime is a normal part of life.

*Peers*

Risk and resilience researchers have prioritised the presence of ‘anti-social’ peers as a risk factor for criminality (McLaren, 2000). This study found that many of the young women interviewed also viewed associating with peers who engage in crime and substance abuse as influential in their own involvement crime. Although generally ignored in risk and resilience literature, the interviews in this study provided further insight into the context in which friendships with peers who engage in crime might form.

Echoing the discussion of cultural norms of the neighbourhood, Jordan (along with other participants), realised that leaving school early and engaging in crime was normal in her neighbourhood:

J: ‘Cause I’m thinking back to like high school. A lot of them. Say there is a 100 of them, 50 of them have gone to Uni or had babies really young, I’d put them there (gestures to one side) ‘cause they’re not really into crime as such, and then the other 50 have kind of done the norm of leaving school and doing crime (gesture to the other side) (Jordan, 20).

Jordan recognises that disengaging from school and filling in her ‘spare time’ with criminal activities was such a popular trend in her area that Jordan described it as ‘the norm’. With large proportions of their peers engaging in crime, it is not surprising that participants consider peer-pressure to be influential in their engagement in crime. Participants described how their disengagement from school led them to socialise with other young people who also had plenty of spare time and limited funds to engage in socially accepted leisure activities, such as going to the movies. For instance, Andrea recognised that as she followed this seemingly ordinary pathway out of school, she started to associate with “naughty” peers, and this is what instigated and then escalated her engagement in crime:

A: When I dropped out of school, I started meeting people just down in (her neighbourhood) and that’s when I got introduced to like crime life. Like knowing all about the bad stuff, like stolen cars, burls and all that, and that’s when I started meeting like real naughty people (Andrea, 19).

Interestingly participants who identified as being alienated from their family members or guardians, placed great importance on their friendships, often referring to their peer circles as being like “a big family” (Andrea, 19). For Andrea this shift in importance of friendships occurred when her mother moved back to their original home and she was left to stay with her Aunty. It was during this period that Andrea left school, associated with other people who had disengaged from school and began

engaging in crime. Andrea's experience aligns with research by Ary, Duncan, Duncan, and Hops (1999) who suggest that peer influence is only powerful in predicting criminality when there has been a major breakdown in the parent-child relationship. Andrea was influenced the most by her peers following the death of her father and her mothers return to live up north while Andrea lived in Auckland.

Sarah and Andrea note that the peer pressure to engage in crime is usually due to the combination of two factors. The first is that typically "girls don't do it by themselves. They've always got another girl with them" (Sarah, 17). The second is that while poverty and other environmental risk factors might drive one young woman to engage in crime, she will pressure her friend to support her and do the crime with her. This pressure might be particularly difficult to ignore due to the sense of loyalty that a young female has to a friend who she considers to be 'like family'. Participants provided further support for the notion that their experience of poverty and the cultural structural constraints within their neighbourhood encourage crime. As Andrea and Tasmine discuss below, the combination of peer pressure and the fact that their neighbourhood does not provide interesting and affordable leisure alternatives to crime for young people can be conducive to offending:

A: I probably did it (crime) because there was nothing else to do, yea I actually thought it was cool back then

T: And you were bored like there was nothing to do around here and they're (your mates are) like 'Come, come, come do this' and you're like I've never tried it and your like 'Yea', and then you try and then you're like 'Fuck I like this' and keep doing it

A: Yea and getting that adrenalin rush, like yea (Andrea, 19; Tasmine, 18).

Evidently other elements such as poverty, schooling, unemployment and cultural norms of neighbourhood are inextricably connected to discussions that consider the influence of peers. The impact that these elements have on youth offending are discussed in greater depth under the appropriate headings.

### **Family**

Since its inception, risk and resilience literature has recognised that family might serve as a risk factor as well as a protective factor for offending among young people. The literature identifies family as a risk factor when it hosts poor relationships between children and parents, poverty and parental criminality (Farrington, Barnes, & Lambert, 1996). On the other hand, family has also been

noted as a protective factor against crime when it serves as a source of social capital and support during the transition to a crime-free life (Farrall & Bowling, 1999). The fact that New Zealand has employed family group conferencing as a key method for dealing with youth offenders implicitly confirms the importance of family in helping young people to stop offending (Becroft, 2009). In this project, discussions with young women who have engaged in crime confirmed the negative influence of some family environments such as those which host neglect, criminality and poverty. The young women also confirmed the positive influence of families who provided them with consistent parental or guardian support.

Before exploring why participants viewed their families as influential in their experiences of offending, it would be an omission not to outline the types of families that the participants came from and are currently living with. None of the girls lived with both of their biological parents. Several of the girls were whangai (informally adopted) to either extended family members, older siblings or friends of their biological parents. It was common for participants to have come from a large family and not know all of their siblings. Around half of the participants had lived with at least two different sets of guardians in different homes during their lives. Also, it was not uncommon for participants to have stayed in foster care at some stage. The time that each participant took to explain their family history and the offhand comments about their childhood that were scattered throughout the interviews, indicate that participants view family as an important, and typically negative, aspect of their experience of crime and growing up. For instance, after reflecting on her own experience of growing up with her grandparents, Tasmine considers that it is beneficial to be raised in a nuclear family:

T: In my perspective every kid should be raised in a house together with their Mum, their Dad and their brother and their sisters and their whole family. And I know shit don't work like that (Tasmine, 18).

It is interesting to note that Tasmine, a young woman who, at least partly, identifies as Maori has come to see the dominant family form of the coloniser as the ideal type of family. Before the colonisation of Aotearoa and for quite sometime after the arrival of the British, Maori lived in close contact with their hapu, (their extended family or clan of descendants). Living within a collectivist paradigm and in close proximity with their hapu, it was very common for a Maori child to be raised by an extended family member such as an Aunt or Grandparent. Tasmine's desire for a nuclear family exemplifies the cultural assimilation of Maori to British customs that

has occurred and continued to occur as a result of the on-going colonisation of Aotearoa.

Despite having an obvious great deal of love for their family, participants' discussions around family revealed situations that normalised crime and encouraged the young women to engage in crime. Participants characterised their family environments as being riddled with poverty, substance abuse, violence and criminals; all factors that risk and resilience researchers identify as conducive to offending behaviour. When reflecting on their childhood, participants realised that, like other youth offenders in their neighbourhood, they were unaware of any other way of living. The family environment that they grew up in and their consequential familiarity with crime were considered to be a normal part of growing up:

T: That was normal, everyday the Mum getting a hiding, everyone being drunk and stoned, that was the normal for them it wasn't like 'oh fuck another day of this' it was just like 'hmmm go make my breakfast, go do that', it was normal (Tasmine, 18).

Risk and resilience literature has recognised that offending is strongly concentrated in families (Farrington et al., 1996). Statistically significant correlations have been used as evidence to support the notion of intergenerational transmission of criminal behaviour (Besemer, 2012). While the love that young people have for their parents or guardians is typically perceived as a protective factor in the literature, it was clear that for the five (out of eight) participants whose parents or guardians were neglectful, had alcohol or drug addictions or permitted violence in the home, that 'Family' served as a risk factor for crime. For instance, Tasmine explains that she began to offend because her guardians had spent their money on alcohol, which left her hungry and in her state of poverty, shoplifting seemed to be the most viable option to gain food. The elements of substance abuse and poverty intersect with family and will be elaborated on under the relevant headings.

Participants also recognised their siblings as having a major and perhaps even more significant influence on their involvement in crime than their parents or guardians. For instance, Nekeisha does not think that either of her parents had engaged in crime yet recalls shoplifting and carrying out assaults with her older sister. Similarly Naomi's first experience of crime was shoplifting with her sister and her cousin. Jordan explains that at the age of 13 she moved in with her older brother. As he was her guardian at the time, she did not have a choice but to go along as he stole cars and later on he taught her how to commit house burglaries:

J: Yea well he's going to go pop a car and you're going to go for a ride... Um, when I was 15 to 17 I used to do burgs, and my older brother taught me how to do it (Jordan, 20).

In their respective interviews, Simone and Sarah both talked about their familiarity with the police and their normalised perceptions of crime as a result of their brothers' offending. They recalled the police frequently visiting their homes in search of their brothers who were suspects in a crime and to ensure that they were abiding by their court imposed curfew requirements:

S: Yea my brother was pretty good at that (stealing cars), yea, we've had a few morning wake ups with the cops banging on the door to get him (Simone, 18).

S: Yea the cops will come over whenever they feel like to. So (name of her brother) don't know whether to go out or not (Sarah, 17).

While participants perceived their siblings as hugely influential to their pathways into and out of crime, it is interesting to note that sibling criminality is frequently relegated to the sidelines of ministerial documents (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Masked by the focus on anti-social peers McLaren's (2000) review of risk and resilience for the Ministry of Youth Affairs states, with no further explanation, that delinquent siblings might have a similar influence on a young person as the presence of anti-social peers. McLaren's (2000) review neglects to explore the additional layer of influence that siblings might have over peers as siblings tend to spend greater amounts of time together. The Youth Development Strategy does recognise family and whanau as the most significant social environment, yet no specific mention is given to siblings (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Similarly the Youth Offending Strategy does not mention sibling criminality (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002). This is interesting as a number of studies including Farrington and Painter's (2004) as well as Glueck and Glueck's (1950) pioneering risk factor research been aware of the strong correlation between youth offenders and the presence of criminal siblings for sometime. It is clear that the discussions with participants in this study support these findings as participants typically attributed their decision to start engaging in criminal behaviour, or their knowledge of how to commit crimes to the direct influence of their siblings.

Despite recognising the detrimental effect of growing up in their 'tough' families who are involved in crime and violence, participants recognise that there are some

benefits of coming from such families. As mentioned in the 'Cultural norms of the neighbourhood' section, Sarah says that her experience of living in a tough family has been protective as it provides her with the social capital or 'street cred' needed to avoid fights and other trouble in her neighbourhood.

However, family influence was not seen to be universally negative. Several of the participants noted that if they received consistent support from a guardian or parent, this relationship served as a protective factor which encouraged them to reduce their involvement in crime. Nekeisha's story demonstrates this as she reflects on her journey away from drugs and alcohol:

N: I've got much love for my Mum...I knew if I wasn't happy my doors will always be open. You know my Mum would always be home and everything. And she would always open her arms to me, every time I went she would always be like (gestures hug) 'Nekeisha I missed you' (Nekeisha, 15).

For Nekeisha, it was the consistency of her mother's support that enabled Nekeisha to trust her mother when she eventually came home and tried to stop engaging in crime and drugs. Similarly, Trieste attributes her reduction in crime to the consistent love and support that she received when she moved into her whangai family. Trieste describes her biological family and her whangai family as being "just different, two types of families". Unlike her biological family, her whangai family "were just so loving" regardless of what her attitude was. Trieste believes that this unconditional love and support boosted her self-confidence and served as the protective factor that she needed to instigate a reduction in her offending.

That participants view family as a protective factor aligns with existing risk and resilience literature. As already mentioned, a strong parent-child relationship is protective against the influence of anti-social peers (Ary et al., 1999). The literature also suggests that positive family relationships serve a more influential protective factor for young women than they do for men. This is because young women are subject to stricter forms of social control and typically spend more time socialising with their family (Carrington, 2009; Gelsthorpe & Sharpe, 2006). Although it was beyond the scope of this research project to compare male youth perspectives with female youth perspectives, it was evident that relationships with family served as significant protective factors for some of the young women in this project.

As shown in Chapters Two and Three, poverty, large family size, poor supervision and weak family attachment have all been linked to youth offending. The observations of my participants offer a contrasting perspective to the idea that closer family relationships result in young people moving towards resilience. While consistent support can help young people as they disengage from crime, a close-knit family does not necessarily produce the social capital required to reduce offending and may even encourage offending (Gadd & Farrall, 2004). Evidently, the various roles that families play in fostering criminality and resilience requires greater prominence in the study of risk and resilience.

### **Substance abuse**

Abusing drugs and alcohol has been recognised as a risk factor for offending in the literature for quite some time (McLaren, 2000; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The interviews in this research project support this assertion and also extend existing risk and resilience literature. Talking with young women who have engaged in crime provided insight into how the drug and alcohol problems of both the participant and their family members exacerbate the negative influence of pre-existing risk factors such as poverty, peer influence and mental health issues. In contrast the majority of risk and resilience researchers tend to state there is a strong correlation between abusing substances and crime, but they do not tend to speculate as to why this relationship exists.

Participants described their family members, and particularly their parents' alcohol and drug abuse as detrimental because it: aggravates the violence that occurs within their homes; increases their parents' inattentiveness, meaning that participants feel unsupported; exacerbates their family's poverty and normalises the use and accessibility of drugs and alcohol as an escape mechanism. The interplay of poverty with parental substance abuse illustrates how the structural factor of poverty constrains an individual's agency so that they are more likely to engage in crime. In their respective interviews, Sarah and Tasmine explain this conundrum as they realise that neglectful parents spend limited household incomes on fuelling their drug and/or alcohol addictions instead of providing essential items such as food for their children. In turn, this encourages the neglected young people to fend for themselves and often this is only possible through illegitimate means such as shoplifting:

S: Oh yea they shoplift because like, their parents will like buy drugs, they like to spend their money on drugs (rather) than food. So that's

pretty sad but like, the parents are putting them first before the kids (Sarah, 17).

