Young Women in the Youth Justice System: Insights into the Inner Workings of New Zealand's Approach

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Social Science in Psychology

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2025

Abstract

Young women who engage in offending behaviour are often forgotten within the youth justice system despite identification that their pathways to offending are unique and characterised by significant challenges and trauma (Smith et al., 2020). Research and interventions often focus on the needs of young men due to their majority status among youth offenders (Braithwaite, 2023), leaving young women fighting in a system that was not designed for them. This research seeks to explore inside perspectives to examine how young women experience and interact with the youth justice system in New Zealand. Recent research has identified that young women who are offending in New Zealand have backgrounds characterised by abuse, neglect and mental health difficulties, outlining a need for further research and support to be targeted towards this group (Best et al., 2021). The aim of this study is to identify and explore the barriers and facilitators that young women face within the system, guided by Erikson's (1950) psychosocial theory of development to determine if the current system is developmentally informed. Semi-structured interviews of 12 professionals and one young woman with lived experience of the Youth Court were conducted to explore the barriers and facilitators that young women face. The data was analysed using a reflective thematic analysis approach that identified a number of barriers, facilitators and precipitating factors for young women. The results showed that systemic factors along with significant complexities and trauma serve as barriers for young women in the system. Healthy developmental trajectories and responsive, integrated support systems were identified as facilitators for positive change in young women Additionally, precipitating factors were identified to impact young women's pathways to offending including offending as a means for survival and disruption in identity development. This research identifies and draws attention to the gender-specific needs of young women and demonstrates that adequate care is not being

provided within the current youth justice system. The findings also provide a developmental framework to understand the challenges young women face in adolescence that coincide with their offending and youth justice involvement.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to thank my academic supervisor Dr. Armon Tamatea. Thank you for your support when things felt like they wouldn't get off the ground and for your continuous feedback. Thank you for your guidance and sharing your amazing knowledge with me, it has been a great experience working with you.

I am deeply grateful to my participants who took part in this study for taking their time to share their perspectives and experiences with me. I am so incredibly grateful for all of your support, and I hope the end result is beneficial to your mahi.

To my manager Caroline, I couldn't have gotten this far without your support, thank you for everything. To Brian, thank you for your continuous check ins and for motivating me when I needed it, I am very grateful for your support.

To my mum, thank you for your endless love and support, I wouldn't be where I am without you. To my incredible friends, thank you for your understanding and patience throughout this entire process and for being there when I needed a distraction. Finally, to my partner, I could not have done this without you. Thank you for always listening to me vent, letting me bounce ideas off you when you had no clue what I was talking about, and for your patience and never-ending belief in me.

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Note: The term young women in this research refers to those aged 14-17. The term girls refers to those aged 12 and 13.

Introduction

> *"A violent young woman or an angry young woman is somehow "wrong" or "born bad". They are often treated more harshly as a result of this stereotyping, without recognition that the vast majority of these kōtiro (girls) were victims themselves long before they began offending. Their trauma forms their responses to the world around them, a world that has never shown itself to be on their side."* (Eivers, 2022, p. 20)

In Aotearoa New Zealand, young women make up a lesser percentage of the youth justice system in comparison to young men but have been identified as a problem group, often presenting with complex needs requiring significant care and support (Smith et al., 2020). Despite this identification, the focus when it comes to reforming youth justice practices or policies are often centred on the needs of young men (Schliehe, 2014). The lack of focus on female offenders has resulted in a system that struggles to adequately address the needs of young women in Youth Court and leads to them experiencing worse outcomes upon entering adulthood across economic, relational and psychological domains (Smith et al., 2020), continuing a vicious cycle of trauma, vulnerability and violence (Best et al., 2021).

Understanding the barriers that hinder young women's experiences in the youth justice system and the structures that support them to achieve positive outcomes is essential to developing a response that is effective and reflective of their needs (Best et al., 2021). This includes their pathways to offending, how their experiences impact how they navigate the system, and how the system works to set them up for their future. The developmental period young women are experiencing as they navigate the youth justice system can influence how and what support is implemented, and how effective this may be (Klimstra et al., 2011). Erikson's

(1950, 1968) theory of psychosocial development provides a useful lens to explore how young women navigating a period characterised by identity formation, seeking belonging and developing their sense of self, impacts their experience of the youth justice system.

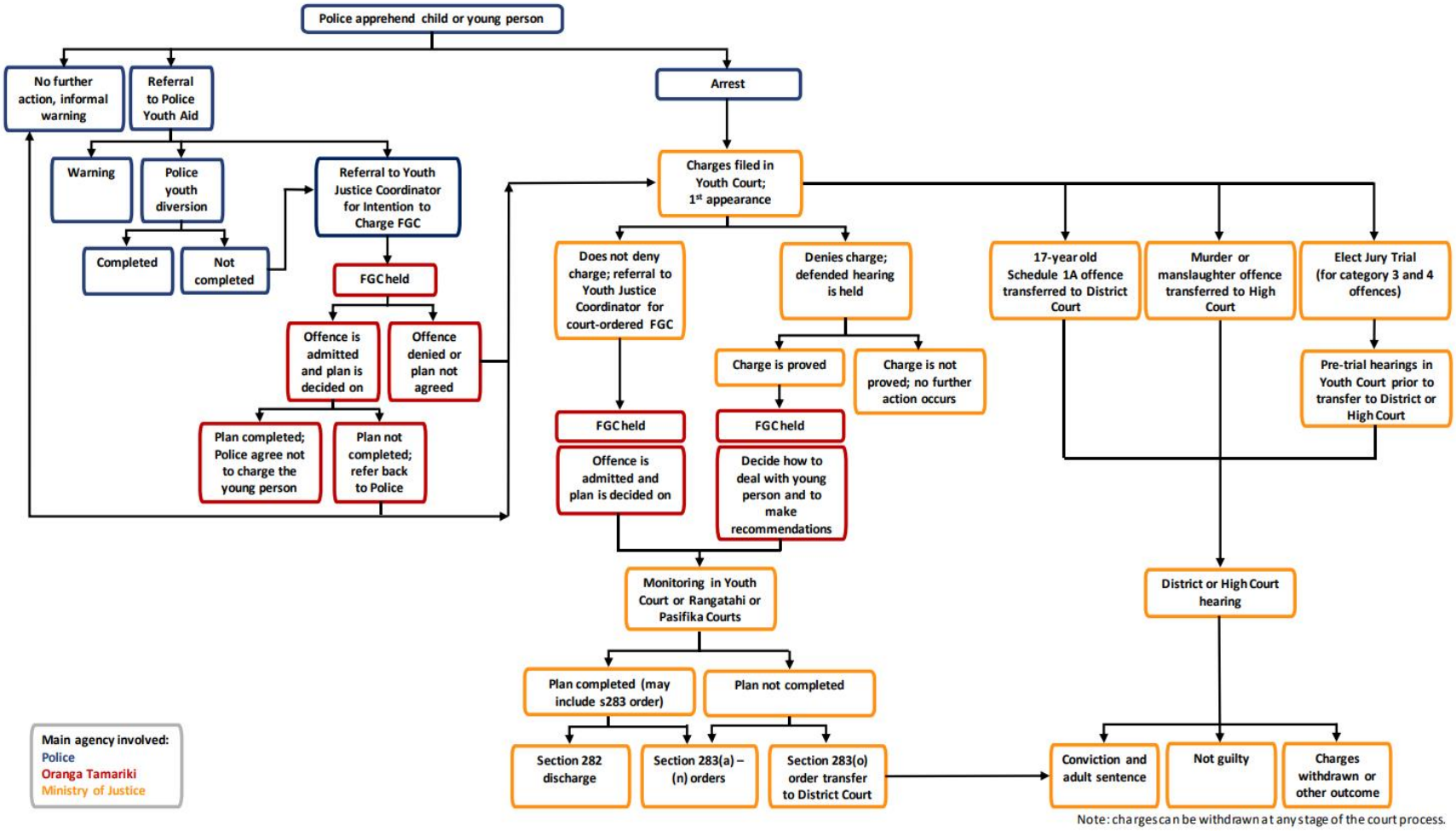
This literature review will provide an overview of the youth justice system in New Zealand and explore the key principles and approaches it employs to target youth offending. It critically examines existing research on young women in the youth justice system, with an emphasis on developmental, social and systemic influences and outlines where New Zealand current research sits. Drawing on Erikson's (1950, 1968) developmental theory and more recent adaptations, the review explores how young women's identity development interacts with and guides their experience of the youth justice system to inform this current research.