T: Their families don't support them, their family is too worried about their next beverage or their next crack hit that there is no money for the kids, and the kids are like 'Oh well fuck, why should I have to put up with this' and then they go out and get it for themselves (Tasmine, 18).

To cope with what was going on around them several of the participants began abusing substances themselves. With only a few caveats, some of the participants reported that alcohol and drug taking are effective and immediate ways of escaping reality and feeling relief from their tough life. For instance, Nekeisha recognises that alcohol can be "a good way to help yourself out when you need it". However this strategy of trying to escape through substance abuse proved to be a dangerous one as Nekeisha, Simone and Tasmine recognised that their desire to escape reality led to addiction and subsequently a lifestyle even more heavily involved in crime and risky activities compared with before they began using drugs and alcohol. For example Simone's alcohol addiction caused her to become violent and rouse police attention while Nekeisha's addiction to methamphetamine led her to run away from home and engage in sexual favours in exchange for drugs. Due to the age difference between Nekeisha and her drug suppliers, the exchange of sexual favours for drugs is likely to be classified as statutory rape:

N: Yea I was on drugs when I was 13...Being young and letting your addiction control your mind was quite hard. I was quite. I was so young too and all I knew was lets get on this drug 'cause it's a nice buzz and I like it. So that's all I thought was yea we're just going to have this, and have some more and next minute it was favours for that And being young, all of us girls being young, having no money of course we're going to have to do sexual favours and so we'd have to do that for the people that used to give it to us and so that's how we'd get our drugs (Nekeisha, 15).

It is interesting to note that despite claiming to have reduced or having stopped their involvement in all other types of crime, several of the participants stated that they still consumed excessive amounts of alcohol or drugs as a way of dealing with the current problems in their lives. Although other participants claimed that talking with friends was a useful strategy when they are feeling down, most of the participants thought that talking with friends was better when accompanied by alcohol. This is particularly concerning when considering that these young women recognise that in the past, alcohol had fuelled their aggression and put them at-risk of committing

violent crimes. For instance as Trieste reflects on some of her fights she attributes her aggression to her intoxication:

T: I think it was just being drunk you think someone is trying to start a fight but they are really not (Trieste, 18).

Similarly, Nekeisha considers her substance abuse to be the key reason why she assaulted a shop owner:

N: If I was sober nothing would have happened...And if you mix it (alcohol and drugs) then you know, you are either vomiting, almost passed out on the ground or you are either fighting and running around wild, it's either or either (Nekeisha, 15).

Considering participants' early exposure to drugs and alcohol via their parents, combined with their experience of neglect and poverty as a child, it is not surprising that many of the participants have abused drugs or alcohol themselves and use intoxication as way of escaping their troubles. Discussions with young women reveal that substance abuse by family members exacerbates pre-existing risk factors such as poverty, and their own substance abuse translates anger that might not have being expressed behaviourally into violence. The addictive properties of alcohol and drug use appear to provide a fast track for young women into a pathway of crime. Evidently substance abuse by young people and by the families of those youth at-risk requires urgent attention by policy makers.

### **Relationship with partner and child**

Relationships with partners as well as with children were significant for a number of the participants as they desisted from crime. There is scant literature addressing how the acquisition of a partner or becoming a mother impacts on young women who have engaged in crime. While Sampson and Laub (1995) realise that marriage and the creation of a family might serve as turning points away from crime for youth offenders, their research was based on an entirely male population and cannot be presumed to have the same impact on women. My discussions with participants found that young women perceive their romantic relationships with young men who engage in crime, and the impact that these relationships have on their offending, differently to the few researchers who have begun to explore this area. The discussions also brought to the fore the significance of identity formation and labelling theory as young women disengage from offending.

*Relationship with partner*

Contrary to the literature, Tasmine, Andrea and Jordan found that dating boys who were in trouble with the police, had helped them to reduce their own offending. The limited literature on romantic relationships with an offender tends to assert that living with a partner who engages in unlawful behaviour enhances the probability of engaging in crime for both male and female partners. Researchers also argue that these romantic relationships are likely to exert a greater negative influence on partner who is a woman than on a partner who is a man (Alarid et al., 2000; Benda, 2005). This is concerning because women who are not involved in crime, are more likely than men to become involved with a partner who is involved in crime (Hodgdon, 2008). In contrast to the literature, participants considered that their relationship with young men who had engaged in crime served as a protective factor that encouraged them to disengage from crime. Jordan explains that her desistance from crime was, in part, due to her desire to role model good behaviour for her partner:

J: Yea well because he used to be a hard out criminal and he's just, he went to his last court case last month and he has like 100 PD hours that he has to do. So I pretty much quit (crime), like I told him you've got to stop the crime 'cause it was you know yea, he was looking at time and stuff (Jordan, 20).

While noble in her attempt to role model good behaviour to help her partner, Jordan's fear that he will encounter further punishment and imprisonment appears to be the driver for her own change in behaviour. This indicates that imprisonment might deter those who were imprisoned as well as the friends and family of the imprisoned young person. Like Jordan, Tasmine's relationship with her partner made her reduce her involvement in crime. However, Tasmine explains that it is the hope pinned on a future with her partner that made her reduce her involvement in crime:

T: What really changed me, to be honest, was my partner. Because we were both like, oh he's fucking nuts, like everyone, you ask (name of youth group leader), he's fucking ape shit. But um when we got together we both changed each other like I stopped him from doing crime and he stopped me, and then the only reason why like I really stopped all of this is 'cause like, yea I want kids. I want a family. I want something that is mine. And like I stopped all drugs, everything for 6 months to get pregnant and that's when he got locked up. And I was 'Oh fuck it' and started smoking again and all of that. But I just reckon yea, nah he's what changed me (Tasmine, 18).

As Tasmine considers the difficulties of having her partner in prison, it is clear that being a young woman whose partner is in prison is not desirable. It limits opportunities, such as creating or raising children, and makes it difficult for young women to move on with their life. In the same breath Tasmine considers her partner to be the reason why she stopped engaging in crime and his imprisonment as the reason for returning to crime and drugs. It is almost as if his imprisonment closed the door to her desired future of having a family and so she gave up and returned to criminality.

As Jordan and Tasmine reflect on their own disengagement from crime it is clear that during their desistance from crime, both women adopted the nurturing role associated with being a 'partner' and, regardless of their personal motive in helping, they took responsibility for changing their partners. By taking on the position of romantic partner, Jordan and Tasmine demonstrated partner-related characteristics, such as being a consistent source of support and encouragement. Tasmine explains the importance of her adopting this 'partner' role for her fiancée whose involvement in crime she views as inevitable considering the environment he grew up in:

T: He was born into the gang life, like he had no choice, he had no one to show him anything better and like now that he sees life like living with me, he's like 'I can make something of my life, I don't need to solve my problems with violence', like 'I can do this' and like 'that's what I want'. That's why I haven't given up on him cause I'm just trying to show him like you can be something, you don't have to be a hood rat, yea (Tasmine, 18).

Listening to young women who have engaged in crime reveals that in spite of conflicting research, dating a partner who has been involved in crime might serve as a protective factor against criminality for some young women. By taking on the new and socially approved role of 'partner' it seems that participants find an opportunity to forfeit their 'criminal' role. Adopting the new social script of what being a partner involves permits a pathway out of crime. However adopting this new role is not always easy.

As anticipated by existing literature on romantic relationships and crime, participants revealed that not all romantic relationships with a criminal partner are effective in helping to reduce levels of offending among young women (Benda, 2005). While Tasmine attributes her reduction in offending to her partner she also attributes her return to offending to the imprisonment of her partner. Tasmine describes the difficulty of moving on with her own life now that her partner is in prison:

T: It's hard now that he's in prison cause like he may be doing time in there but I'm doing time out here cause like my life has pretty much on hold waiting for him to get out...I'm trying to do things while he's in there, like get my drivers license and like NCEA Level One and Two and stuff like that, but its just like hard have the effort to because we made plans, to do this together. Not to do it by myself, like we were going to do this together (Tasmine, 18).

Tasmine's decision to return to crime when her fiancée got "locked up" illustrates the complexities of romantic relationships. While the relationship served as a protective factor against crime when he was out of prison, it seems that Tasmine's identity as a crime-free citizen was intertwined with her role as a romantic partner to such an extent that the break down of this relationship led her to resort to familiar roles that involved crime. As projected by researchers such as Alarid, Burton and Cullen (2000), Tasmine's involvement with a criminal partner seems to hold her back from achieving her own socially normative goals.

When talking about crime it became clear that participants associated criminal activity with toughness and masculinity. As mentioned in the Chapter Two, researchers have recognised that offending behaviours are typically perceived by authorities as being masculine and female offending has a tendency to be sexualised, which influences how young women are treated in the criminal justice system (Carrington, 2009). It appears that this perception of crime being tied to masculinity may have filtered through into the perspectives of young women who engage in crime. For instance Jordan notes that:

J: Usually the boys will do the harder crime. Like that's popping the car and that and the girls will just go into the house with them. 'Cause yea, girls yea, it's a bit harder for the girls to kind of keep up with the boys (Jordan, 20).

Jordan also attributes her femininity as being the key reason why she did not get involved with stealing cars:

J: I never got into popping the car 'cause I just can't handle tools or anything (Jordan, 20).

Participants recognised that it was safer in their neighbourhoods if they appeared to be tough and masculine. While this desire to appear to appear tough encouraged their participation in crime, this desire to appear masculine seemed to dissipate as the participants' relationships with their partners strengthened or they took on another role such as motherhood. In their joint interview Tasmine and Andrea appreciate

their adoption of femininity as they discuss the process of reducing their involvement in crime:

T: Like we're not all blooded out all walking down the street like asking for a fight.

A: And dressed like boys and stuff and we don't–

T: And we used to dress hard out like boys, oh well I still do, but she dresses like a chick.

R: You guys look like chicks!

T: This is a good day (Tasmine, 18; Andrea, 19).

It appears as though Tasmine and Andrea realised that the masculine traits they adopted when engaging in crime did not fit as well with their evolving, more feminine roles. For Tasmine her role was being a partner, and for Andrea her role was being both a partner and a mother. The adoption of the new roles of mother and partner provided Tasmine and Andrea with an opportunity to discard the inconsistent script of engaging in the 'masculine' act of crime and embrace their femininity.

My discussions with participants found that young women perceive their romantic relationships with young men who engage in crime, and the impact that these relationships have on their offending, differently to the few researchers who have begun to explore this area. At present, researchers have tended to perceive relationships with partners who engage in crime as detrimental to one's own involvement in crime. Yet, participants revealed that their relationships with people who have engaged in crime have, generally, helped them to reduce their involvement in crime. Talking with participants also brought to the fore the significance of identity formation. Some of the participants revealed that their desistance from was in part the result of being able to turn away from their role as an 'offender' and adopt the caring, nurturing and feminine role of being a partner which was only made possible by entering a romantic relationship.

#### *Relationship with child*

Participants revealed that while becoming a mother at a young age might serve as a protective factor that encourages a reduction in criminal activity, young mothers who live in poverty might be encouraged to engage in crime. In the Pakeha dominated society of Aotearoa, teenage pregnancy is typically perceived as a catalyst

for a raft of negative consequences for both the young mother and their child (Banks, 2008). In contrast to this popular perception, participants discussed how becoming pregnant, taking on the role of a mother and its script of being responsible and caring was a positive influence. Evidently, becoming a mother that encouraged participants' desistance from crime in a similar way to establishing a romantic relationship.

The positive impact of adopting the role of mother and the consequential discarding of the role of youth offender was clear when Andrea and Sarah attributed the knowledge of their pregnancy to their decision to stop engaging in all criminal offending:

A: Fighting I haven't had a fight. I'll admit I'm going to blame it on that (rubs pregnant belly). 'Cause it is true, I haven't had trouble or fights because I'm pregnant now so I've come away from that stuff, I don't need it, nah and I don't get in trouble...I've always had a big thing for fighting like I'm always having fights, but I've calmed down a lot since I've turned pregnant (Andrea, 19).

Andrea's comment that she "no longer needs" fighting, shows that she was not only reliant on fighting to form her identity, but that motherhood is a powerful turning point that can alter a young woman's perception as to what she considers necessary. Sarah's comments echo this sentiment as she realises that adopting the role of mother requires a change in a young woman's perception and responsibilities:

S: Yea motherhood does change you. You're not like the old you, what you used to do, you just forget about it and move on and like you forget about all the bad stuff that you did and just think of your child (Sarah, 17).

While there is no literature that directly supports the participants' claims that motherhood reduces offending, there is some research from both New Zealand and overseas which suggests that motherhood might serve as a turning point away from crime. In 2008, Hannah Banks explored the perceptions of young Pakeha mothers in Aotearoa. She found that motherhood serves as a turning point away from a number of undesirable behaviours including alcohol and drug consumption, towards positive outcomes such as enrolment in education programmes. These findings indicate that Sampson and Laub's (1995) desistance research, which found that marriage and parenthood among young men served as turning points away from criminal activity, could be extended to motherhood among young women who engage in crime in

New Zealand. Notions of identity formation and the adoption of social scripts further support this finding (Erickson, 1968).

As many of the participants were subject to neglect from their own mothers, and consider this to have encouraged their own participation in crime, it is not surprising that the young women held strong opinions about what it meant to be a 'good' mother. Participants recognised that the vulnerability and innocence of children requires a strong sense of responsibility to protect, provide and nurture their children. These characteristics were noted as being dissonant with many of their offending behaviours, such as substance abuse and fighting and "all that bad stuff" which encouraged young mothers who engaged in crime to lay down their 'offender' identity and take up the identity and associated characteristics of being a 'mother'. Several of the participants including Tasmine, view motherhood and the starting of their own family as an opportunity which provides them with the fresh start or alternative role/identity that they were looking for.