The Youth Justice System in Aotearoa

The youth justice system in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by the *Oranga Tamariki Act 1989* (formerly the *Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act*) that has a key objective to promote the well-being of children, young persons and their families, whānau, iwi and hapū. The system is designed to take a non-punitive approach to justice, differing from other jurisdictions and has been understood as a paradigm of reintegration, restoration, diversion and family empowerment (Lynch, 2012). The Youth Court follows a specific process that is guided by the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, involving key stakeholders including NZ Police, Oranga Tamariki and Ministry of Justice whose level of engagement differs throughout the process as shown in *Figure 1*. The Youth Court positions itself as a solution focused court centred on rehabilitation and wrap-around support that addresses the underlying causes of offending (District Court of New Zealand, 2023). This model of youth justice has gained international recognition, particularly in reference to the family group conference process, with it

Figure 1

'Youth Justice Roadmap' (Ministry of Justice, 2024, p. 33)



being the first of its kind to blend western and indigenous approaches to justice (Lynch, 2012; Slater et al., 2015).

Oranga Tamariki Act 1989

The Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 is guided by four key principles in relation to youth justice and dealing with young people who are offending that encompasses consideration of the well-being and best interests of the child or young person, public interest (and public safety), the interests of any victim and ensuring the child or young person is accountable for their behaviour. The Act guides both arms of Oranga Tamariki, youth justice and care and protection, creating a model that sets out to focus on early intervention and prevention of harm, as well as providing a youth-orientated approach to dealing with offending. The principles of the Act highlight a focus of ensuring that children and young people's developmental needs are met and that any possible harm to their development and wellbeing is minimised.

The Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 encompassing both youth justice and care and protection is significant given the high rate of crossover between the two systems. The Youth Justice Indicators Summary Report (Ministry of Justice [MOJ], 2024) states that among children aged 12-14 who were referred for a Family Group Conference (FGC) for offending, 95% of girls and 93% of boys had previously been subject to involvement from care and protection. The rate remains high among young people aged 14-17, with 94% of young women and 86% of young men referred for a youth justice FGC having previously had care and protection involvement (MOJ, 2024).

The legislation accounting for both sectors can be beneficial and convenient, however it has also led to increased risk of the systems crossing over, with statistics showing that children who have been in state care (i.e. care and protection) are more likely to end up charged with a

crime and enter the youth justice system, often referred to as the ‘revolving door’ (Schliehe, 2014) or ‘care to custody pipeline’ (Baidawi et al., 2020). These statistics demonstrate the impact of the system's connection and crossover, emphasising the importance of developing a youth justice system that is not only developmentally informed, but is also capable of managing trauma and multi-systemic difficulties.

History and Context

The youth justice system often goes through phases that typically comes from changes in political parties who share strikingly different views in relation to youth offending. The stark change can often be destabilising for the youth justice system but can also provide opportunity for new developments or ideas to be trialled (Lynch, 2012). The most profound and fundamental changes to the legislation were seen in 2010 in what was titled ‘Fresh Start’ (Children, Young Persons, and Their Families (Youth Courts Jurisdiction and Orders) Amendment Act 2010) that saw the inclusion of mentoring, parenting programmes, and drug and alcohol rehabilitation programmes being added to the types of orders Judges could issue and that needed to be considered during the family group conference process. This legislation is also what allowed the Youth Court to be able to deal with 12- and 13-year-old offenders.

The youth justice system often circles between punitive and non-punitive approaches to dealing with youth offenders, seen with the Young Offenders (Serious Crimes) Bill 2006, that attempted to reform the workings of the youth justice system and lower the age of criminal responsibility, making it easier for a youth to be tried as an adult. The previously proposed bill presents similarities to the Young Serious Offender Declaration recently added to the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 in 2024, that provides police and the Youth Court increased monitoring capabilities, removal of FGC’s unless for custodial purposes, the re-introduction of military style

academies, and the ability to hold young people in the justice system for up to two years. Back when the 2006 bill was proposed, Youth Court Judges, the New Zealand Law Society, the Children's Commissioner and the Human Rights Commission strongly objected the bill, suggesting that it would have gone against the founding principles of NZ's youth justice system (Lynch, 2012).

Over-representation of Māori Youth

In exploring the youth justice system within the context of Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important to understand the experiences of Māori rangatahi, who continue to face unfair disadvantages and are disproportionately overrepresented (Blank-Penetito et al., 2023). The latest reports from MOJ (2024) outlines that Māori tamariki and rangatahi are more likely to be proceeded against in comparison to the total population, with the rate of tamariki (aged 12-13) proceeded against reaching 175 per 10,000 compared to 75 for the total population, and rangatahi (aged 14-17) reaching 522 per 10,000 compared to 250 for the total population. The disparities are not limited to those proceeded against but are seen across the workings of the system including the FGC process, with Māori rangatahi more likely to have Court action taken, and both tamariki and rangatahi more likely to be remanded in custody (MOJ, 2024).

This is an ongoing issue that is yet to be resolved. Jackson's (1988) report outlines that New Zealand's justice system was reflective of a Pākehā perspective and failed to adequately reflect Māori experiences or cultural contexts. Jackson (1988) writes "This failure to adequately address the influence of systemic decisions and operations narrows the focus of research and effectively inhibits attempts to understand Māori offending and imprisonment" (Jackson, 1988, p. 15). An influx of reports in the 1980s drew attention to the discrepancies and failures of the system leading to changes in policy, strategies and interventions, including the highly regarded

FGC process (Blank-Penetito et al., 2023). However, marginalisation of Māori remains prevalent today, with Māori rangatahi continuing to be alienated from a Pākehā and settler-colonial centred criminal justice system that is imbedded with institutional racism (Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018; Blank-Penetito et al., 2023).

Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al. (2018) explores the marginalisation of Māori and Pasifika youth with particular reference to Samoan youth who make up the majority of Pasifika youth offenders in New Zealand. While the number of Pasifika youth involved in youth justice has decreased significantly in recent years with MOJ (2024) reporting the rate of Pacific young people proceeded against was 363 per 10,000 compared to 809 per 10,000 in 2013/2014 reports, Pasifika youth continue to face disparities in comparison to the total population and are overrepresented. Both Māori and Pasifika experiences of the youth justice system begin at a young age and are often accompanied by histories of state agency and community service involvement, said to reflect deep systemic issues and cultural disconnect (Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018).

In 2008, the first Te Kooti O Rangatahi was established, providing an alternative pathway for Māori youth to attend court hearings on local marae. This has since spread across the country with numerous different Te Kooti O Rangatahi operating, and in 2010 the expansion of Pasifika based Youth Courts were introduced in Auckland (Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018). Both Te Kooti Rangatahi and Pasifika courts were designed and established to address the over-representation of Māori and Pasifika in the youth justice system (District Court, 2023), and form culturally focused justice responses (Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018).

The historical and recent literature focused on Māori and Pasifika rangatahi in the youth justice system outline a number of systemic difficulties that are imbedded into the functioning of

the system, and highlights a lack of research that has been undertaken to address and explore the experiences of these communities (Jackson, 1988; Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018; Blank-Penetito et al., 2023). The introduction of Te Kooti Rangatahi and Pasifika Youth Courts showcases that there is an ability for change to be implemented and for targeted supports to be designed for groups who are historically under-represented in the general system.

Restorative Justice and Diversion

New Zealand's youth justice system is unique as it prioritises diversion in the first instance, taking a gradual response process growing in severity, with a 6-month supervision with residence order (custodial sentence) being the most restrictive option within the Youth Court (Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, s. 283). The FGC process begins the youth justice process, with diversion outside of Youth Court often prioritised and only a small number reaching Court (Slater et al., 2015). An FGC coordinator convenes an FGC, and a meeting is held involving the young person, their whānau, the victim(s) and support people, and a representative from the police. From the FGC, a plan is developed for the young person as a way of dealing with the offending and is followed up by a social worker (Williams & Sloane, 2019). The non-punitive design continues and is reflected in the ability for youth offenders to receive a section 282 discharge without conviction (diversion), should they complete their FGC plan and the restoration process (Oranga Tamariki Act 1989, s. 282 (1)).

The idea of restorative justice was formed in the 1970's, with an initial focus of bringing victims and offenders together in a facilitated conversation to decide on how the offender could repair the harm done and be held accountable (Mitchell, 2018). However, over time this response began to diminish across different countries due to a lack of consensus on how to implement effective restorative approaches, leading to behaviours being ignored or harshly punished.

Mitchell (2018) defines a true restorative approach to be one that has a high level of both support and sense of control over what is deemed unacceptable behaviour, understanding that punishment alone has proven to be unsuccessful in reducing recidivism and leads to increased negative outcomes, particularly in already marginalised groups. A restorative approach is one that provides the emotional and social skills that help to target and reduce the causes of offending.

Family Group Conference

New Zealand pioneered the Family Group Conference (FGC) model into the youth justice system, considered to be a form of restorative justice, with strong evidence to suggest its efficacy in addressing youth offending (Mitchell, 2018), and is carried out in a way that is culturally versatile and flexible to the needs of young people (Slater et al., 2015). It has been internationally recognised and countries including the United Kingdom, Canada, Sweden and the United States have introduced their own version of the FGC (William & Ioane, 2021).

The FGC process emerged from the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 and was introduced according to the values and principles that underpin the Act (Williams & Ioane, 2021). It is used in both the care and protection and youth justice space, with its purpose in youth justice being to address the harm caused by a youth's offending and allow for whānau and the victim of the offending to be directly involved in the resolution process (Williams & Ioane, 2021).

Prior to the development of the FGC, whānau were not heavily involved in the youth justice process for a young person, and there was a lack of cultural inclusion (William & Ioane, 2021). The blend of Māori and western features of justice brings a collective focus to dealing with youth offending and places an emphasis on participation and repairing harm, following the restorative justice model (Slater et al., 2015).

In the past decade, research has explored the perspectives of those who work closely with the running of the FGC process. Slater et al. (2015) interviewed a number of youth justice co-ordinators to understand the development of practice and identify what constitutes best practice or areas of weakness. Their findings showed that participants in their study highly applauded the foundation of the Act, supporting the concept of family empowerment that is reflective of the Act's principles and drives the premise of the FGC. The collaboration of different agencies and services were reported as a positive element of the FGC process, and an integral part of providing adequate care. However, they also identified that varying interpretations of the Act have resulted in inconsistency and raised the lack of cohesion when it comes to its delivery of support and services. A key limitation of this study identified by Slater et al. (2015), was its focus on one key stakeholder group. As a result, while the findings were informative and provide valuable insight into the FGC process, it offers only a partial view of the complexities that are involved.

Later, a study that examined the rates of victim participation in the FGC process was conducted, after reports that victim participation in the process was low (Williams & Ioane, 2021). Williams and Ioane (2021) utilised a mixed-method approach to obtain qualitative measures through interviews with New Zealand Police, Oranga Tamariki and victim support, and used quantitative measures through the tracking of victim participation. The findings of their study highlighted that there were discrepancies across agency approaches and systems that suggested a need for a streamlined process. It was stated that the integrity of the FGC process is reliant on professionals involved, and there is a clear lack of adequate resources available. It was also felt that the process was focused solely on the offender and that "FGCs appeared to be nothing more than tick-box approaches" (Williams & Ioane, 2021, p. 72).

Both studies highlight that there has been a positive response to the development of the FGC process through its inclusion of whānau and its focus on restoration, reflecting the principles of the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. However, a lack of resources and cohesion across agencies can create a disconnect and hinder the process from achieving what it sets out to do (Slater et al., 2015; William & Ioane, 2021).

Overall, the research regarding the youth justice system in New Zealand highlights a number of developments that have been made in effort to be more inclusive and better suited to its population; however, it remains apparent that there is still more work to be done (Lynch, 2012; Tamasailau Suaalii-Sauni et al., 2018; Blank-Penetito et al., 2023). While the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 is focused on supporting children and young people and has many well-intentioned processes, there is a lack of consensus and consistency in how it functions in practice that impacts the systems delivery and threatens its effectiveness (Slater et al., 2015; William & Ioane, 2021). When conducting research on youth justice, it is important to understand and acknowledge this background because it highlights the historical focus of change and gives context to the environment in which change is being proposed.

Young Women in the Youth Justice System

Women who offend are a historically overlooked group in the area of criminal justice (Gobiel et al., 2016), an issue that extends to the youth justice context, with the needs of male offenders often prioritised (Best et al., 2021). Research has identified a rise in young women entering the youth justice system; however, it remains an understudied area and continues to lack female focus, particularly when it comes to interventions and policy (Smith et al., 2020; Best et al., 2021).

Historical Understandings

Prior to the late 1960's, girls and young women's offending was characterised and viewed as something outside of the gender-norm and that went against stereotypical understandings of femininity (Gelsthorpe et al. 2009). Traditional theories of female offending have ignored or misrepresented girls and young women, defaulting to using psychological theory and sexual promiscuity as the main descriptor and narrative used, leading to girls being seen as more problematic than boys and facing harsher scrutiny due to these unrealistic standards (Gelsthorpe et al., 2009).

The idea that girls are a challenging population for social services has been longstanding, transpiring throughout history when it comes to troubled young women, as their delinquency breaches the expectation that young women should be nurturing, feminine and maternal (Gelsthorpe et al., 2009; Eivers, 2022). This meant that girls and young women were not only viewed as deviant in a criminal sense but traditionally were looked at and punished for 'immoral' behaviour and going against the idea of how a woman should behave (Braithwaite, 2023).

Research on Young Women Offenders

In New Zealand, young women and girls in the youth justice system have been identified as a key area that requires more support. Best et al.'s (2021) recent study examined the key characteristics of young female offenders in New Zealand, what leads to their offending and how to mitigate these factors. They found that young women who offend in New Zealand often have very complex histories of abuse and neglect, with a particularly high prevalence of sexual abuse, family dysfunction, mental health disorders, substance abuse and gang involvement. Young women who commit violent crimes were said to present with more severe risk factors, including high rates of childhood maltreatment, and present with complex clinical profiles that require

careful consideration of needs when working to address their offending. However, Best et al. (2021) highlight that there is a deficit in the youth justice system's ability to deal with these factors that contribute to young women's offending and there is a failure to successfully mitigate the risks and consequences of their youth justice involvement.

These findings are consistent with overseas research into young female offending populations, identifying them as a highly vulnerable group (Smith et al., 2020). Research has indicated that despite making up a smaller percentage of offenders, young women often have more negative experiences of the justice system including FGC and restorative processes (Braithwaite, 2023). They have also been found to have an increased risk of experiencing further negative life outcomes upon entering adulthood compared to males who offend in their youth, across economic, relational and psychological areas of functioning (Smith et al., 2020; Best et al., 2021). Understanding and identifying the life domains in which young women are likely to struggle following youth justice involvement, and the risks that lead to worse outcomes highlights the importance of developing targeted interventions to ensure that the same cycle does not continue and the system doesn't work against young women (Smith et al., 2020).

Gender-specific Needs

A young women's presentation to the Youth Court is often the first point of contact for issues to be brought to the attention of services and professionals (Best et al, 2021), essentially operating as an opportunity for areas of support to be identified, and interventions to be implemented. However, due to their majority status, the system is designed around the needs of young men and fails to recognise the differences in how young men and young women present to the youth justice system (Braithwaite, 2023). Additionally, programmes that centre around girls

often struggle with funding, staffing and sustainability, with it proving difficult to justify sufficient resources being provided as there are less girls in the system (Arnull, 2009).

Judge Eivers, former Chief Children's Commissioner, reported that almost all interventions in the youth justice system are designed around the needs of young men, and placed emphasis on the need for female-only programmes (Eivers, 2022). This view was shared by Judge John Walker (former Principal Youth Court Judge), who stated that despite young women accounting for approximately 30% of the Youth Court population, their pathways into offending are very different to that of young men and there is a lack of targeted, gender-specific support that account for their needs (Doyle, 2022).

Despite presenting with a higher degree of vulnerability, young women are often offered even less support than young men (Eivers, 2022). Mixed-gender programmes have been highlighted as difficult to run and could present a risk of re-traumatising young women, failing to understand the prevalence of abuse at the hands of men that they have experienced (Doyle, 2022). Eivers (2022) provides further insight into how young women's traumatic histories have led to them exhibiting significant emotional and behavioural challenges, including mood and conduct disorders, difficulties with impulse control and signs of trauma such as PTSD and difficulty trusting others. These issues are often accompanied by anger, frustration and problematic behaviours that can negatively impact how they navigate the Youth Court.

"All kōtiro deserve our respect and to be valued; these kōtiro also generate in me a feeling of awe that they have even managed to survive" (Eivers, 2022, p. 17). Young women have often had to prioritise their survival, and their external behaviours are often protective measures that on the surface present as an attitude or lack of care, but underneath they are seeking attention and support that is lacking in their lives. These external behaviours can create

barriers for young women navigating the youth justice system, as they are labelled as hostile and difficult to work with (Schliehe, 2014; Best et al., 2021), and there is a failure to see that their behaviour is a response to the world around them that has required them to be defensive (Eivers, 2022).

Therefore, it is important that further attention is given to helping young women in the youth justice setting, and the system needs to differentiate between the needs of young women and men in order to address the disparities and create an approach that reflects the needs of this group (Best et al., 2021). Community based services that are led by iwi, hapū and local organisations have the power to break through this facade and show the patience and perseverance needed to improve the outcomes of young women in the system (Eivers, 2022).

The Role of Mental Health

Young women in the youth justice system often have high mental health needs, with internalising disorders and a high rate of co-morbidity being highly prevalent. Their mental health difficulties are often part of a web of support needs, leading to complexities in providing appropriate and adequate support (Braithwaite, 2023). Young women with mental health difficulties are unfairly placed in secure facilities, such as youth justice residences as a result of ‘unmanageable behaviour’. Their behaviour, while problematic, can place them into the offender category as that is the only option seen suitable to manage their risk (Schliehe, 2014).