Although participants recognised their romantic relationships as significant to their desistance from crime, participants tended to perceive the role of mother as a more powerful motivator for changing their behaviour. Participants were strongly motivated to provide their children with resources and an environment completely differently to their own childhood. It is interesting to note that implicit in this desire is the belief that environmental factors such as poverty influence life outcomes, and in their case, their criminality:

T: Yea I want my kids to have everything man

A: Yea that's all I know. That's why I don't even want to bring them up in an environment like what I, I don't want them to go through anything like I did

T: Yea I want my kids to have the opposite life to me

A: Yea I just hope my children won't be like me. Oh I just want to give them everything, give them everything I never had. Make sure that they have what they need and just make sure, oh I don't know, I just don't want to neglect my babies.

T: Hard aye

A: Cause I see a lot of babies being neglected these days and so I just want to give them whatever I can (Tasmine, 18; Andrea, 19).

It is important to note that the relationship between embracing the role of motherhood and a reduction in crime is not a linear one. Taking motherhood and its protective duty seriously also has the potential to encourage participation in crime. In light of their strong desire to provide a completely different life for their own children, participants including Naomi, realise that some young mothers use their sense of responsibility and willingness to be a “good” mother who provides for her children as justification for their involvement in crime, namely shoplifting:

N: Um my friend, she steals like her baby’s clothes. And um she’ll get her friends to do it too, so that that it doesn’t look sketchy

R: Right ok, so is she quite young?

N: Yea she’s my age

R: And is it just too hard for her to afford clothes?

N: Yea. It was like, yea. Oh she really wants it and she’s not paid on that day and so she’ll get her friends to steal it

R: Oh right. Is she on the benefit? Like getting money through that?

N: Yea (Naomi, 17).

The protective nature of motherhood is reinforced as Naomi’s friend gets other people to steal on her behalf. This suggests that Naomi’s friend believes that she will keep herself safe from prosecution and not jeopardise her ability to care for her baby if she does not do the crime herself. Along with several other participants, Naomi appreciates that a young mother’s options to provide the environment she desires for her children is constrained by her poverty. Participants recognise that their friends’ subsequent inability to access resources through legitimate means leads to shoplifting, which demonstrates the interplay of structure (poverty) and agency (the individual’s decision to steal the products). Jordan realises that this cycle of poverty and crime is incredibly difficult for young mothers to break out of because the Government does not provide enough financial assistance to those most in need:

J: Well you can’t live off the benefit and that’s the only thing. ‘Cause usually these Mums are like what, 16 and they can’t get it (the benefit), and now they’ve changed it that you need to be 19 to get on the DPB instead of 18 (Jordan, 20).

It is evident that participants’ perspectives of motherhood and their relation to crime both diverge and align with the literature. Participants realise that the desire to provide a different life for their child might encourage disengagement from crime.

Yet participants also acknowledge that when young mothers encounter poverty and cannot provide the commodities desired for their child, then motherhood might serve as a risk factor for engaging in crime.

### **School and employment**

In line with risk and resilience literature, the young women interviewed perceived their experience of dropping out of school or being formally excluded and the consequent unemployment that they experienced to be risk factors conducive to criminal activity. An exploration of participants' experiences of both school and un/employment reveal that there are systematic inequities operating which shape the lives of these young women from socially deprived areas. It also shows that being employed provides young women with an alternative to offending.

#### *School*

It is well established that schools play a significant role in the socialisation of young people (Carpenter, 2012). Truancy from school, as well as poor performance at school, have been recognised as risk factors for offending for some time and are currently employed in risk factor analyses across Government agencies (see Appendix A) (McLaren, 2000; Ministry of Justice, 2013; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002)

Despite the high profile of poor attendance and poor performance at school in extant risk factor analyses, school experience was not discussed in great detail during the interviews. It is likely this lack of discussion is due to the early ending of school life through either truancy or formal exclusion for all of the young women interviewed. As all of the participants leaving mainstream education before completing NCEA Level One, disengagement from school was a common theme across their biographies.

Participants provided a variety of reasons for disengaging from school that initially seemed rather disparate but are in fact united by marginalisation and isolation. For instance, Naomi described leaving school because she was bullied by girls at her school. Similarly, Trieste found the rumours and gossiping about her relationship with an older man to be too much to handle and consequently left school. On the other hand Jordan and Sarah described situations where, at first, they were marginalised from their peers for maintaining regular attendance at school, but

eventually they gave in to the peer pressure to “wag school” which eventually led to their expulsion.

Nekeisha attributed the marginalisation that she experienced at her first school to her status as a member of an ethnic minority group:

N: I went to two high schools...and that (first) school, it was a good school but it was too white for me, it was too white for me. Um. There were a lot of Asians, a lot of white people, a few Islanders, a few Maoris...

R: So can you tell me, what made it white, what made you feel like you didn't fit?

N: Oh well, any little thing I would get pulled up by the Dean for not really serious things and its like, well when they pull me up I'd be like 'Well do you have proof of this?' and so I got stood down for tagging in the school...I didn't do it (Nekeisha, 15).

Nekeisha believes that ethnicity made her a target for school authorities to assign her the role of the perpetrator for any misbehaviour in the school. This isolation led Nekeisha to skip school to such an extent that she was transferred to a different school, from which she eventually disengaged due to a drug addiction.

Disengagement from school significantly shapes the experience of growing up and its close relationship with crime raises questions as to how leaving school influences the pathways into and out of crime for marginalised young women. Sutherland (2006) argues that being excluded from school is likely to be conducive to young people engaging in crime as it reduces the prospects for attaining qualifications and increases unstructured time away from school supervision. As has been discussed in the 'Cultural Norms of the Neighbourhood' element, Andrea's experiences of crime and schooling confirm Sutherland's presumptions. Andrea only became involved in crime after she had disengaged from school as she met “naughty” people who also had a lot of spare time. That participants' disengagement from school might be related to their engagement in crime is further supported by the fact that 80% of young people who appear in New Zealand's Youth Court are not engaged with the education system (Becroft, 2004). This normalisation of leaving school has been identified as a serious barrier to becoming a “mainstream member of civil society” (Farrall & Bowling, 1999, p. 548) and demonstrates the negative impact that an individual's habitus or cultural context can have on young people.

### *Employment*

As identified by the literature, the majority of young people aspire to conventional goals even when they face marginalisation or disadvantage (Foster & Spencer, 2010). This study confirms that as part of achieving socially normative goals, some of the participants expressed a desire to gain fulfilling and well-paid employment despite their lack of formal qualifications. As stated in Chapter Three it is evident that employment has been identified as a protective factor in mainstream risk and resilience literature. Listening to young women who have engaged in crime confirmed that employment operates as a protective factor and demonstrates a converging of researchers and participants' viewpoints. Participants considered the financial rewards that employment offered to be the most important aspect of employment. Yet, they also recognised that the restrictions that work might place on their time was as a good thing as it removed the availability of spare time to engage in crime. These views towards employment align with risk and resilience literature (e.g. McLaren, 2000). Simone realised how different her life is when she has access to money:

S: 'Cause I didn't want to lose my job 'cause then I get no money, and then its just this vicious cycle...(Having a job) opens up a different world (Simone, 18).

While gaining employment had obvious benefits for young women who engage in crime, most of the participants were unemployed. Participants considered unemployment to be a risk factor as it was typically paired with an array of other risk factors including not having much money, having a lot of spare time and there not being many free or interesting socially accepted activities to do in their neighbourhood. All of these risk factors identified by participants align with Bottrell, Armstrong and France's (2010) ecological perspective of risk and resilience. Participants saw the correlation between unemployment in their neighbourhood and involvement in crime as so strong that it was almost inevitable. As discussed in the 'Cultural Norms of the Neighbourhood' and 'School' sections, participants thought that being unemployed led to making friends with other unemployed young people and that engaging in criminal activities would resolve their boredom from having "nothing to do" in their neighbourhood (Andrea, 19).

Participants tended to describe the cause for their unemployment in one of two ways. The first was to take full responsibility for their unemployment attributing it to their own laziness and poor decision-making. For instance, Jordan describes herself

as “just a fucking bum” who was “stupid being caught up in too much”. This aligns with mainstream risk and resilience literature that centres on the individual as the locus of control (France et al., 2012). In contrast, the second type of explanation recognised that structural inequities were operating, and participants blamed their lack of employment to issues much larger than their own efforts or attitudes towards gaining employment. For instance Tasmine recognises that current Government policy is not dealing with the high rates of unemployment effectively and the blame should not be attributed to those unlucky enough to not be able to gain work:

T: I reckon that they (the Government) should just stop making things so hard for people, like for the community, like they are saying that the community is pretty useless with going out and getting jobs and stuff, but... You need a lot of qualifications and there are like 50 fucking people going for one job, the same job and stuff so it's harder that way (Tasmine, 18).

Explanations such as Tasmine's align with the less dominant branch of risk and resilience research that focuses on structural factors as influencing the environments and ultimately the involvement of young people in crime.

By listening to the participants' stories it became evident that their unemployment is due to the interplay of both structure (e.g. having limited employment opportunities) and their individual agency (e.g. laziness or lacking educational qualification).

Although none of the participants explicitly acknowledged both the influence of structure and their choices to their employment, Jordan's experience reveals this interplay. While Jordan blames herself for being unemployed, she also considers the influence of structural factors in the outcomes of those around her. She recalls that her “Grandparents struggled when they were growing up with like no jobs and stuff” and she blames the Government who she believes have let “money rule the world” and do not do enough to truly help families in poverty as they are “down there in Wellington and stuff and they are just all in suit and ties”. Unemployment has been recognised by both young people who have engaged in crime and by researchers as having a wider-reaching impact. Unemployment feeds into the cycle of poverty and increases the likelihood that female youth offenders will provide the same ‘risky’ conditions to their own family (Bottrell et al., 2010; France et al., 2012).

### **Growing up: Growing out of crime**

In line with previous youth crime studies, this research illustrates that the process of maturing or ‘growing up’ influences the decisions of young women who

have been involved in crime to reduce their offending. Along with other participants who claimed to have reduced their involvement in crime, Nekeisha realises that in the past her behaviour was immature:

N: I've had a lot of fights in my life and it's just fun. Nah, nah it's been fun at the time but now I think about it and I'm just like oh that is so immature I should have just walked away (Nekeisha, 15).

Andrea also recognised a change in her attitude nowadays compared to when she was more heavily involved in fighting:

A: I could say I've changed a lot 'cause I used to have someone every week that I'd have, that I'd be arguing with like a different girl every week I'd have problems with, and it will keep going on really until I see them, and then once I've seen them (and had a fight), then I'm done, I'd satisfied myself. I've calmed down now (Andrea, 19).

However, participants rarely described maturing or 'growing up' as the primary motivation to stop or reduce their engagement in crime. The process of perceiving their past actions as 'immature' or 'stupid' was reliant on factors other than just the cognitive development associated with ageing. As early as 1999, criminologist Shaa'd Maruna noted that although the notion that ageing causes a reduction in crime appears to support the 'age-crime-curve', it does not account for the variables inherent in the process of reducing ones involvement in crime. Rather than being simply a biological measure, the maturity that participants claimed to now have is a result of evaluating the consequences of offending. In their respective interviews, Jordan and Andrea realise that the prospect of further exposure to criminal justice system was significant in their decision to reduce to their involvement in crime:

J: I was like thinking about it and I was like, 'I don't want to go to jail', that's just too scary, like it's just not worth the risk of it all (Jordan, 20).

A: I'm 18 now I have to start protecting my freedom and my Mum has always said that since I turned 17, 'you're 17 now you're old enough to go to jail so you need start protecting your freedom' (Andrea, 20).

Further exposure to the criminal justice system evidently had an influence on the way in which Jordan and Andrea imagined their futures and prompted changes in behaviour. Shover (1996) notes that as a young person grows older, the risks associated with crime appear larger. For Jordan and Andrea, the costs associated with being caught have increased as they have grown older (e.g longer prison time, a criminal conviction to their name and neglecting their children or partner), but according to Shover (1996) their perception of the risks associated with being caught

are also likely to have magnified the consequences associated with offending and further deterred the young women from engaging in crime. Apart from her concerns about imprisonment, Andrea's comment also points to the complexity of family as both a risk factor and a protective factor. It appears as though Andrea's mother may have (unwillingly) encouraged Andrea's involvement in crime by condoning some criminal behaviour when Andrea was too young to be imprisoned. However it seems as though Andrea's mother played a crucial role in encouraging Andrea to desist from crime as soon as she was old enough to be imprisoned.

Another consequence that seemed to contribute to participants' decisions to 'grow up' was the realisation that they were hurting the victims of their crime as well as those people who they care deeply for (e.g. family members or romantic partners). For instance, as Tasmine reflects on her previous house robberies she acknowledges that it was the realisation that she might be hurting the people who she stole from that shifted her attitude towards house burglaries:

T: You don't know who you are stealing from, like these people, this could be a single mother who's like working three jobs, trying to support her kids and you just come into her house, what cause you want a little bit of fun for the night? And take all of her shit... You don't really think about who you are hurting when you do it, and like that's thing, we can see it now, the people that are still around here doing the same shit, like they haven't learnt, they haven't seen that side of it, like you're actually affecting other people (Tasmine, 18).