Eivers (2022) indicated that most young women who enter New Zealand' s youth justice system had families that had struggled to deal with their mental health or behaviour, leading to care and protection involvement. The criminalisation of mental health and behaviour can be detrimental to one's self-identity. In Schliehe’s (2014) study of young women who were incarcerated, one girl spoke about the confusion and damage to her self-identity that occurred

from being placed in custody for behavioural reasons with other girls who had committed crimes such as murder. While there is an element of risk management that comes with placing young people into secure care for their own benefit, there is a disconnect between offending and mental health concerns, and the support appears to only go as far as containing the risk.

Bui et al. (2021) examined the extent to which maladaptive coping, substance abuse and self-harm were linked to higher rates of continued remands in correctional facilities and how this impacts youth recidivism rates across young people aged 12-19. Their findings suggest that self-harming behaviours were reflective of deeper, unmet needs despite Japan's system following a welfare-based model focused on informal procedures, diagnosis, treatment and the needs of the youth. The rate of re-offending was understood to reflect ongoing vulnerabilities that were not being adequately dealt with as opposed to persistent criminal intent. Further, their study found a strong association with self-harm and recidivism, signifying that a lack of ongoing support and continuity of care once a young person is released from custody can lead to an increased risk of re-offending and engagement in maladaptive coping strategies.

This disconnect is also reflected in Schliehe's (2014) study that centred on young women's experiences in secure institutions after a significant rise in suicide rates had raised concerns regarding the increased rate of female incarceration. The findings concluded that young women were being criminalised for their mental health and accompanying behaviours. Additionally, policies in place were failing to account for needs relating to mental health and emotional well-being, leading to the over institutionalisation and punishment of young women struggling with their mental health.

The connection between self-harm and youth recidivism (Bui et a., 2021) and unmet needs within custodial settings (Schliehe, 2014) highlights that there is a systemic neglect of

mental health and maladaptive coping strategies that contributes to ongoing cycles of offending. Welfare-based systems are designed to allow the inclusion of trauma-informed and gender appropriate responses, however the system continues to fail to address the underlying causes of young women's offending and as a result can increase the risk of harm done by the system.

Pathways to Offending

Girls and young women not only experience the system differently to young men, but they also have been found to have a unique pathway to criminal behaviour that is characterised by persistent and severe trauma (Smith et al., 2020), highly complex clinical profiles (Best et al., 2021), and being victims of abuse (Braithwaite, 2023). A lack of belonging in school settings has also been identified to increase the risk of offending in girls, more so than their male counterparts (Smith et al., 2020), potentially highlighting that a sense of achievement in academics is more prevalent for young women of that age.

These risk factors often don't stand alone, with a tendency to cluster and interact with each other, leading to the complex presentation seen once they enter the youth justice system (Arnull, 2009). It is important that targeted supports and interventions understand the identify these pathways, as by only focusing on the offending behaviour, the underlying cause is not dealt with, and the cycle merely continues (Smith et al., 2020).

Puberty is a key phase of development for any young person, marked by biological, hormonal and psychological changes that can influence behaviour. Michielsen et al. (2020) found that the timing of puberty onset can be associated with increased risk of antisocial behaviour, differing by gender. Their research explored how hormonal markers work as mediating or moderating factors between puberty timing and antisocial behaviour in boys and girls. Puberty onset in girls was associated with heightened cortisol activity and an increased risk

of aggression, relating to a higher risk of antisocial behaviour. Psychosocial stressors could present an increased risk, including peer-related stress and early life adversity such as absent fathers or negative parenting that contributed to an earlier puberty onset and negative stress responses.

These findings supported accentuation theory, suggesting that transitional stress at the time of puberty onset could accentuate previous emotional and behavioural difficulties. Boys presented differently, with late puberty onset being more strongly associated with antisocial behaviour. These gender-specific influences highlight a connection between hormonal influences, psychological stressors and behavioural outcomes that can occur in adolescence (Michielsen et al., 2020).

Violence in Girls and Young Women

Violent offending in girls and young women is a complex issue that is influenced by a range of social, emotional and developmental factors. Swift (2011) explored the pathways that led to aggression in young women using both qualitative and quantitative methods by conducting 3,400 questionnaires from Year 9 and 10 boys and girls, 40 focus groups of girls aged 12-18 and 100 interviews with teenage girls who came to the attention of researchers or were involved with authorities for their violent behaviour. The findings suggested that violence and aggression exist on a continuum that begins with relational aggression and escalates to physical violence often as a result of learned behaviour. Violence among siblings was notably common, that would increase to the point of physical violence and was accompanied by complex family dynamics marked by disrespect and aggression towards their mothers. The motivation was often associated with peer influence, popularity or for male attention, and there tended to be a belief that violence was justified as a form of retribution.

Hayden et al. (2014) further contextualise these behaviours within a developmental framework, highlighting how children who experience early adversity contribute to co-occurring internalising and externalising problems. These problems are then said to manifest into aggression, withdrawal, substance abuse and mental health issues that can be influenced by family dynamics, social influences and personal attributes that can either mitigate or exacerbate internalising and externalising problems.

To effectively target these behaviours, interventions need to be gender-specific, trauma-informed and timed during key developmental windows of opportunity (Swift, 2011). Targeting interventions to focus on ego resiliency, emotional regulation and managing conflict that are culturally and developmentally minded, can work to redirect and reduce the risk of long-term problems and promote adaptive behavioural outcomes (Hayden et al., 2014).

Intersectionality

While young women experience a gendered disadvantage, other factors such as ethnicity and care status present a variety of complex intersections that can create further barriers for young women in the system (Braithwaite, 2023). The welfare and justice systems have struggled to meet each other and interact in a way that fits both care and criminogenic needs. Girls in the justice system tend to be viewed more negatively due to care status or for having a history of care and are viewed as too difficult to deal with (Braithwaite, 2023).

In the late 1960's, the United Kingdom saw changes in legislation that reflected the understanding that welfare and care related concerns were relevant when dealing with youth offending, allowing the two areas to be dealt with together (Gelsthorpe et al., 2009), similar to what is now seen in New Zealand's system. While legislation attempts to provide additional support, for girls the combining of welfare and offending systems has led to an increase in

contact with the system (Gelsthorpe et al., 2009), and the criminalisation of girls who are trying to escape abuse, exploitation and maltreatment (Smith et al., 2020). Schliehe (2014) refers to the idea of the revolving door in relation to young people who have been abused in state care that can see themselves charged if they are to fight back, drawing on a notion that once you're in the system, it is not designed for you to be able to get out.

Justice systems that employ welfare-based models are more likely to be able to identify issues focused on wellbeing as opposed to countries who employ models focused on punishment and accountability, such as the United States (Bui et al., 2021). However, while perhaps well-intentioned, the systems lack the understanding and foundations to deal with the level of trauma and victimisation that comes with the combining of welfare and offending. It is also important to understand the impact of culture within this system, as systemic racism and discrimination places young people at greater risk of experiencing maltreatment and the intersecting of systems, subsequently increasing their risk of involvement in the youth justice system (Smith et al., 2020; Braithwaite, 2023). For interventions and methods for prevention to be effective, there needs to be an understanding of how these systems connect and hold sensitivity to trauma and cultural disparities to ensure that they do not increase the risk of negative outcomes.

Experiences of Young Women in the System

Although limited in scope and somewhat dated, there are several key studies that draw on the experiences of young women and provide valuable insight to how they navigate the youth justice system. Schliehe (2014) examined the lived experiences of young women who were incarcerated, exploring how their experiences were often remembered by gendered constraints such as a lack of privacy and limited autonomy. Many girls experienced ongoing fear and anxiety after being placed in secure care (confinement), exacerbating often already existing

mental health difficulties. Schliehe's (2014) work draws on the idea that institutional environments can reinforce feelings of powerlessness and create further trauma for young women in these situations. On the other hand, the system was said to be predictable, which was often very different from the lives they were living before being in custody, suggested to increase the risk of further offending to return to these secure environments.

Douglas and Plugge (2008) also explored perspectives of young women detained in juvenile justice centres alongside the views of staff working inside these facilities, focusing on issues pertaining to health. This study including both the perspectives of young women and staff was outlined to be unique and important to obtain a full view of the issue. While both groups identified areas of need to be centred on mental health, substance abuse, developing self-esteem, self-harm and sexual health, there was a clear disconnect with professionals focused on long-term issues, and the young women focused more on immediate needs. Douglas and Plugge (2008) attribute this to their adolescence and lack of development of long-term perspective, however it is important to note that the lives of many of the young women were characterised by a need to survive their environment and they had to work to have their basic needs met or to be protected from violence. As a result, it makes sense that future planning was not something widely thought about or seen as a priority.

The need for targeted, gender-specific approaches is further supported by Smith and Smith (2005) who explored how an approach targeted towards building relationships and conflict resolution among young women were implemented in correctional settings. The aim of the programme was to target the root of the problem and help the young women deal with the trauma that led to their current situations. The results were positive, with young women building trusting

relationships with the staff, reporting that they were able to learn what a healthy relationship was, and it enabled them to begin to trust others.

The environment that was centred around care and support had led to young women forming a healthy identity, developing their self-esteem and building a community with each other where their trauma was recognised and they were able to understand themselves outside of their circumstances and develop lifelong skills. The development of a sense of community was deemed to be just as important as their individual development (Smith & Smith, 2005). Further evidence has also suggested that young women prefer relational approaches that are delivered in safe, typically female-only spaces, whereas young men respond more to structure and rules (Arnull, 2009).

Research regarding young women in the New Zealand youth justice system has begun to expand and explore their specific needs (Best et al., 2021), however a large gap remains in how the system is set up to deal with the different complexities that they present with (Braithwaite, 2023). An increased risk of negative life outcomes and continuing cycles of trauma highlights the need for further focus and research centred on young women within this context (Smith et al., 2020; Best et al., 2021). Interventions and supports that are gender-specific and targeted towards young women have been proven to result in positive changes and outcomes (Smith & Smith, 2005), but remains a lower priority in the youth justice setting due to young women's minority status and they continue to exist in a system built around the needs of young men (Eivers, 2022; Doyle, 2022; Braithwaite, 2023).

Psychosocial Development in Adolescence

The use of theory as an explanatory framework is essential to understanding the complexities of young women's experience in the youth justice system. Theories provide a basis

to organise, understand and interpret human behaviour across different social contexts (Miller, 2022) and to explore the developmental pathways that can lead to difficulties across different facets, providing insight to how and why certain patterns emerge (O'Connell et al., 2009).

Developmental theory from a psychological perspective seeks to follow individuals' development beginning in early childhood and spanning across their entire lifespan, often looking at periods marked by significant challenges and change. There are many different developmental theories that explore different ideas and lenses to look at development through, such as staged theories that follow the idea that development occurs in fixed stages (Miller, 2022) or emergent theories that propose a more fluid development through interactions with the social world and the environment (Sawyer, 2013).

Eriksonian Theory

Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory of psychosocial development present the idea that development across the lifespan occurs across eight psychosocial stages separated by childhood, adolescence and adulthood. The opposing formations of each stage represent a psychosocial conflict, with successful navigation of the stage theorised as laying the foundation for the next developmental stage (Maree, 2021). Successful navigation of each conflict can form psychological strengths that will benefit well-being and future development, however being unable to navigate these conflicts can negatively impact on development of a strong sense of identity and sense of self (Darling-Fisher & Frey, 2008).

While Erikson's (1950, 1968) stages extend into adulthood and old age, this research will focus and conclude at the fifth stage, Identity vs. Role Confusion that is said to occur during adolescence. Erikson's theory combines psychological and social aspects, focusing on how individuals see and understand themselves, as well as how they are viewed by others. Inherently,

this is influenced significantly by social structures and social norms that are understood to become more prevalent in adolescence and can cause conflict among peers, family, schooling and other authoritative systems that present rules and regulations (Azad & Carlsson, 2024). This stage is of particular relevance in the context of youth offending to understand the developmental challenges and conflicts that young women are experiencing concurrently with their involvement in the youth justice system.

Childhood stages include Trust vs. Mistrust, Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt, Initiative vs. Guilt and Industry vs. Inferiority that reflects normative challenges faced throughout different development stages. These stages are reflective of an infant and child developing a sense of security, autonomy, initiative and guidance (Darling-Fisher & Frey, 2008). Disruption of these stages from stressors such as abuse, neglect and trauma can have lasting effects on a person as they progress to adolescence (Dent, 2020) and can later manifest as issues with identity and self-worth (Klimstra et al., 2011), social and interpersonal skills (Hayden et al., 2014) and can lead to the development of antisocial behaviour (Modi et al., 2023).

Forming a stable identity is considered to be one of the most important developmental tasks for an adolescent and leads into stage five, Identity vs Role confusion (Klimstra et al., 2011). This stage is characterised by a need for continued support and encouragement from others to assist in the development of a profound sense of self and independence (Maree, 2021). This stage reflects a crucial period in which an adolescent begins to explore who they are, their morals and values and where they fit into the world (Klimstra et al., 2011). Achievement in this stage can be hindered by a lack of feeling successful across different areas, setting a precedent for an adolescent that they don’t belong or fit into a particular role (Maree, 2001).

Youth Offending and Development

For youth who are offending, they not only experience the typical stressors of adolescent development that comes from fighting with parents and friends, mood disturbances and hormone changes, but they also experience additional stressors associated with involvement in the youth justice system. Klimstra et al. (2011) report that further research is needed to explore the impact of offending on identity formation, as therapies and interventions tend to centre around moral reasoning and the behaviour being morally wrong. The effectiveness of this is questioned, given that someone in this developmental stage is still developing these concepts. Limited attention is said to be placed on the underlying cause of the problem they are facing, which according to Erikson's (1950, 1968) model is the development of a firm personal identity that results in behavioural difficulties, risk taking and, in some cases, offending (Klimstra et al., 2011).

Further Adaptations and Explorations

Since Erikson's (1950) initial theoretical statements, there have been further adaptations and explorations that build upon this developmental model, with a particular focus on identity in adolescence and its relevance to antisocial behaviour and offending. Marcia (1966) outlined two important factors that support identity formation, exploration referring to the process of exploring and questioning different values, beliefs and roles before deciding which to pursue, and commitment, referring to making a firm decision regarding which one they choose to pursue. Four identity statuses were created that refer to the level of commitment and exploration individuals choose to explore. These include diffusion (little exploration, little commitment), foreclosure (strong commitments, but alternatives not explored), moratorium (intense exploration, no strong commitments), and achievement (strong commitments formed after extensive exploration) (Klimstra et al., 2011). This work provided additional information and

frameworks to explore identity development; however, Marcia's (1966) sample population was male university students, lacking gender and cultural diversity as well as socioeconomic range that limits the ability to make generalisations across populations.

Crocetti et al. (2008) expanded on Marcia's theory, adding reconsideration of commitment to the identity formation process. This process is understood to occur when an individual is able to question their current commitment and search for alternatives. Further, a second part of moratorium was added called searching moratorium that identified adolescents as being able to revise their identity. Crocetti et al. 's (2008) model was able to demonstrate validity, and reliability estimates for both boys and girls across all stages of adolescence. Among offending populations, their theory may provide insight into how some young people can engage in offending behaviours, but don't have their identity shaped around offending, allowing for interventions to be more effective.

Difficulties in forming an identity has been connected to youth offending and subsequently being incarcerated. Klimstra et al. (2011) investigated ideological (education) and interpersonal (relationships) identity formation across youth who were incarcerated for offending, youth in residential care for mental health difficulties and the general youth population. This study follows Erikson's (1950, 1968) focus on identity formation mainly developing across ideological and interpersonal domains. Youth who had offended exhibited major disruption across all areas of identity development, particularly within relationships and education.

The offending group were shown to have lower commitment and in-depth exploration in both ideological and interpersonal domains, and higher reconsideration of commitments in the context of doubt. Their level of identity development was significantly lower than both general

and clinical groups and they struggled significantly more with identity formation, potentially contributing to, or causing their offending behaviour. They exhibited less ability to reflect, possibly hindering their ability to receive adequate support in their environment. The clinical group were shown to have perceived benefit from institutionalisation, and despite their experiences of emotional distress, were able to maintain a sense of identity. This suggests that these constraints associated with youth justice facilities create barriers to identity formation that can further obstruct the developmental process that is not solely as a result of institutionalisation (Klimstra et al., 2011).

Reid and Patterson (1989) theorised that antisocial behaviour was a consistent pattern or trait that originated in early childhood and remained stable, persisting into early adulthood. Antisocial and aggressive behaviour was said to foster and stabilise through a social interaction context that is typically characterised by irritability from parents and as a result of inconsistent, ineffective and often abusive discipline tactics. Antisocial behaviour is said to be strengthened or maintained by coercive social interactions caused by ineffective discipline when a child is aggressive or defiant, creating a coercive cycle as they learn this behaviour works to get what they want. These factors according to Reid and Patterson (1989) only contribute to antisocial behaviour if they disrupt day-to-day parent and child interactions, leading them to stabilise as traits.

The social world was deemed a powerful influence in a child's development that begins with parents and later grows to include teachers and peers. Once a child enters school, these learned behaviours begin to show in other settings and can lead to peer rejection, creating an overall sense of isolation both at home and among peers. They then seek out other peers

exhibiting similar behaviour, furthering the development of antisocial patterns of behaviour forming (Reid & Patterson, 1989).