Tasmine identifies the realisation that her involvement in house burglaries was hurting undeserving people as encouraging her to desist from crime. Tasmine also recognises that her excessive alcohol drinking caused great anguish for her grandmother and this has served as a key motivator for reducing her offending and alcohol consumption. Similarly Nekeisha attributes her desistance in crime to when she a "light bulb" moment of realisation about how much she was hurting her mother who she has "great love for", by running away and using methamphetamine. Although the change in Jordan, Tasmine and Nekeisha's thinking as they aged might be used as evidence in support of a biological explanation for young female offenders age-crime curve, it is clear that their 'growing up' came as a result of the external catalyst of consequences for their actions.

Maturation typically does not offer a quick fix. Generally 'growing up' was described as being influential in participants' decision to disengage from crime but not critical. The growing awareness of the consequences tied to offending combined with the

participant's decision to reduce their involvement in crime, suggest that both individual and external factors operate to reduce offending among young women and should be addressed in policies and strategies.

### **Poverty and the Government's (lack of) assistance.**

As already flagged under other headings and in Chapters Two and Three, the issue of poverty permeates and affects nearly every other aspect of the participants' lives. Poverty influences where participants live, the cultural norms they are exposed to in their neighbourhood, the schools they attend, the peers they associate with, their employment opportunities, the level of tension in their home and numerous other aspects in their lives (Armstrong, 2006; Bottrell et al., 2010; France & Homel, 2006). Despite its wide-reaching influence, poverty is rarely mentioned in mainstream risk and resilience literature let alone addressed as part of New Zealand's youth crime strategies (France et al., 2012; McLaren, 2000; Stevens et al., 2013). In contrast, participants' discussions about factors which influenced their involvement in crime repeatedly returned to the central tenet of poverty. This simultaneously confirmed the value of ecologically-centred perspectives of risk and resilience, and the gaps in, individually-centred literature and policies. For example, under 'Relationship with Child' Naomi explained that young mothers who are reliant on Government subsidies find it hard to afford clothes and food for their children. Under 'Substance Abuse' Tasmine and Sarah considered that the negative impacts of substance abuse were exacerbated when those abusing lived in conditions of poverty. In the 'Peers' section, Andrea and Tasmine considered that their own, and their peers lack of access to financial resources encouraged their participation in crime as it gave them access to commodities they couldn't otherwise afford as well as a source of free entertainment that provided a great adrenalin rush. Yet only Jordan recognised the systematic inequity in the way that wealth and consequently poverty is unevenly distributed across different ethnic groups, which ultimately contributes to the over-representation of Maori and Pacific youth in crime statistics:

J: Yea and like poverty is a big huge thing...I'm going to be all racial but it is like the Maori and Islander set, we're lower class...and that's why I reckon the youth and especially the Maoris' and all the brown ones are into crime, 'cause they come from lower class families because their families were shunned from society (Jordan, 20).

That the young women interviewed perceive poverty as a significant risk factor is one of the most obvious themes to emerge from this research project. The Government's

willingness to ignore, and in fact perpetuate, the problem of poverty through benefit cuts appears to have instilled a sense of marginalisation from and mistrust towards the Government from participants. For instance, Jordan states that those making decisions that impact hugely on young female offenders do not understand the issues that those living in poverty grapple with. Along with other participants, Jordan purports that Government workers are too far ingrained in their own habitus, which is characterised by wealth and privilege, to fully comprehend the everyday issues associated with poverty that participants encounter:

J: I think like the whole Government thing you know, they all, I see them all down there in Wellington and stuff and they are just all in suits and ties and like 'Look at my car I got it from the tax payers money yea yea yea' you know, and like money rules the world these days and I think that's a big problem and you can't solve that one can ya? (Jordan, 20).

Participants realise the influence of structural factors and the Government's ignorance to its influence on youth offending when they discuss recent benefit cuts. Andrea express alarm at the Government's ignorance to their lived realities when the Government expects that making cuts to benefits will entice beneficiaries, including young mothers to gain employment:

A: It does get worse, it does get worse because they are cutting benefits and so the mother or whatever has to go out and do more just to get extra money. And most mothers will even go out and sell themselves on the street just to get more, extra money to feed their babies or whatever (Andrea, 19).

Later in the same interview, Tasmine reaffirms this concern about the Government's lack of provision when she says:

T: The way that they are cutting the benefits now and shit, depending on how many kids you've got. 'Cause like one kid and you're on the benefit that's sweet, but if you've got like five kids and you're on the benefit, how are you supposed to look after all five of them? And that's when three out of those five go off and do crime and the other two are being looked after. Yea (Tasmine, 18).

Participants realise that benefit cuts will contribute towards a situation of poverty that encourages crime such as shoplifting or prostitution. Tasmine fears that poverty and the Government's lack of assistance to help young women break out of the poverty–crime cycle will bolster intergenerational crime. Unless the Government simultaneously alters the opportunities available to young offenders by creating jobs suitable for young, unqualified offenders, participants believe that the benefit cuts will only make the circumstances that entice young women into crime worse.

### **Encounters with law enforcement**

As already mentioned in the 'Family' and 'Cultural Norms of the Neighbourhood' sections, participants considered it normal to deal with the Police and prison system. If it wasn't first hand experience, the young women interviewed had witnessed the exertion of power by the Police or the criminal justice system, through the imprisonment and imposition of curfews on their friends and family members.

As Jordan explains, interacting with law enforcement is a normal part of everyday life for young women who engage in crime:

J: This is kind of like a normal day thing for me to hear, 'oh someone got locked up, someone is getting out soon, blah blah blah'. I mean fuck you guys are dumb. I just want to turn around and be like 'you're dumb, you're dumb'... but it's a normal thing, like I said, I visit people inside and stuff (Jordan, 20).

Sarah describes deliberately being rude to police officers in retaliation for how poorly they treat her family when they come to check on her brother who is on curfew. Similarly, Tasmine and Andrea laughed about how stupid the police in their area are. They described engaging in fights in public, despite knowing that the police officers are nearby because they are certain that they know their neighbourhood better than the police officers and will be able to escape from them. The participants' stories and existing youth crime research suggest that the contact participants have with law enforcing agencies might be considered a risk factor for their criminality.

The normalisation thesis posits that young people who witness the impact of law enforcement agencies might come to perceive these encounters as a normal route to adulthood (Becroft, 2009; Gordon, 2011). They may be less deterred than other young people from engaging in crime because of their familiarity with law enforcement agencies (Gordon, 2011). Although the normalisation thesis is contested, youth crime researchers, including Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft (2009), tend to agree that exposure to the criminal justice system is likely to increase recidivism among young offenders. Consequently recent youth crime strategies have prioritised the diversion of young people away from the formal criminal justice system (Watts, 2003). However risk and resilience researchers have typically failed to address how interactions with law enforcement agencies might influence a young persons pathway into or out of crime (France & Homel, 2006).

There is a long-standing opinion that imprisonment might actually be a desired option for offenders who wish to escape from the hardships of their own life. As will be discussed in the ‘Non-Residential Social Service Agency’ section, Tasmine’s desire to return to the “lockdown” correction facility she was placed in for several weeks, demonstrates that there is some truth to this phenomenon which has been unexplored among New Zealand young women who engage in crime. However, Jordan raises the concern that while this positive view of imprisonment might entice some young women to engage in crime, the stigma attached to being a prisoner is powerful. In line with Bordieu’s (1977) labelling theory, Jordan claims to have witnessed this stigma cripple young women from becoming or doing anything else other than crime once they leave prison:

J: It’s free and the only thing is that, I start thinking that they (young women who have engaged in crime) think that they belong there. Yea like that’s the only thing that they are really good at, like ‘Lets go to jail’. Maybe, I think there needs to be kind of like a thing in the prison to encourage them that they are not just good at doing crime...

R: Ok what I think you are saying is that 'cause you’ve kind of got that role of like ‘I’m the girl that’s like tough, I go to prison that’s who I am?’

J: Yea yea yea, and they’ve got to maintain it ‘cause “This is what I’m only good for, this is what I’m worth, sweet the fuck as, carry on’. That’s how, well everyone that’s come out they’re all that (Jordan, 20).

Evidently, for the young women Jordan described, the label of being a prisoner and all of its negative associations had become ingrained in their identity. The label of prisoner had become self-fulfilling to such an extent that it encouraged the young women to engage in crime more so than the initial risk factor that started their engagement in crime. It became clear that participants had negative encounters with the Police and did not trust nor like law enforcement agencies or the Government in general. In alignment with the concerns about institutional racism discussed in Chapters Two and Three, participants posit that police are unnecessarily punitive in their approach to young people and specifically toward young Maori or Pacific Islanders. Tasmine and Andrea were appalled by the police officer in their area who had an obvious prejudice against Pacific Islanders and Maori young people, and they believed he used to beat up young people. Tasmine and Andrea considered that in their neighbourhood Pakeha young people have an “advantage with the cops and stuff cause like they are like ‘Nah like this little white girl wouldn’t do this’” (Tasmine, 18).

Tasmine attributes the beginning of her engagement in crime and her distrust with the police to their lack of action when she reported being sexually abused at the age of 13. Tasmine was on track to compete in the Olympics in her chosen sport when her coach sexually abused her. Tasmine filed a report to the Police: however no charges could be laid as the Police claimed not to have enough evidence. The sports coach was allowed to continue coaching and Tasmine was forced to leave her sport and forfeit her chance at competing internationally. The unjust situation and the inability of the Police to help made Tasmine angry and untrusting towards law enforcement agencies. Tasmine explains that this was further perpetuated as the Police continued to let her down:

T: Oh well we took it (the complaint) to the police but they just said that there was not enough evidence to prosecute. And that's one of the reasons why I started hating on the cops, like when I got hidings and stuff the pigs would never do anything about it but when I gave someone a hiding I'd be straight in the cells and its like well 'fuck you', and that's pretty much why, the pigs are so full of shit (Tasmine, 18).

Nekeisha considered the approach of the Police to be unfair and this fuels her dislike for law enforcement agencies. Nekeisha was already upset for being charged by the Youth Court with assault crimes that she claims she did not personally commit, but was with the offender at the time of the incident. Due to this unfair sentence she thought it was particularly unfair of the Police to be putting her "straight in the cells, that whole procedure, sleep the night" for breaking her curfew when she "never got a warning, ever, like 'ok if you do that again' or 'we're going to have stricter hours'".

In contrast to Tasmine and Nekeisha's approach of retaliation, Jordan and Andrea assert that their experience with law enforcement has in fact deterred them from engaging in crime. Jordan's strong desire to stay out of jail coupled with Andrea's assertions that she needs to protect her "freedom", illustrate that their encounters with law enforcement have deterred them from engaging in serious crimes. Evidently familiarity with law enforcement agencies is a complex aspect that young people describe as both a risk and a protective factor. For some young women, their negative experiences with the police induce feelings of dislike and distrust to the police along with criminal behaviours that demonstrate these feelings. However the prospect of imprisonment does deter some young females from engaging in serious crimes and in this way a young person's encounters with law enforcement agencies might serve as a protective factor against crime.

## Religion

How religion or an affiliation with religious organisations might influence young offenders' pathways into or out of crime has largely been left unexplored in Aotearoa. Although the Youth Court considers involvement with religious groups to be a positive use of time, religiosity has largely been ignored in risk factor analyses (Becroft, 2009; Ministry of Justice, 2002; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). This oversight is concerning as several of the participants thought religion and church attendance was an important protective factor to their desistance from crime, and recent research suggests that religiosity may be of greater significance for young women (Piquero & Sealock, 2004).

Some participants described their Christian faith as important in their desistance from crime as it provided them with a sense of hope, clear life guidelines and a supportive community. It is important to note that out of the eight participants, the five who discussed religion talked about Christianity. It is possible that the same aspects that these women found to be useful in their Christian faith could be found in other religions such as the Islamic faith or in other communities such as iwi or hapu. However, as no other religious denominations were discussed in this research, reference is only made to how Christianity and church attendance might influence young women who engage in crime to reduce their offending.

For some participants it was the spirituality, the believing in something beyond this world that gave them hope and helped them to develop resilience. Jordan considers if she had not developed a positive relationship with her social worker and “found God” through this relationship, then she would still be travelling down a pathway of criminality, controlled by her depression and suicidal tendencies:

J: If I hadn't found (her social worker) or found God or anything I'd either be dead or some cracked up, fucked up bitch in town (laughs). I'm being serious though its helped me discover who I am and that I am a good person and that I can do whatever I set out to do... Yea well you've got to have hope in something aye? (Jordan, 20).

That a framework for understanding this world and their role in it would provide young women with hope seems to be a logical step towards resilience. Jordan understood that it was her belief that there was a higher power, a God who was bigger than her current circumstances and who believed in her that gave her the belief that she could make herself a “good life” and disengage from crime.

In contrast, Naomi did not consider a personal relationship with God to be the most influential factor about religion to changing her behaviour. Rather, she appreciated the clear guidelines that her church provided for living a socially normative and desirable life. This aligns with the overarching theme that adopting a new pro-social role, such as being a Christian or more specifically a church-goer, permits the shedding of Naomi's previous role in society as a youth 'offender' (Rumgay, 2004). In light of how strongly participants viewed the neglect and lack of discipline from their parents as influential to their offending, it is interesting that Naomi really appreciates that she was able to find guidelines and discipline from another source:

N: Church helped me a lot... 'Cause it has like, if you keep the commandments then you won't be in danger of like what alcohol does to you, or what drugs does to you. Like if you have sex before marriage what that does to you, like you won't be at-risk of that (Naomi, 17).