Modi et al. (2023) defined adolescence as a time characterised by an increased need for approval and social acceptance. This focus regards social connection and affiliation with peers, and an increase in what is known as social sensitivity, a strengthening in saliency of social cues. Their research explored how the need for approval and antisocial behaviour moderates' effects of socio-emotional cues on adolescent girls' cognitive control. The findings indicate that adolescents with a high need for approval whose self-worth depended on what others thought, struggled more with emotional regulation. Girls in adolescence were said to place greater emphasis on socially rewarding goals such as maintaining friendship and were found to be more socially sensitive causing disruption in their cognitive control.

Adolescents who engaged in antisocial behaviour engaged more in reward seeking and risk-taking behaviour and often failed to respond to punishment. Adolescents were reported to seek social rewards more than any other age or developmental group, signifying a time that requires acceptance and affirmation from peers. If this acceptance is not being achieved in prosocial settings, this may lead to engagement in antisocial behaviour in order to gain that feeling of acceptance. For girls whose motivation for offending is often co-occurring with other issues or adversity, their offending within this context may be more focused on a need for approval rather than driven by antisocial patterns of behaviour (Modi et al., 2023).

Critiques of Current Theory

Despite further explorations and developments of Erikson's (1950, 1968) psychosocial theory, the literature remains largely fixated on the development of boys and young men, particularly if the focus is on youth offending (Klimstra et al., 2011). Identity development in

adolescence has been linked to engagement in offending or antisocial behaviour in both boys and girls (Modi et al., 2023) and involvement in the system can increase negative outcomes on identity formation (Klimstra et al., 2011). Further exploration is needed that centres on the experiences of girls and young women in this critical developmental stage.

Erikson's theory has also received criticism for its focus on western, individualistic cultural values and perspectives on identity, lacking inclusion or knowledge of the impact of cultural identity (Schwartz & Pantin, 2006). Particularly when working with adolescent offending populations who come from diverse cultural backgrounds, understanding their connection to their cultural identity would play a key role in understanding their worldview and the interaction this has with each developmental stage.

The Impact of Disrupted Development on Identity Formation

Both Klimstra et al. (2011) and Hayden et al. (2014) highlight how identity formation and behavioural adjustment in adolescence can be shaped by a range of factors across development and the impact of adversity. Klimstra et al. (2011) report that identity status and psychosocial adjustment are closely connected, particularly in the context of internalising and externalising behaviour. Adolescents whose identity status developed around strong commitments (foreclosure and achievement) had shown lower levels of both internalising (e.g. anxiety and depression) and externalising behaviours, whereas having an unstable identity status was linked to higher rates of internalising (e.g. anxiety and depression) and externalising (e.g. aggression, conduct problems) behaviours.

However, internalising and externalising problems often co-occur and are influenced by early adversity, family dynamics (Hayden et al. 2014), and parenting variables that can contribute to the development of problematic behaviour (Reid & Patterson, 1989). When dealing

with youth who are involved in offending, it is important to consider the range of emotional and behavioural challenges that may present that impact identity development and self-worth, and interventions need to be both supportive of the needs, but also developmentally informed.

Adolescents within a youth justice context often have backgrounds of childhood adversity that have significantly threatened their well-being and impact their ability to see a different path for themselves, and it can often seem easier for them to succumb to this future rather than fighting the cycle (Kalpidou, 2024). With interventions that are targeted towards these areas of development, the period of adolescence is one that can see great change, growth and improvement and can help young people to build their self-concept and foster positive identities.

In summary, research on young women within offending populations is scarce despite knowledge that they are a problematic and vulnerable group. Recent research in New Zealand has been able to identify and provide insight into who our young female offenders are and the kind of difficulties they present with (Best et al., 2021), that can be used to inform ongoing research and interventions that are tailored to the needs of young women. There remains a lack of qualitative studies that capture the voices from within the system including key stakeholders that work closely with this group, and the voices of young women themselves who hold many of the answers to key questions. Further, much of the research centred around psychosocial theory and development in offending populations is centred on boys and young men within western contexts, lacking representation of how this impacts girls and young women, as well as diverse populations and perspectives.

Aim of the Current Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate and explore the perspectives of key stakeholders and young women who have previously been or are currently involved in the youth justice system to obtain a deeper understanding of how the system is designed to function, and how the system functions in practice. This research draws on Erikson's (1950, 1968) model of development to understand the developmental period that young women are in whilst navigating the system and how the system works for or against this. In doing this, it is hoped to obtain a deeper understanding of how the system is designed to function for its users and how it functions in practice, in the context of young women.

The aim of this study is to explore the experiences of young women in the youth justice system and understand the barriers and facilitators they face, guided by Erikson's psychosocial theory of development. The following questions will be addressed:

- What are the barriers and facilitators that young women encounter within the New Zealand youth justice system?
- From an Eriksonian perspective, what elements of the system are developmentally-informed for young women?
- Similarly, what elements of the system are *not* developmentally-informed?
- Lastly, how is change in young women understood or observed within the youth justice system?

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodological framework that was used to conduct this research. It outlines the research design and rationale for why this approach was used to explore the research questions. This chapter discusses the process used for participant recruitment and provides a description of the participant group. It explains the process of data collection and reflexive thematic analysis used to analyse the data. Finally, this chapter concludes with discussion on the ethical considerations that informed this research.

Research Paradigm

The research is grounded in a relativist ontology, focusing on both the individual and collective experiences of participants (Pretorius, 2024). This ontology emphasises the importance of how people make sense of the world around them and acknowledges the different realities that exist alongside each other. This is prevalent and suited to this research, as it seeks to explore the individual perspectives of participants as well as their collective view. It seeks to highlight how groups can experience the same phenomenon differently, and to explore their perspective and interpretation of their own reality.

A constructivist epistemological position was adopted to guide the exploration of knowledge throughout this research. The goal of this research is to generate and create meaning among different perspectives and realities, not to discover a singular, objective truth (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This epistemological view was fitting to this research as it upholds the understanding that an individual's perspective is based not just on their personal experiences, emotions and interactions with the world around them, but also from their social, cultural and historical contexts for which they exist in (Pretorius, 2024).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks provide a structured, conceptual lens to inform methodological techniques and approaches that seek to explore the research questions and what the research attempts to understand (Maxwell, 2013). Erikson's (1950) developmental theory places emphasis on the different developmental tasks and challenges that each individual faces and focuses on how they navigate and interpret these tasks across different contexts. This theoretical lens guides this research through its exploration and understanding of the developmental time period young women who are involved in the youth justice system are navigating and the influence this has on their experience. This will further inform the analysis and interpretation of the results, guiding the narrative of this research. This supports a relativist ontology as it provides a framework to understand the different challenges young women face throughout their development and how these experiences influence the way they see and understand the world around them. The constructivist epistemological position supports this framework, using Erikson's model of development to guide the exploration of meaning across the different perspectives within this context.

Qualitative Research Design

Young women who engage in offending are a historically under researched and understudied group (Smith & Smith, 2005; Swift, 2011; Smith et al., 2020). Recent research focusing on young women within New Zealand's youth justice system has identified and examined key characteristics of young women who are offending and identified why further research is needed to develop approaches that target their gender-specific needs (Best et al., 2021). This research sought to expand on this literature by involving real-life voices from within

the system, to highlight and explore their perspectives to provide a foundation for positive change.

An exploratory qualitative research design was adopted to examine the experiences and perspectives of young women and those who work with young women within the context of New Zealand's youth justice system. This method was chosen as I wanted the participants' narratives and experiences to guide the research, not any preconceived ideas or beliefs on what the data may highlight, using the data to identify themes and inform the analysis process (Guest et al., 2011). The research questions of this study were intentionally broad as I wanted to be able to provide an overview of the system and how it relates to young women with no bias or intention of swaying the research in any direction.

Research has used a range of different methodological strategies to explore the experiences of young women in offender populations. Common approaches include the use of questionnaires and surveys, focus groups, and individual interviews. Quantitative measures such as conducting large-scale surveys and examining administrative information are useful for gathering a range of data and are particularly helpful when trying to draw generalised conclusions and findings regarding specific populations. However, these methods are typically conducted using closed-ended questions and are limited in their capability to capture the true lived experiences of participants and obtain a deep understanding of the complexities of individual experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The use of focus groups in qualitative research has the ability to capture a range of experiences and real-life accounts at the same time and allows space for in-depth conversation within the participant group, offering significant insight for the researcher. The ability to explore multiple participants' perspectives and ideas at once can be beneficial and show diversity among

groups but can also provide a generous amount of data due to the sample size that can be challenging to analyse, particularly for an inexperienced researcher. Conducting group interviews can also limit the ability to obtain in-depth understandings of individual experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

Lastly, semi-structured, in-depth interviews allow for open-ended and detailed accounts of participant perspectives and holds the ability for further exploration of their experiences and how they relate to the research context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This method is often utilised in smaller sample populations, compared to focus groups that typically employ seven to ten per group, limiting the generalisability of the data across populations and can be time consuming to analyse (Krueger & Casey, 2015).