Trieste and Naomi both saw the support from their church community as being a significant factor that encouraged them along a pathway out of crime. The young women perceived church as being a place where they could receive the practical help that they struggled to receive through other agencies. For example Naomi recognised that they not only "lifted her confidence higher" and helped her to overcome her depression and suicidal tendencies, but they also addressed the underlying practical and financial issues that her family struggled with and put her at-risk of depression and engaging in crime:

N: The people in the church they are really supportive, they are like 'Oh we'll help you with this' and they'll like help you with, like if you don't have food they will get and buy you some food so you don't have to go and steal. Like my Mum had a water bill or something and they paid for it (Naomi, 17).

It is evident that the supportive and practical approach of a community church is a positive influence on young women who had engaged in crime and this echoes the importance of neighbourhood connections (Bottrell et al., 2010). The different aspects of religion that the young women described as influential may have been identified as more or less important, depending on their own risk circumstances and what issues were pressing for individual in their unique environment. Neglecting to consider religiosity in risk and resilience literature and analyses is concerning for two reasons. Firstly, Piquero and Sealock (2004) consider women, in comparison to men, as particularly susceptible to the influence of social support received from attending a community church and having a personal faith. Considering that the proportion of

female offenders is growing, it is clear that researchers seeking to reduce levels of crime should further interrogate the influence of religion on women who engage in crime in New Zealand. Secondly, Maori and Pacific people are over-represented in crime statistics, and traditionally, they adopt a holistic worldview that recognises that religion, spirituality and community all influence individuals (Kingi-Ulu'ave, Faleafa & Brown, 2007; Herbert & Morrison, 2007). It is clear that further research is required to unpack particular aspects of religious groups which positively influence young offenders, the types of religious affiliations that provide those influential factors for young people, and how these insights might be used to provide holistic approaches to reducing the 'problem' of youth crime.

### **Encounters with social service agencies**

Participants expressed an overwhelming sense of distrust and dislike for the majority of social service agencies that they interacted with. The young women interviewed had great disdain for Government agencies such as Work and Income (WINZ) and the Police. They particularly abhorred agencies that interfere with their living situations, namely Child Youth and Family (CYFs). Less resentment was reserved for non-residential and community-based agencies. However the programmes designed to assist youth 'at-risk' were not perceived as being particularly helpful if they did not address all or the most significant issues operating in the participants' lives.

#### *Residential-based social service agencies*

Nearly all of the participants expressed negative opinions about residential care and particularly about CYFs. All of the participants had either experienced or witnessed the relocation of children from their family home into CYFs care. Tasmine explains the unsettling feeling and detrimental impact of being separated from her family and re-located numerous times:

T: Like every time I moved I was like 'Fuck' and its like new, different people, everything new, whole new area and its like 'What the fuck' (Tasmine, 18).

Although Andrea had not been put into CYFs care herself, she recognised the importance of breaking the social bonds that young people have with the people that they live with and with people in their neighbourhood:

A: I reckon it's CYFs fault why they (young offenders) are actually like that (criminals). Because they (CYFs) have taken them away from their

families and put them in all of these different places, yep, and they keep moving them around so they don't get to settle in with like one family...So their (the young person's) mind is set in a different way, so that every time they keep getting moved it doesn't matter. I can just see cause that's the exact same thing that happened to my boyfriend. And you've got to meet a whole new family, a whole new environment and then they are still getting in trouble (Andrea, 19).

There was strong consensus among participants that even if a home was not 'risk-free', once a young person had bonded with their family, they were generally better off staying with their family than being shifted to a presumably safer environment. As exemplified in the quotes above, participants considered it hugely detrimental for young people to be uprooted from their environment, and particularly if it happened several times. Frequently moving and changing families was thought to disenable a young person from being able to form social connections or social capital in each new area. On this premise, it seems almost arbitrary to separate this discussion from the 'Cultural Norms of the Neighbourhood' section as the issues of community, habitus and social capital are common themes in both discussions.

Participants tended to agree that CYFs did not do thorough assessments, often moving young people who were troublesome to relieve their worn-out guardians, whilst failing to remove young people who were 'at-risk' of an array of negative outcomes because of their guardians. This negative attitude towards being uprooted because of CYFs residential-based care is particularly interesting in light of Tasmine's positive reaction to being moved out of her neighbourhood and imprisoned in a residential-based 'lockdown facility'. Tasmine recalls loving the fact that she was removed from her environment and its associated troubles:

T: I loved it there. Sometimes I wish I could just go back there 'cause like there was no dramas (Tasmine, 18).

It is interesting that Tasmine, a young woman who was so proud of her neighbourhood she would wear colours to represent her area of Auckland, relished the chance to go to prison and have a break from the 'dramas' of her neighbourhood, yet she hated being uprooted from her family and neighbourhood when done so by CYFs. Further research into this discrepancy is needed. However early speculation might suggest that the different perceptions of being moved lies in that fact that Tasmine might not have lost any social capital when she was in the lockdown facility. Tasmine knew that she was eventually returning to her neighbourhood, and in this particular neighbourhood her imprisonment might have

earned her more street credibility. In contrast, the complete and permanent removal of all things familiar to her by being placed in CYF's home, was an environment considered too unfamiliar and much more difficult to negotiate.

*Non-residential social service agencies*

With such strong views against social service agencies that can result in residential care, it is not surprising that participants prefer dealing with non-residential agencies where their issues and risk factors were addressed in the context of their everyday lives. Participants provided mixed reviews about various community-based agencies that they had encountered. However the young women tended to agree that most important to any agency was having staff who could build a good rapport with the young people and would go the extra mile to help. Participants thought that the second most important factor was having programmes and facilities that offer practical advice and help.

Nekeisha acknowledges the difference that having new tutors that show her respect, has changed her attitude, behaviour and willingness to continue pursuing a NCEA Level One qualification at her alternative education school:

N: I like this place because I've made myself like this place. It's probably the tutors that help me like this place, I have a good bond with the tutors, yep they are awesome... Before those tutors they were nasty cows like 'Oh my gosh you're a bitch'. I um, when the other tutors where here I actually pushed that (pointed to fire extinguisher) and sprayed the whole classroom...It was so funny (Nekeisha, 15).

Nekeisha recalls that the low levels of rapport that she had with the old tutors led her to "muck around" and be distractive in class. However, Nekeisha realises that she has stopped being defiant in class now that she has tutors that she has a "good bond with". Jordan considered the genuineness and consistency of the social workers in the community-based agency she had contact with to have "pretty much saved my life". Jordan recognises that despite "all this shit that like I'd been doing and that, they (the social workers) helped me hard out." Most notably her social workers helped by sticking by her side for over three years. They welcomed Jordan into their own lives and families and helped Jordan with her enrolment into a foundation course so that she can pursue her dream of becoming a social worker herself.

Another aspect of social service agencies that participants acknowledged as being a protective factor against crime, was the practical nature of organisations that would help young people to plan their futures, improve their work skills, help them apply

for jobs, enrol them in an education course and help them to sort their financial situations. For Naomi the financial assistance given to her mother to pay for day-to-day living expenses by her church was noted as extremely helpful. Simone and Trieste considered the help they received from various organisations about how to write a CV and preparing for job interviews was very useful. While Nekeisha and Jordan appreciate the direct assistance they got with researching further study options, enrolling into their respective courses and applying for financial assistance through Studylink.

Since the release of *A review of research on what works to reduce offending by young people* in 2000, the New Zealand Government has been aware that effective methods of aiding the reduction of youth crime include non-residential based programmes that provide practical help with work skills and education. This same report brought to the Government's attention the importance that such programmes are led by staff that are good role models and whose opinions young people respect (McLaren, 2000). The interviews in this project suggest that these aspects are particularly relevant and should be focused upon when trying to reduce crime levels among young women.

### **Commonalities From Across the Risk and Protective Factors**

During data analysis it became clear that nearly all of the elements that participants raised as areas of their lives that influence their involvement in crime host at least one of three themes. The three broad themes include, the influence of societal and social structures on an individual's agency, the importance of cultural norms and the way that habitus shapes an individual's perception of crime and thirdly, the importance of adopting a pro-social role as they move away from a life characterised by crime.

#### **Structural factors constrain options available to female youth offenders**

Giddens's (1984) structuration theory acknowledges the interplay of structure and agency as an individual exercises agency within a structurally constrained environment. In alignment with structuration theory, participants' experiences of crime revealed that their involvement in crime is constrained by societal, political and structural factors that shape their environments and their opportunities. Participants recognise that poverty, high levels of unemployment, institutional racism and the implementation of (in their opinion) uninformed Government policies shape the environment in which they live and bolster the factors that they consider put them

at-risk of engaging in crime. Participants recognise that they exercise some agency in deciding whether to engage in crime or not. Yet it is clear that decisions are shaped by their unique habitus or cultural context and are subject to the influence of structural factors. Like the researchers, some participants were more inclined to link their experiences of crime to individual agency and others were more inclined to note the structural forces that shape their available pathways into and out of crime. However, participants tended to attribute their involvement in crime to factors present in their environment as opposed to personal deficits. This aligns with literature which argues that external and structural factors have a greater influence on a young persons involvement in crime than factors tied directly to the individual.

### **Normative behaviour and situations**

Closely linked to how structural processes shape their environment is the notion of habitus. Bordieu (1977) explains habitus as the way that social norms or tendencies guide the behaviour and thinking of those who live within a particular cultural context. Throughout the interviews it became clear that what the participants perceived as ‘normal’ everyday behaviour and situations, differed considerably to my own assumptions of what is ‘normal’. Within their sphere of cultural influence, in their family, and in their neighbourhood with their friends, it was not considered abnormal to engage in crime and in some instances engaging in crime and violence was seen as a positive and protective action. Being exposed to high levels of violence, abusing alcohol and drugs, living in poverty, experiences of teenage pregnancy, disengaging from school, having numerous criminal friends and having experiences with police and the justice system were all seen as normal parts of growing up by the young women interviewed. Consequently these factors were not always brought to the fore, or at least immediately recognised as risk factors by participants as they were considered to be a regular part of every day life. As a result, participants did not instantly consider these experiences necessary to share. By embracing the cultural norms of their environment, participants tended to not only view crime as a normal pathway to adulthood, but they also perceived violence and crime as necessary to attaining social capital and maintaining an image of toughness which might protect them in their environment.

### **Resilience requires movement toward a pro-social role**

Thirdly, it seemed that by adopting a pro-social role such as employee, mother, partner or church-goer, participants were able to abandon their anti-social

role of ‘youth offender’ and stop engaging in crime, thereby demonstrating resilience. As flagged in Chapter Two, adolescence is a time of identity formation and a time when young people are particularly susceptible to internalising the reflected appraisals of others (Erickson, 1968; Hirschfield, 2008). When participants were provided with an opportunity to adopt a different, pro-social role to their role of ‘offender’, these opportunities were seized and resulted in a reduction of offending. Sociologist Erving Goffman (1963) explains that the socially determined roles which are imposed upon (e.g. motherhood), or chosen (e.g. employment) by an individual are to be played according to scripts and scenarios that are socially determined and known to the performers (Sullivan et al., 2007). The participants who moved into a socially accepted role were able to adopt an alternative script to operate from, and consequently change their behaviours to align with the socially accepted expectations of what a person in that particular role does (or does not do). By adopting an alternate role, participants were able to abandon the role of the offender or at least mitigate the primacy of that role in their life and move towards a life characterised by ‘resilience’.

### **Conclusion**

The factors that participants consider significant to contributing to their decision to either engage or disengage from crime simultaneously, supports and diverges from existing risk and resilience literature. Participants realised some spheres of their lives, such as family, contained both risk and protective factors for their criminality, while other elements were more distinctly protective against crime (e.g. employment) or crime inducing (e.g. early disengagement from school). Many of the factors that the young women identified as directly influencing their pathways into or out of crime confirmed the application of risk and protective factors currently identified in existing risk and resilience literature. Yet listening to the explanations provided by participants also extended and contextualised knowledge about how these risk and protective factors influence their involvement in crime. Contrary to mainstream risk and resilience literature, participants noted that the structural factors of poverty, the influence of social policies, and the cultural norms of their neighbourhood were largely out of their control, but hugely influential in shaping their pathways into and out of crime. By listening to young people who have engaged in crime, it is apparent that policies that strive to build resilience and avoid risk for young people should address factors that directly influence the individual and are

closely linked to the young person, as well as factors that are environmentally-located which indirectly influence the young persons behaviour.

### **What Do Young Women who Have Engaged in Crime Desire for Their Future?**

Being aware of the expectation that they will end up in prison or at least with a future undesired by the mainstream population, it was important to provide young women who have engaged in crime with the opportunity to share what they desire for their own futures in order to avoid making unnecessary presumptions about the goals of youth offenders in New Zealand. Contrary to popular opinion, but in alignment with the small amount of international research that has explored the perspective of young women who have engaged in crime (e.g. Foster and Spencer, 2010), the participants in this study revealed that they desire socially normative lifestyles. Participants described futures characterised by wealth, fulfilling careers and close relationships with their family. The means of securing such futures ranged from well-planned career trajectories to vague or multiple plans of how they might possibly make this future happen. Although not all of the participants were completely sure what they wanted for their futures, most were able to articulate with relative ease and specificity the kind of future they did not want. The interviews revealed a disparity between the past histories of the participants, the current ways that they were using time and what participants' desire for their futures as well as. This disparity suggests that their desired futures are unlikely to be realised. It also insinuates that interventions assisting young women to make steps towards their desired futures are likely to be welcomed and effective in helping these young women who have engaged in crime avoid the life of crime that they appear to have their trajectory set towards.

#### **Comparing the flowing and the disjointed connections between past, present and the desired future**

Time was spent during the interview discussing the future. I listened for specific plans such as whether to go to University, or whether to have or not to have a family. I also listened for more general outlooks and hopes, such as where participants see themselves in ten years. Common to all participants was a desirable future that was rooted in economic independence in which they could afford to buy and own material things, experiences and stability. This desire for financial independence suggests that the neo-liberal agenda has been achieved, as participants appear to support notions of individual responsibility. Participants were also unified

in their desire to be able to provide a very different life for their children and families to their own childhood. As discussed in the 'Relationship with Child' section, Tasmine, Andrea and Sarah held very strong views about wanting "to be rich" enough to have the security of knowing that they can always provide for the children so that their children don't "have" to get involved in crime like they did.

What became apparent was that while some participants presented flowing and logical narratives that connected their past and present actions with their desired futures, others did not connect their histories to their imagined futures. Of those with flowing narratives, two kinds of stories emerged. First there were those young women with a long-term plan that was directly and logically connected to concrete steps that they were currently taking, such as enrolling in training or working in an entry level-job in the field of their desired career. Simone's current position as bar staff at the local pub and her short-term plans to get a managers' liquor license and become the manager of the pub are all logical steps to take towards achieving her long-term goal of owning a small winery. Secondly there were participants who had not yet taken any steps, but connected their imagined futures to past dreams and passions. For instance Jordan acknowledged that "since the age of 15" she has wanted to "save the world" and help young people like herself that have grown up in poverty and struggle with depression and suicide. At the time of the interview Jordan was unemployed, but a social worker of the youth group she attends in her neighbourhood was helping her look into how she might go about gaining enough NCEA credits so that she can get training to become a social worker to achieve this goal. Jordan's current plan to achieve her desired future lacked the same rigidity and thoroughness of Simone's.

In contrast, other participants did not connect their histories to their imagined futures, giving the sense that the latter did not logically flow from the former. As a result, their desired futures seemed inconsistent with their current actions and consequently unrealistic. Despite Tasmine's strong desire to be financially stable and to be able to give her children the "opposite life to me...Yea I want my kids to have everything man...(and) not be brought up in front of drugs and drinking and gang fights", at the time of the interview, Tasmine was not making any changes to her present situation. Tasmine was not making any effort to increase the level of income she receives, further her education or make attempts to stop doing drugs. All of these changes would help her to provide the lifestyle she desires for her children who she hopes to conceive as soon as her partner is out of prison. Apart from her most

important goal of becoming a mother, Tasmine spoke of dreams to gain NCEA Level One and Two, get her drivers license, become a social worker and join the army. At the time of the interview, Tasmine had not made any plans towards achieving her career-orientated goals which would eventually help her to provide a financially stable home for her children. The inconsistency between Tasmine's current action and her desired future is evident in her response to Andrea's suggestions that she focus on her other career-orientated goals while her partner is in prison and, in the short-term, she cannot pursue her ultimate dream of becoming a mother:

T: It's hard now that he's in prison 'cause like he may be doing time in there but I'm doing time out here 'cause like my life has pretty much been on hold waiting for him to come out.

A: I reckon do something with your life while he's in there

T: What though?!

A: You could do anything you know. You know you love cooking, why don't you do chef school with (friends name)

T: Nah cause we'll bitch too much

A: Or do something else, I reckon you could do something and then by the time he comes out you could have a whole life set up for you fellas

T: I'm trying to do things while he's in there...but its just like hard to have the effort to because we made plans to do this together, not by myself (Tasmine, 18; Andrea, 19).

Despite her strong views about the importance of financial stability for children, Tasmine had tried to become pregnant with her partner before he went to prison, even though they were both receiving the benefit and Tasmine thought that they were "poor". It is particularly interesting that in light of her past attempts to get pregnant and her current lack of action to change her financial circumstances yet consistent desire to become pregnant, she criticised mothers for not planning for their children:

T: If you can't look after your kid, then don't open your legs in the first place...Get a fucking job man, stop laying around on the benefit, do something with your life, like you bitch about like 'Oh I got to get this for my kids', bro, you should have thought about that when you were pregnant (Tasmine, 18).

It is clear that the participants of this study hold socially normative goals and desire to have conventional lifestyles (Carpenter, 2012; Foster & Spencer, 2011). Despite

the hurdles of their environment and past decisions (such as their poverty- stricken neighbourhood and lack of formal qualification), several participants demonstrated that they were able to acknowledge their past histories and draw clear and concrete steps from their present situations to how they might achieve their imagined future. When other participants discussed the future, the dissonance between their desired future and their current actions became clear. With a lack of support from their families, and limited availability of careers guidance (since dropping out of school), it is not surprising that these young women are unsure of how to move out of their current situation towards a more conventional lifestyle. In light of how positively participants regarded the practical help that they received from social service agencies that helped them to enrol in training courses and apply for jobs, it seems that there is scope for more similar interventions that support and guide young women out of their pathway of criminality and into a pathway that is directed by the conventional dreams of the young people who have engaged in crime.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

Located in Aotearoa New Zealand, this study explored how eight female youth offenders aged between 15 and 20 years old, understood their experiences of crime. This research introduces the voice of young women who engage in crime into the burgeoning body of male-dominated risk and resilience literature. The growing proportion of female youth offenders compared to male youth offenders, the fact that most youth crime theories and interventions are based upon male youth crime statistics, and that there is no certainty that young people view crime in the same way as researchers, all highlight the importance of including the marginalised perspective of young women who have engaged in crime into the literature. By employing an interpretative approach this study gained insight into how young women who have engaged in crime understand their experiences of crime. Specifically this study sought to investigate three areas. First, how young women who have engaged in crime understand the risk and resilience terminology that surrounds them. Secondly, it considers the risk and protective factors that influence their involvement in crime. Thirdly, it offers insight into the futures desired for young women who have engaged in crime, from the perspective of some of these young women.

### Background

A review of risk and resilience literature found that there is a long-standing and unrelenting concern about youth crime both internationally and in Aotearoa. Youth crime researchers and policy makers purport that the best way to address the issue of youth crime is to target intervention programmes towards those deemed to be most 'at-risk' of offending. As mentioned in Chapter Three, a young person's 'risk' is determined by the balance of 'risk' and 'protective' factors present in their lives. The large body of risk and resilience literature which identifies 'risk' and 'protective' factors is typically deficit focussed in its approach. It tends to identify risk and protective factors as largely operating within an individual (e.g. personality traits) and their immediate context (e.g. their family). This individually-focussed body of research encourages notions of individual responsibility, which continue to dominate New Zealand's youth crime intervention strategies and political rhetoric. However, a growing body of ecologically-centred risk and resilience research suggests that wider, structural or systematic factors such as social class, institutional racism and poverty also influence an individual's likelihood of engaging in crime. Identifying risk and protective factors at this ecological level might help to explain and address the systematic inequities in youth crime statistics, i.e. the disproportionately high number

of poor, Maori and male offenders or the growing proportion of female youth offenders.

In both individually-centred and ecologically-centred risk and resilience research, the voice of young people and particularly young women who engage in crime has been excluded. As a result, there is no certainty that the way young people understand and view their relations to crime aligns with the risk and protective factors identified by researchers and utilised by policy makers. This is concerning as it indicates that current intervention strategies might not be targeting the factors most influential to a young person's involvement in crime. Consequently the overarching purpose of this research was to give voice to the marginalised perspective of young women who have engaged in crime in order to better inform policy and practice. This study paid particular attention to the structural factors that might foster crime and have a wide impact on youth offending. It recognises that both individual and structural risk and protective factors must be addressed to improve outcomes for young women in Aotearoa.

### **Terminology: Labels of 'At-risk' and 'Resilience'**

The first research question posed in this study explored how young women who have engaged in crime understand and describe the labels of being 'at-risk' and 'resilient' to crime. As discussed in Chapter Two, researchers and policy makers considered that employing the terminology of 'at-risk' and 'resilience' would reframe discussions and strategies about youth crime to be more positive and that the shift in terminology would shift the focus from the failures of young people who engage in crime towards building on the successes of young people. Although policy-makers and researchers might focus on an individual's strengths as they strive to build up their 'resilience', discussions with participants in this project revealed that employing risk and resilience terminology has not shifted the focus or the blame away from the individual young person for the apparent problem of youth crime. The young women I interviewed considered the way researchers and policy-makers use the terms 'at-risk' and 'resilience' attributes the problem of crime to personal deficits or failures within the individual young person. This individual focus echoes the neo-liberal rhetoric of individual responsibility and accordingly places the individual as the locus of control for changing an individual's personal engagement in crime as well as changing the prevalence of youth crime in Aotearoa. When talking with participants it became clear that, in alignment with popular discourse and mainstream risk and resilience literature, participants also associated the label of being 'at-risk' with notions of individual responsibility. Participants' definitions of 'at-risk' relied on

their own behaviour and state of mental wellbeing. The definitions that participants provided of the term 'at-risk' neglected to consider the influence of external and ecologically-located factors, despite acknowledging earlier in their interviews that environmental factors were influential in their involvement in crime.

It is concerning that young women who engage in crime understand that they are labelled 'at-risk', and associate this term with their own personal behaviour because of the potentially stigmatising impact of the risk and resilience terminology. This concern is heightened as adolescents are undergoing the developmental stage of identity formation and are particularly vulnerable to living up to the labels or social roles that they believe other people are applying to them (Erickson, 1968). As noted in Chapter Three, an additional concern arising from the literature (eg. Erickson, 1968; Goffman, 1963) is that a young person's awareness of being labelled 'at-risk' might have a self-fulfilling effect: where the young person's knowledge of being called 'at-risk' encourages them to live up to the role of being an 'at-risk' young person, which in turn, encourages their engagement in 'risky' activities such as crime. It follows that the current terminology used to describe young women who engage in crime propagates the perceived problem of youth crime. The association between terminology, stigmatisation and youth crime has tended to be ignored by international and national researchers. Considering the wide-reaching impact that the stigma associated with risk and resilience terminology might have, this oversight by researchers needs to be addressed. Working in collaboration with young people who have engaged in crime to create new and less stigmatising terms might be the first step to reducing the stigma attached to the labels of being 'at-risk' and 'resilient' to crime. From the discussions with participants in this study, it is likely that less stigmatising terms would reflect the influence of both external or environmental factors as well as internal or individually-located factors the pathway into and out of crime for young women.

Although some researchers (e.g. Fitzpatrick, 2011) assert that the term 'resilience' is common and used in every-day conversation, the findings from this research indicate that using such terminology might further exclude young women who have engaged in crime from participating in discussions with researchers and policy makers. While all of the participants were aware of the term 'at-risk', none of the participants knew of its complementary term, 'resilience'. Yet, when participants were provided with a definition of resilience the examples that they gave to clarify their understanding reflected the dichotomous nature of resilience literature: while some of the

participants viewed resilience as the result of individual characteristics, such as an attitude, other participants viewed the presence of external factors such as a positive relationship as instigating the process of resilience. That participants were ignorant to the term ‘resilience’, but could provide examples of people who they thought demonstrated resilience after the term was explained, indicates that they had conceptualised ‘resilience’ without knowing the specific label used by academics. This suggests that the terminology used in academic text is inaccessible to the young women that they are describing. Using such terminology might exclude young women from participating in discussions with researchers and policy makers about their involvement in crime. It also insinuates that risk and resilience research privileges the perspective and interpretation of academics over the perspectives and views of the young people they discuss. Excluding young women from such discussions is anticipated to result in intervention strategies that are unlikely to address the issues viewed as most pertinent to young women. Consequently, such intervention strategies are likely to be less effective and economically viable in their attempts to divert young women away from engaging in crime. Although further research is required to substantiate these speculations about the terms ‘at-risk’ and ‘resilient’, this study has confirmed the need for future research and policy discussions to include the perspectives of young women who have engaged in crime.

### **Experience of Crime**

The second and the most significant aim of this study was to explore the factors young women who have engaged in crime identify as being influential to their involvement in crime. As participants talked about their experiences of crime it became clear that risk and protective factors are inextricably interconnected and that the views of young women who have engaged in crime both confirm and diverge from existing risk and resilience literature. Participants identified a number of factors that encourage their involvement in crime. These risk factors include poverty, cultural norms of their neighbourhood, associating with antisocial peers, substance abuse, negative encounters with law enforcement agencies, disengagement from school, unemployment, as well as encounters with social service agencies that result in residential relocation. In contrast, participants recognised a number of factors that assisted their disengagement from crime. These protective factors include: new relationships with a partner or a child, consistent support from family members, religion, employment, receiving practical financial and employment assistance from social service agencies, and the process of maturing and growing up. To a large

extent the factors identified by participants confirmed the significance of the risk and protective factors identified in existing risk and resilience literature. Participants did note a number of ways in which specific factors diverged from the literature. These nuances are detailed in Chapter Five and will not be repeated here.