As this study's focus was to explore young women's experiences of the youth justice system from the perspectives of participants across their differing roles as service users and service providers, a qualitative approach was considered the most appropriate method. While larger-scale analyses may have provided data that was generalisable across this context, it would not have encompassed the real-life voices and the complexities of the system and how it is experienced by the different participant groups.

Through adopting a qualitative approach for this research, it allowed for exploration of both the depth and range of experiences in the court system. I explored different analytical approaches that utilise qualitative methods including grounded theory, narrative analysis and thematic analysis. Grounded theory allows for a dynamic process that grows and changes through interaction and analysis of the data for the purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2010). While grounded theory is widely used in qualitative research and can provide significant insight particularly when there is limited research into an area, it was not deemed

appropriate for this research and its aim to explore perspectives of participants and how it relates to pre-existing theory.

I then explored the use of a narrative analysis approach due to its focus on individual experiences and narratives about particular experiences. While this approach is valuable to understand an individual's experience, narrative analysis focuses more on the structure or chronology of participants' experiences or events with an emphasis on storytelling rather than examining common themes, experiences and perceptions across multiple participants (Souto-Manning, 2014). Reflexive thematic analysis was therefore favoured due to its emphasis on reflexivity, researcher subjectivity and its focus on creating and developing meaning from the data. This approach requires immersion into the data to draw themes and meaning, rather than thinking that the data 'holds' truth that needs to be found (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This reflected the aim of this study in its ability to capture and explore the individual accounts of participants, and how they fit into the collective context of the youth justice system, while being informed by a theoretical framework to assist with interpreting and making sense of the data, but not driving its findings.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited using purposive sampling and were contacted via email (see appendix A) with an information sheet (see appendix B) containing further information regarding the study and what their involvement pertained, as well as the consent form (see appendix C). If participants wanted to discuss further, I indicated that I would be happy to meet with them or be contacted to address any questions or concerns, however none of the participants needed to utilise this opportunity. Most of the participants were previously known to me in a working

capacity and were asked to participate as they were known to have personal experience of the youth justice system or working with young women in this space.

Participants were informed they could choose a location for the interview that they felt comfortable in, or alternatively it could take place at the University of Waikato campus. All participants had a location of their choosing for the interview to take place. Group interviews were offered to participants from similar roles including Police or youth advocates if this was more comfortable for them, however all participants opted for one-on-one, face-to-face interviews. No participants required a support person to accompany them for the interview; however, this was offered.

Participants were intentionally selected based on their differing roles within the youth justice system as both service providers and service users. Group one, service providers were made up of youth advocates (lawyers), youth aid officers from NZ police, and staff who work in youth forensic mental health including a psychologist and a registered nurse. This sample selection is not representative of the entire youth justice ecosystem as some wider organisations presented with different logistical and procedural challenges. However, this research canvasses a number of different roles across the system to provide a range of participants to reflect people within a context.

A research proposal was submitted to NZ Police requesting for the ability to interview their officers and was put before the NZ police research panel. This was approved and I had contact with the area manager for youth and community for ongoing liaison to organise the interviews. It was stated in the recruitment email sent to all participants that involvement in this research had no affiliation with my role in a professional capacity, and that their identity would be protected.

The service user group was to consist of young women who had previous involvement with youth justice and was approached differently. I reached out to youth justice social workers within the area and queried if they knew of any young women who may be interested. Once potential participants were identified, they were sent the recruitment email accompanied by the information sheet and consent form. It was made clear in the email sent to participants that their participation would have no implication on any prior or future involvement in youth justice and in the case that they re-entered the youth justice system, they could request that I have no professional involvement in their case. It was ensured that this was made clear to the participants and that the relationship between me as a researcher and a working professional was separate to minimise any conflicts (Fleet et al., 2016).

In total, 13 participants were recruited and interviewed including 12 working professionals from the service provider group and one young person from the service user group. The service providers consisted of seven youth aid officers, three youth advocates and two staff from a youth forensic mental health service. One young woman who had been involved in youth justice participated in the research as a service user.

Data Collection

Over the course of four months, 13 semi-structured interviews took place with participants and ranged from 25 to 45 minutes. These interviews were audio-recorded on a phone, which participants were aware of and consented to. They were informed that these recordings were only used for the purpose of creating the transcripts and would not be shared outside of this research.

At the beginning of the interview, participants were explained the purpose of this research, and I went over the information sheet and consent form that had been sent out to

participants prior, ensuring their understanding of their involvement in the research. Participants were offered the opportunity to ask any questions and begin with karakia if they wished before the interview began.

The interview questions (see appendix D) were designed to be flexible and act as a guide, allowing the participants to guide the narrative of the interview and leave space for spontaneous questions in response to participants (Braun et al., 2015). The questions were predominantly open-ended, with some accompanying close-ended follow up questions. Participants typically would expand upon their answers without prompting, however could be prompted to go into further depth if necessary. Some questions were adapted or omitted from the interview if they weren't appropriate to the participants role within the youth justice system.

There were two sets of interview questions separated by service providers and service users, with both encompassing three main areas: The Youth Justice System, Young Women in the Youth Justice System, and Support and Interventions.

Youth Justice System

Participants were asked questions regarding their understanding of the Youth Court and the youth justice system. For service providers, these questions were designed to gain an understanding and explore the different perspectives pursuant to differing roles within the system. For service users, these questions sought to explore how the purpose of the youth court translates to young people who are involved in the system. The purpose of this section was to highlight what works and what doesn't work in conjunction with how the system is intended to function.

Young Women in the Youth Justice System

This section sought to explore views of young women in the system and identify the impact this has on their identity (Erikson, 1950; 1968). For the service user group, the questions were targeted towards their view of themselves and their relationships and how this was impacted through involvement in Youth Court. For the service providers, this involved asking about their views on young women who are offending and how they navigate working with them. The purpose of this was to highlight the perception of young women who are offending and identify common experiences to determine what matters and what is important when working with young women in Youth Court.

Interventions

The final section of the interview questions focused on exploring what kind of support is needed in the Youth Court for young women and how the system is set up to facilitate this. This section of questions explored participants' perspectives regarding what they felt were key interventions needed to target the needs of young women, as well as the barriers that they face in accessing adequate support. The focus of these questions naturally skewed into what was missing from the youth justice system as opposed to supports that already are in place, providing future directions in this area.

Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Braun & Clarke (2006) outline a six-phase process for analysis, beginning with familiarisation of the data that involved reading over the transcript's multiple times. This phase was done throughout the process of editing the transcripts. I listened to the audio recording while reviewing the transcripts to ensure that they were accurate and made edits as needed to align with

the audio file. This process assisted with re-familiarising myself with the data following the interviews and allowed me to pick up on emerging themes that had been overlooked when conducting the interviews and deepened my familiarity with the data.

An inductive approach was used to identify themes and generate codes in the data, allowing for a data-driven method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Both semantic and latent codes were utilised throughout the process, with semantic codes being used to identify explicit patterns and surface meanings of the data, utilised more heavily in the beginning phases of coding. I then went through the codes I had generated and re-coded some of the data using latent coding, interpreting the underlying ideas and meanings of the data, resulting in a mixture of both semantic and latent codes (Braun & Clarke, 2015).

I then copied the codes into a separate document and began to organise and group related codes together across two sections: barriers and facilitators and began to develop overarching themes. In this process, a third section was created titled: precipitating factors. While this was not originally an area of inquiry, throughout the coding process I found this to have a meaningful connection to the research and provided further understanding of the data and research questions. I also removed or omitted some of the initial semantic coding that did represent patterns across participants but were not found to represent anything meaningful among the data or in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Once potential themes were identified, I arranged the codes using NVivo, merging some of the codes together to form sub-themes if they shared the same idea in relation to a theme, or smaller codes that I felt fit into larger codes. I went through the data for each code again, removing some that I did not find to fit the code or theme, and in some cases where I had doubled-up data. This process was time consuming, and I continuously developed the codes and

themes as I worked with the data. I went back and forth reviewing themes and adjusting as I developed deeper connections and understanding of the themes. Finally, I analysed each individual sub-theme's dataset and identified which data items to extract to convey the meaning of these themes in the results section that cohesively reflected the sub-theme and showcased diversity among the data (Byrne, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

An ethics application was submitted to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Committee. Ethical approval was obtained on 4 November 2024 (appendix E). Ethical considerations that were identified in the planning phase and throughout the research are outlined below and discussed in detail how they were managed:

Dual-Role

I had a pre-existing relationship with participants in the research in a working capacity and all participants were known to me prior to the interview. For the service providers, this relationship would continue following their participation in the research, so it was important that professionalism was maintained and that participants were aware that this research had no affiliation with my place of work or youth justice, and that all information shared was confidential and only used for the purpose of this research.