There were three major ways that participants' understandings of their experiences of crime depart from the mainstream, individually-centred risk and resilience literature. The first major departure away from the literature is that participants acknowledged the influence of ecological factors as well as their individual agency on their involvement in crime. The second entails participants' recognition of how their cultural context and the norms of their neighbourhood greatly influence their offending behaviour. The third way that this study departed from the literature was through the types of roles and relationships that participants found helped them to reduce their involvement in crime. These three themes were evident across nearly all of the risk and protective factors discussed by participants. Consequently the implications of these findings are likely to be wide-reaching and more influential than the implications attached to one specific risk or protective factor discussed. These three findings are discussed in more detail below.

While the majority of the existent risk and resilience research and policy interventions have located risk and protective factors within the individual or their immediate context, my discussions with young women who have engaged in crime highlight the significance of broader and ecologically-located factors in their involvement with crime. Participants recognised that the social and structural factors of poverty, high levels of unemployment and the implementation of Government policies indirectly influence their criminality. These macro-level factors shape the environment in which young women live in and the opportunities and chances available to them. These societal, political and structural factors have the power to bolster or diminish the influence of the more immediately contextual or individually-located risk and protective factors (e.g. family poverty and substance abuse), which were more likely to be noted in mainstream risk and resilience research as they have a direct influence on a young woman.

Although participants recognised the influence of ecological or external factors on their involvement in crime, they did not consider themselves powerless in the face of these external factors. Participants realised that within their ecologically shaped environments they exercised some personal agency. In alignment with structuration

theory, the young women did not perceive themselves as 'super agents' completely free to act as they chose and directly influence the outcomes of their lives: nor did they perceive themselves as 'super dupes' reacting solely to the wider social forces and environmental circumstances in which they found themselves. For example the majority of the participants recognised that their apparent reduced involvement in crime is, at least partly, due to their own deliberate decision making. This belief that they exert some agency was further highlighted in discussions of desired futures where participants acknowledged that exercising their personal agency might overcome their circumstances of poverty, racial/class prejudice and unemployment to achieve their desired goals. The recognition by these young women that they have some personal agency affirms the usefulness of intervention strategies, which strive to bolster individual resilience in young people: that use interventions which empower young people with self-esteem and confidence so they may resist the norms of their neighbourhood or habitus.

However, at present, policy makers have tended to employ only interventions that aim to change how an individual uses their free agency. This is despite the fact that numerous studies have linked the over-representation of particular groups in youth crime statistics to the ecological factors afflicting the relevant groups. The exclusive focus of interventions on the individual ignores the fact that an individual's free agency is constrained by structural, social and political factors. Recognising that risk and protective factors are unequally distributed across ethnic, gender and social-class groups is likely to help explain the over-representation of Maori, male, lower class citizens in youth crime statistics. Extending current political policies so that they address both the individual as well as the structural issues would be an innovative approach to solving the perceived problem of youth crime. It would also eliminate the presence of 'static' risk factors which are not currently addressed in youth offending strategies.

Participants acknowledged risk and protective factors as originating from within the individual, their immediate context and their broader social and political environments. This encourages the merging of the individually-centred view with the ecologically-centered view of risk and resilience. Failure to consider ecological factors is no longer an option. While participants realised that some individually-focused interventions are useful, such as those that provide practical assistance with job hunting, their stories reveal that the consideration of larger structural factors that influence engagement and disengagement with crime is likely to have a wide-reaching

effect and is crucial to reducing youth crime. Addressing individually located and ecologically located risk and protective factors is likely to have the greatest impact on reducing youth crime rates and the over-representation of particular groups of young people in youth crime statistics.

The second theme to emerge is closely related to the first. It recognises the significance of neighbourhood norms and cultural context in shaping the thoughts and behaviours of young women who have engaged in crime. In alignment with habitus theory, participants recognise that within their spheres of cultural influence it is normal to engage in crime. Such cultural spheres include their family, neighbourhood and group of friends. Within these spheres, participants considered that it was normal to be exposed to an array of risk factors including: high levels of violence, alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, teenage pregnancy, disengagement from school, having numerous friends who engaged in crime and negative encounters with police and the criminal justice system. Living in environments characterised by risk-factors, it was not surprising that participants described crime as not only a normal pathway into adulthood but also as necessary to gaining social capital within this context.

It is evident from participants' accounts that they perceived crime as necessary to meet the social expectations in their neighbourhoods. An example of this is appearing tough. The majority of participants felt it essential and logical to resolve disputes through violence and establish themselves socially by engaging in crime. Not only was this a method of improving their social standing; it was equally important in commanding enough 'respect' to prevent themselves from becoming victims of crime or violence which was prevalent in their environments. The value in listening to young women who have engaged in crime is evident here. Within the individually-centred model of risk and resilience, expressions of violence are typically located as a characteristic of the risk factor 'anti-social behaviour, yet the insight gained from participants is that their violence is not so much a character flaw that needs targeting as it is a direct consequence of trying to survive in a neighbourhood that values toughness.

Further examples of the influence of cultural context include the reasoning behind participants' early disengagement from school, as well as the stark contrast in participants' thoughts and behaviours when they became involved in a religious community. While disengaging from school before attaining any formal qualification

might be considered abnormal in many social environments, participants described it as a normal in their neighbourhood. Participants recognised that their familiarity with people who had disengaged from school led them to also travel along this well-trodden pathway. With hindsight the young women interviewed recognised that leaving school propelled them into other familiar pathways such as substance abuse and unemployment which ultimately led to their involvement in crime. The familiarity with this trend of leaving school and then engaging in crime suggests that this process is a normalised pathway into adulthood. It demonstrates how a cultural context in which disengagement from school is endorsed can lead young women to become involved in crime. In contrast, the influence of habitus or cultural context was evident when participants discussed their experiences of religion. Organised religion, namely involvement with church, provided an alternative set of social norms to those in their neighbourhood. In an environment where participation in crime is frowned upon and social capital is sought through pro-social behaviour, the participants who attended church found themselves disengaging from crime in order to gain social capital within this new and different cultural context.

Mainstream risk and resilience literature, and therefore youth crime prevention strategies, have typically failed to consider how ‘neighbourhood’ factors might influence a young person’s pathway into or out of crime. For instance, the Ministry of Youth Affairs’ literature review on what works to reduce offending by young people includes the disclaimer that “Neighbourhood factors are also risk factors for offending although they are not looked at in depth in this paper” (McLaren, 2000, p. 12). This statement epitomises the concerns raised in Chapters Two and Three, that in order to maintain political popularity a neo-liberal government might deliberately ignore the influence of the environment on offending as it supports notions of individual responsibility. By adopting individually-centred policies, governments place the onus of youth offending on the young people themselves. This justifies inexpensive interventions that focus exclusively on the individual and their immediate context. This approach trivialises issues surrounding youth offending and window dresses the factors that cause young people to both engage and disengage with crime. If the Government hopes to reduce the influence of cultural context on young people and change their perceptions that crime is normal, then risk and protective factors located in the neighbourhoods of young people who engage in crime must be investigated further and then addressed. It would also alleviate the impact of window dressing tactics used by political parties who are insistent on

fostering a rhetoric of individual blame and therefore individually-based interventions.

Thirdly, when considering their disengagement from crime, or their development of resilience, it was common for participants to discuss the importance of adopting a pro-social role. This raises the issue of how perceived identity impacts on offending, an issue which is noticeably underdeveloped in the reviewed risk and resilience literature. Apart from Sampson and Laub's (1995) theory of turning points, current literature surrounding risk and resilience largely fails to recognise the impact of identity formation and role adoption on young people's involvement in crime.

In line with turning points and Goffman's (1963) theory of playing roles according to socially accepted scripts, participants perceived the adoption of the following pro-social roles as key to their disengagement from crime: employee, a mother, a partner or a church-goer. Participants described their transition into these roles as a time where they were able to forfeit their anti-social role of 'offender' in order to fulfil the social expectations of their new role. For instance a mother is typically seen as a responsible woman who protects and provides: not someone who abuses alcohol and drugs to such an extent that they cannot care for a dependant person.

A number of implications arise by failing to consider the propensity of young offenders to adopt alternative pro-social identities. First, policy makers and social service providers risk further stigmatising 'at-risk' young people by not using language that appreciates that a change in one's role or one's behaviour is possible. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, policy makers risk losing an opportunity break the cycle of offending in the lives of young people through intervention policies that recognise these pro-social roles as promoting disengagement with crime. A further implication arises from the variety of roles young offenders' perceive to be pro-social and the availability of these roles within their immediate community context. Discussions with young women who have engaged in crime revealed the importance of having pro-social roles that are both attainable and desirable for the young women. The manner in which various roles may be adopted or construed 'pro-social', however, remains unexplored in existing risk and resilience literature. The adoption of pro-social roles relies heavily on the availability of given roles within the young offenders' environment. For example, if economic conditions prevent an individual from gaining employment, or only present opportunities for casual

employment, the potentially pro-social role of ‘employee’ remains elusive and the benefits of transitioning into such a role is lost.

Further research should explore the pro-social roles that young women who engage in crime desire, as well as how attainable these roles are for the young women. It is particularly important that future research explores what pro-social roles Maori and Pacific Island female offenders view as appealing alternatives to crime. Researchers should interrogate the complexities of being a mother among Maori and Pacific Island young women who engage in crime. This is because Maori and Pacific Island women are not only overrepresented in crime statistics but they are more likely than young women from other ethnic groups to become a mother at a young age (Statistics New Zealand, 2007). Although recent research from New Zealand (i.e. Banks, 2008) suggests that becoming a mother serves as a turning point for ‘at-risk’ women, it may not be desirable or politically advantageous for policy makers to encourage young women who engage in crime to become pregnant. Further research which includes the perspective of young Maori and Pacific Island women who have engaged in crime is required to see what pro-social roles such young women might perceive as being appealing and policy makers should focus on making more accessible.

### **Desired Futures**

My third aim was to provide young women who have engaged in crime with an opportunity to insert into the literature what they desire for their own future. The participants revealed that although their futures are characterised by risk and negative outcomes, they desire socially normative lifestyles characterised by wealth as well as access to resources and opportunities. This bolsters support for the few studies that have explored the perspective of ‘at-risk’ young people about their futures (Carpenter, 2012; Foster & Spencer, 2010). However this study extends existing research about youth offenders desired futures as discussions with participants revealed a disconnect between their current platform and approach to achieving their desired futures. Despite acknowledging their current and constraining circumstances of poverty, prejudice against their ethnicity or class and unemployment, participants believed that by making changes to their own behaviour; or by exercising some personal agency, they might be able to overcome these constraints and achieve their desired future. An implication of this belief is that participants are unaware of the particular steps required to move out of their current circumstances. This indicates

that the necessary resources and opportunities for ‘at-risk’ young women to achieve their goals are not available, and that the resources that are available do not make it clear to young women how engaging in crime or disengaging in crime will impact on their desired futures.

This apparent gap in current intervention policy was further emphasised by participants’ perspectives that, apart from the small number of social service agencies that offer ‘practical’ assistance, agencies mandated to combat youth offending are ineffective. The implication is that agencies and intervention policy assigned with addressing youth ‘at-risk’ of offending should promulgate practical resources and tools which align with common pro-social futures which young women who have engage in crime view as desirable. Not only would such policy specifically engage with the needs of those deemed ‘at-risk’, interventions focussed on practical solutions would assist young women who have engaged in crime to realise and then change the disconnect between their current behaviour and the futures they desire.

### **Reflections on the Research and Further Possibilities**

This research has opened up a number of avenues for future studies that prioritise the perspective of young women in risk and resilience research. As only a small number of international studies have focussed exclusively on prioritising the voice of young women who engage in crime, the present study has added considerable insight to risk and resilience literature, particularly within the context of Aotearoa, New Zealand. The implications drawn from this study have the potential to drastically change the way that youth offending is addressed in New Zealand. However, this small-scale research project hosts a number of methodological issues that limit the ability to generalise the findings to all young women who engage in crime in New Zealand. This research project provides insight and lays the foundations for future researchers to build upon by broadening, generalising and extending the research findings.

As discussed in Chapter Four, limitations of this study include issues of having an unrepresentative sample of young women who have engaged in crime and the power dynamics between the participant and the researcher as they negotiate potential cultural, economic and geographic differences. As evident in the literature review, both male and female youth offenders have been excluded from sharing their perspectives in risk and resilience literature. It was beyond the scope of this research project to consider and compare youth offenders perspectives according to their

gender. Future research might explore both female and male perspectives of what encourages and discourages their involvement in crime. This would provide data which could then compare and contrast the perspectives of young women who have engaged in crime with the perspectives of young men who have engaged in crime.

Most of the young women interviewed in this research project thought that they had matured and 'grown out' of crime at the time of the interview. The fact that most youth offenders desist from crime by their mid-twenties is a wide-spread phenomenon detailed by the age-crime curve. The cause of this age-related reduction in offending is a matter of great contention among youth crime researchers. This study provides insight as to why young women in New Zealand might consider that they have grown out of crime: however it is limited to reflections of past behaviours and thoughts from a small number of young women. A large-scale longitudinal study which prioritises youth offenders' perspectives might be able to unravel the complexities of the age-crime curve. A longitudinal study would enable changes in a young person's perception and changes in their environment and relationships to be tracked and compared with the seriousness and amount of self reported crime they are committing.

Future researchers might try and reduce the power imbalance in the interview by ensuring that there is cultural, gender and age matching between the participants and interviewers. With New Zealand's recent history of colonisation and current over-representation of Maori in youth crime statistics, cultural safety is a particularly important ethical issue that future researchers should consider before embarking on research with young people who engage in crime. Providing participants with the option of speaking with an interviewer who belongs to the same ethnic group as themselves might balance the power dynamic and further protect the participant during an interview.

As this research project is one of the first to explore the perspectives of young women who engage in crime, there was limited literature to compare the research findings with. Therefore there is great scope for future research projects to interrogate the findings drawn from this research project and bolster the perspectives of youth offenders within risk and resilience literature.

## Conclusion

This thesis illustrates the value of including the perspectives of young women who have engaged in crime in discussions of risk and resilience. Along with other nations, Aotearoa invests a significant amounts of resources into youth crime prevention strategies that strive to reduce the factors that put a young person 'at-risk' of offending and bolster the presence of 'protective factors' that increase the likelihood of a young person demonstrating 'resilience' to crime. This thesis is one of the first research projects to prioritise the perspective of young women who have engaged in crime within the context of Aotearoa, New Zealand. It demonstrates that listening to young women as they describe their experiences of crime contextualises and informs risk and resilience research. The discussions with young female offenders revealed the importance of extending the mainstream risk and resilience literature and policy interventions that have focussed almost exclusively on individual character traits and immediately contextual factors to include a more ecologically orientated view of risk and resilience. By representing the young women interviewed, this thesis suggests that Government agencies should extend the parameters of youth crime prevention strategies. Youth crime prevention strategies should address both the individual as well as the structural factors that construct a society of inequity and pathways into crime for young people in Aotearoa, New Zealand.



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## Appendix B: Interview Guide

The questions below are a guide and may be adapted to suit the individual participant or group and direction of the interview or focus group discussion.

### Introduction

*Objective: To explain the interview or focus group process, how the information will be used and ensure that informed consent/ assent is attained.*

The introduction will cover

- The interviewer's / facilitators role and background
- The purpose and scope of the interview/ focus group
- The role and the rights of the participant
- There are no right or wrong answers
- Confidentiality and consent for recording the interview /focus group
- Informed consent
- Privacy, withdrawal and informed consent
- Participant(s) will be provided with an opportunity to make suggestions as to how to make the interview or focus group more culturally safe.

I have some questions here that I would like to ask you but if there is anything that you would like to add, that's fine – I really want to hear your story.

### Whakawhanaungatanga/Background

*Objective: To build rapport between the interviewer / facilitators and the participant and to gather contextual information.*

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?

How old are you?

What ethnicity do you identify as?

- Where did you grow up? Tell me about your neighbourhood. Have you always lived there? Do you like it there?

Do you feel safe in your neighbourhood? Or are there some areas that you don't feel comfortable walking through?

How would you describe your childhood?

Where do/did you go to school? Do/did you enjoy school?

What do you do in your spare time?

Can you tell me about your family/whanau?

Who lives in your home?

### **Factors conducive to crime**

*Objective: To answer Objective 2, 'What are the factors that female youth offenders identify as being influential in their decision to engage, not to engage or to stop engaging in crime?'*

I'd like to talk now about getting into trouble with the police.

Do you think a lot of people get into trouble where you grew up?

Mostly boys, girls? What type of crime if so?

Can you tell me a little bit about the things that you have done that you think might have got you into trouble with the police?

- What happened?
- Can you remember why you did this?
- How often would you do things that might get you in trouble?
- Would you do just one type of crime, or a variety of things? Over time what kinds of things/ crimes have you been involved with?
- Did you do things on your own or with others? Who were the others? Friends, family?
- Can you describe your life when you getting in trouble the most?
  - o *Prompts if necessary:* Were you going to school? Happy at home? Drinking, using drugs? Going to marae? Church? In a relationship?

What things/factors do you think encouraged you to get involved in crime/things that might get you in trouble?

- *Prompts:* Peer pressure? Not having enough money? It's the norm/just part of life? The consequences of not doing it is worse than doing it? Get respect?
- Do you think these things would encourage other young females to do things that might get them into trouble with the police?

Boys / Girls in crime?

- Do you think that different things encourage boys and girls to engage in crime? Or would boys participate in crime for the same reasons as girls or would they be slightly different?
- Do boys and girls participate in the same, or different types of crimes? E.g. theft or violence based crimes?

Do you think there are/were there any downsides to what you are/were doing?

- Have you ever wanted to stop or reduce how much you are involved in crime?

What things might make it easy to stop or reduce how often you are/were involved in crime?

- Do you think these things would encourage other young females to *not* do things that might get them into trouble with the police?
- Do you have contact with any agencies? Are they helpful? What parts?

Do you have any female friends that have been in trouble with the police? If so can you tell me a little bit about that person?

- How old are they?
- Can you tell me what was going on for them, like their personal situation?
- *Prompts if necessary:* Working? In education? Happy at home? Drinking, using drugs? Going to marae? Church? In a relationship?
- Would they just do one type of crime, or a variety of things? Over time what kinds of things have they been involved in?
- Would they do it by themselves or with others? Who were the others?
- Why do you think that they got involved in crime?
  - What factors do you think encouraged/made it easy for them to get involved in crime?
- Were there/are there any downsides to what this person was/is doing?

- Do you think it would be easy for this person to stop? Have they stopped? If so did they get help? From who? Any agencies?
- What factors/things do you think might make it easier to help this person to stop or reducing their offending?

### **Risk & Resilience**

*Objective: To answer research Objective 1, 'How do female youth offenders understand and describe the labels of being 'at-risk' and 'resilient' to engaging in crime?'*

Have you heard the term 'at-risk youth' or 'at-risk young person'?

What do you think it means?

As far as you know, has anyone said that about you?

Do you think you're at-risk?

At-risk of what?

Do you feel like you're good at coping when times are tough?

What do you do when things are tough?

How do other people cope when things are tough?

Do you think those things might work for you? Why/why not?

Have you heard of the term 'resilience', 'resilient youth' or 'resilient young person'?

What do you think this means?

As far as you know, has anyone said that about you?

Do you think you are resilient?

### **Desired Futures:**

*Objective: To answer Objective 3, 'What do the female youth offenders desire for their future?'*

What are your plans for the future?

- At school? After School?

In 10 years what would you like to be doing?

- Would you like to work? What kind of job?
- Studying? Studying what? Family?
- Where would you want to live?
- What will your home be like? Who will live there?

Are you doing anything now that might help you to be doing these things in 10 years?

## Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer



**Have you done something that might have got you into trouble with the police?**



**In Aotearoa the proportion of female youth offenders is rising. If you're a female, aged between 16 – 20 years old, that has engaged in crime before, then Aotearoa needs to hear your experience and opinions.**



**This is your chance for your opinions to be heard.**

If Aotearoa is to provide useful supports to young women that engage in crime then it is really important that the voice of young females heard.

My name is Emma Clarkson and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato.

If you are a female, aged between 16-20 years old that has on more than one occasion done something that might have got you into trouble with the police, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview.

The interview will be a conversation with me where I will ask you to discuss your thoughts and opinions about crime and the factors which you think encourage or discourage young females to participate in crime, as well as what you desire in the future.

If you and a friend both want to do the interview, then you are welcome to do it together.

All of the information you provide will be treated confidentially and nobody will be able to identify you or what you have said in any reports or publications out of this study.

The interview will be held at a time and place that is convenient for you. Some food and drink will be provided as well as a movie pass in recognition of the time you give.

If you would like to be involved, please take this flyer and contact me:

Emma Clarkson  
Text or Call: 0211304822  
Email: emma.clarkson@gmail.com



## Appendix D: Participation Information Sheet

Please note that this Participant Information Sheet (PIS) was given to all potential participants who were 16 years and older. The participant who was 15 years old at the time of the interview was given a PIS that informed her that her guardian will need to read a Parent/Guardian PIS and also give consent for her to participate. The guardian and the participant were both happy to read their PIS and provided informed consent.

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
New Zealand



### **‘YOUTH ‘AT RISK’ OF CRIME: FEMALE YOUTH PERSPECTIVES FROM AOTEAROA.**

#### **PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET**

My name is Emma Clarkson and I am a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato.

**I would like to invite you to take part in an interview OR group discussion about your experiences and view towards crime and what you would like to do in the future.**

#### **Background to the research project:**

It is important that young people tell others about their experiences and opinions of crime so that researchers and policy-makers actually know what encourages or discourages a young person from engaging in crime.

As the number of young women doing crimes seems to have increased it is even more important to give these young women a chance to talk about their experiences and thoughts.

I would like to invite you to take part in this research if:

- You are a female aged between 16 and 20 years old.
- More than once, you have done something that ‘got you into trouble with the police’ or might have got you into trouble if you had been caught.

It does not include minor traffic or parking offences, regardless of whether you were caught or not.

### **What will happen if I agree to take part in the study?**

If you agree then you will be invited to be interviewed by me, Emmson. In the interview you will be asked to discuss your thoughts and opinions about crime and the factors which you think encourage or discourage young females to participate in crime as well as what you desire to do and have in the future. You are welcome to bring a support person with you to the interview if you would like to. If you do chose to bring a support person it is important that you feel free to talk honestly and openly about these topics in front of them.

If you have female friends that have done things that might have got them into trouble with the police and they would like to talk about their experiences, then you are welcome to bring up to three of your friends to the interview. If you would like to bring some friends to the interview then please tell me this before the interview so that I can give your friends some information about it. If you bring friends to this interview, the interview is called a focus group discussion.

The interview or focus group will be held in a time and place that is suitable to you and if relevant, the other participants. It is expected that the interview or focus group will take about one hour and, with your permission the discussion will be digitally recorded. Refreshments (e.g. fruit juice and snacks) will be provided and you will be offered a koha (e.g. movie pass) in recognition of the time you have given to the study.

### **Will anyone be able to tell what I have said?**

While I cannot guarantee confidentiality or anonymity when people meet for a discussion in a group, everybody who takes part in the focus group will be encouraged to keep the information shared confidential. If you chose to bring a support person to the interview they will be encouraged to keep the information you share confidential, but this cannot be guaranteed. All information you provide me, the researcher with will be treated anonymously and nobody will be able to identify you or what you have said in any reports or publications that arise out of this study. However my commitment to the University of Waikato's Human Research Ethics Committee and the *New Zealand Psychologists' Code of Ethics* means that I am obligated to breach this confidentiality if in the interview or focus group it becomes clear that either you, or someone else is in immediate danger. In the unlikely event that I think it is necessary to tell someone else about anything shared in the interview or focus group then I will inform you of this first. It is unlikely that the organisation or school where you received the flyer advertising this research will find out whether or not you have taken part, but if they do, it will have no impact.

### **Will I be able to withdraw my information?**

You are free to stop the interview or the focus group at anytime and can refuse to answer questions. If you choose to have a one-to-one interview, then you may withdraw your information for up to 28 days after the interview. You will be given the opportunity to have a typed copy of the interview emailed to you and you will have two weeks to make changes to the interview transcript or to withdraw the information you have provided from the research. If you participated in a focus group discussion you will not be able to withdraw your information after participation. You will be given the opportunity to have a summary of the focus group emailed to you. This summary will outline the key points discussed in focus group. For two weeks you can make recommendations to change the key points. If you do not make changes or contact myself, within two weeks of when the transcript

or summary are sent to your email address then it will be presumed that the information you provide can be used in the research.

### **What will happen to the information gathered in this research?**

The digital recordings and the electronic transcripts will be stored on a password-protected computer. Hard copies of transcripts will be kept in locked file cabinets. All identifying information collected from this study will be kept separate from data in a locked file cabinet. Electronic data will be kept for 6 years. Once the required 6 year data storage period has passed, electronic data will be erased from computers. Paper transcripts will be shredded and destroyed.

The information gathered may be used to help people design and deliver effective programmes and resources to support young people who are engaged in crime and would not like to be. In addition, I hope to present the findings at conferences and to publish them in journals so that people involved in helping you offenders will have increased awareness of their experiences, needs and successes.

I will also provide a summary of the main study findings for all those who participated. If you would like a copy of this summary you will be asked to provide an email address to which you would like the summary sent. On the consent form, which is provided with this information sheet, there is a space for you to write your email address.

### **What can I do if participation in the research causes me to worry or be upset?**

Thinking and talking about crime can sometimes lead to people feeling worried and upset. As well as talking to trusted friends and family the following agencies and online information can give you support:

- Your school counsellor and/or local medical clinics and GP services
- Youthline: Phone: 0800 37 66 33. Free text: 234. Email: talk@youthline.co.nz
- Turn Your Life Around (TYLA) Trust: (09) 828 2331. Email: admin@tyla.co.nz
- Brothers in Arms Mentoring: Phone: (09) 579 8165 info@brothersinarms.org.nz
- 247 Youth Core in Otara: Phone: (09) 265 3210. Email: enquire@crosspower.org.nz
- Big Brothers Big Sisters: (03) 548-9059. Email: national@bigbrothersbigsisters.org.nz

**Thank you for thinking about taking part in this project. I would greatly appreciate your help and hope that you will agree to participate.**

If you have any questions, or would like to discuss the study further, please call or email me using the contact details below.

#### **Researcher:**

Emma Clarkson  
The University of Waikato  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton 3240  
New Zealand

Ph: 0211304822

Email: emma.clarkson@gmail.com

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**For ethical concerns contact:** Convenor of the Research and Ethics Committee,  
Dr Nicola Starkey, phone: 838 4466 ext.6472, e-mail nstarkey@waikato.ac.nz.

Approved by the University of Waikato Psychology Research and Ethics Committee,  
on 13 June 2013, Reference Number: 13:14