I also had prior contact with the young woman who had previous involvement in Youth Court. To minimise any conflicts of interest, I had purposefully only approached young women with previous and not current involvement in Youth Court to optimize participant comfortability. I noted in the recruitment email that should for any reason they re-enter or engage with the youth

justice system following their participation in the research, they would have the right to ask that I do not have any involvement in their proceedings if that was preferred.

I believe that the precautions taken minimised any conflicts that may have arisen due to the dual relationship I had with participants. My role as a researcher was clearly differentiated to participants and I ensured that they were aware that they had complete confidentiality in what was said in their interviews, and I would uphold professional boundaries (Gabriel, 2005). Participants were clearly aware of the dual relationship prior to agreement of participation and were not misled at any point (Fleet et al., 2016).

Confidentiality and Anonymity

To ensure confidentiality was maintained and participants identity was protected, any information that could identify participants was removed when reviewing the transcripts. Any other persons that participants named were also removed from the transcript either by redaction or it was anonymised. Participants were informed that this would happen at the onset of the interview, so that they were encouraged to speak freely in a way that was easy to them, with assurance that this would be altered in the transcript.

It was made clear to participants that while their personal identity would remain anonymous, their participation in the research was categorised into their various roles within the youth justice system, as service providers in their differing professions e.g., a youth aid officer, or as a service user. For the young women who participated as a service user, the limits of confidentiality within some of the other participants who could potentially read this research and identity or recall their case based on possible information was discussed and understood.

Interview Transcription

Interviews were transcribed using secure software Rev (Rev, 2025). Upon receival of the transcripts, I conducted edits and removed any information I deemed could identify participants or anyone they had discussed. During this process, filler words such as “um” or broken sentences in instances where a thought was redirected part-way through were edited in line with the true verbal account. I continuously aligned the transcript with the audio file to ensure the transcript was reflective of the original nature of what was being said as there could at times be discrepancies with the written and spoken words, and I wanted to ensure that the meaning of what participants were saying was reflected in the transcript (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In certain cases when service providers had discussed young people and used details other than their names that could potentially have identified that young person, I made greater edits to anonymise the information whilst maintaining the purpose of this discussion and drew attention to this when transcripts were returned to the participant for review.

In order to minimise the possibility of deductive disclosure being used to identify participants (Kaiser, 2009), I also chose to omit any information that referred to a particular district or area in which participants were based or worked in to protect their confidentiality. Again, I wanted to ensure that participants felt they could freely express their opinions without fear of their identity being compromised.

Participants were sent the edited transcripts by way of email and provided with a two-week timeframe to review the transcript themselves. They were encouraged to remove any identifiable information if they felt it had been missed, or if there were any other changes or comments they wished to make regarding any answers, they were able to do so. This opportunity was given to ensure participants knew that they had the ability to control what information was

being utilised for the purpose of this research (Petrova et al., 2016). I felt this was particularly important given my dual role as for the majority of participants, rapport and a relationship had already been established, meaning that they may have shared more with me or shown more vulnerability and honesty in their answers.

The majority of participants did not wish to make any changes to their transcript, and if they did these were very minor amendments. I followed up with participants if I had not heard back from them via email and in some cases, I was informed in person that they had no issues with their transcript.

Data Storage

All data was stored throughout the research process on a password-encrypted laptop. Any information or correspondence with information such as transcripts were sent electronically by email using University servers. During the data analysis process, data was regularly backed up. Following completion of the research project, the data will remain on OneDrive via University of Waikato and be safely destroyed after a period of five years.

Cultural Safety

Participants in this research came from a range of different ethnological backgrounds. This was not the focus of any selection criteria when recruiting participants. Throughout the data collection phase, I was guided by the principles of Te Ara Tika (Hudson et al., 2010) including *whakapapa, tika, manaakitanga* and *mana.*

The interviews were designed to be participant-led using open-ended questions, allowing participants to hold a *kaitiaki* role in the research and navigate their interview. Aligning with the principle of *Whakapapa,* referred to in Te Ara Tika (2010) as the quality of relationships and

structures that are established to support these relationships, given that I had previously established relationships with participants, it was important that they understood the *kaupapa* (purpose) of this research was for their voices and experiences to be heard and that this was reflected in how the interview was conducted. I also ensured that at the beginning of the meetings, I explained my connection to this research and what I hoped to be able to achieve through their participation, maintaining transparency with them throughout the process.

Tika refers to the validity of the research and how it seeks to prompt positive and transformative change. I sought guidance from and consulted with Māori advisors in the development phase of this research to determine how this research could hold the most benefit within the area and to ensure that the research methodology was culturally appropriate. As Māori rangatahi are over-represented in the youth justice system (Blank-Penetito et al., 2023), it was anticipated that the service user group made up of young people who had been before the youth court would likely be Māori. This was not required in the selection criteria for participants; however, it was deemed to have been of benefit for Māori rangatahi to have their voices heard in relation to this research.

All participants were treated with respect and dignity *(manaakitanga).* It was important that interviews were carried out face-to-face and not rushed, allowing time for *whakawhanaungatanga* to be established in this setting. Participants were invited to bring whānau or a support person if they wished and were in control of the environment in which the interviews took place to maximise participant comfortability, and the opportunity to open and close with karakia was offered. Participants' privacy and confidentiality were maintained throughout the research, and participants were included in this process to ensure that they approved of the level of anonymity provided.

Mana Tangata was reflected through participants' right to voluntary participation and maintaining transparency throughout the process, protecting their power and authority. I acknowledged and respected the mana of participants through ensuring that their delivery of their experiences and views were accurately and authentically upheld in the transcriptions that would be used for the research. Participants were provided further opportunity to review these transcripts and were able to make changes as necessary, upholding authority over their own knowledge and narratives.

Informed Consent

The process of obtaining informed consent was achieved using both written and verbal measures. Participants were sent the information sheet and a consent form to view and consider before agreeing to participate. They were encouraged to contact me if they had any questions or concerns prior to the interview. Information regarding the purpose of the study and what their involvement would entail was provided in written form on the information sheet, alongside the consent form ensuring that they understood their role as a participant (Xu et al., 2020).

Both the information sheet and the consent form were verbally explained to participants at the beginning of the interview to ensure that this was fully communicated and there was an opportunity for participants to clarify if necessary (Xu et al., 2020). Participants gave their verbal consent to continue and signed the consent form. All participants were able to consent for themselves and were aged eighteen or over. The consent form allowed for parents or caregivers to sign in any instance where a participant was under the age of sixteen, however this was not required for any participants. Participation in the research was voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline or withdraw their consent and data from the beginning of data collection, up until two weeks following the receival of their transcript (Dahal, 2024).

Participant Wellbeing

Including young women who had been before the Youth Court in the research was highly important in obtaining perspectives and experiences from both sides of the system. While not intended, it was possible that some of the questions or areas of discussion may have brought up difficult emotions for this group of participants.

Participants were informed at the beginning that they had the right not to answer a question if they didn't want to and could pause or stop the interview at any time. In one case in which difficult topics were discussed, the participant was reminded of their right to not answer when follow up questions were asked and they could remove anything from their transcript if needed.

If a participant were to become distressed during the interview, I would have taken breaks or stopped the interview as necessary, however this did not occur throughout any of the interviews. If ongoing support was necessary due to anything discussed in the interview, participants would have been connected to support services available within the area.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the self-examination process by which researchers examine their own biases, assumptions and values throughout the research process and acknowledge the impact that these can have on the interpretation of the findings (Pretorius, 2024). Having worked in the youth justice space, I came into this research with my own experiences and perspectives that may have influenced how I approached the topic, conducted interviews and interpreted the data. What I had observed in my work is what led to this research being developed with hopes of facilitating positive changes.

My dual role as a researcher and colleague could have had an influence on the research process. Participants may have felt more comfortable sharing things with me due to an already established relationship, or they may have felt less comfortable as the professional relationship would continue once the researcher-participant relationship ended. To combat this, I placed emphasis on informed consent, and sought to provide a safe, non-judgemental space for participants to openly share their perspective with me.

Reflexive thematic analysis holds an interpretive nature, acknowledging that the researcher's subjectivity is not a bias to be eliminated, but a valuable research tool that contributes to the interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2019). I acknowledge that my own beliefs and views were challenged at times, however this was a welcomed element of the research, and I continued to uphold the purpose of exploring differing perspectives and the themes that were drawn from the data reflected that of participants' voices not my own preconceptions.

Results

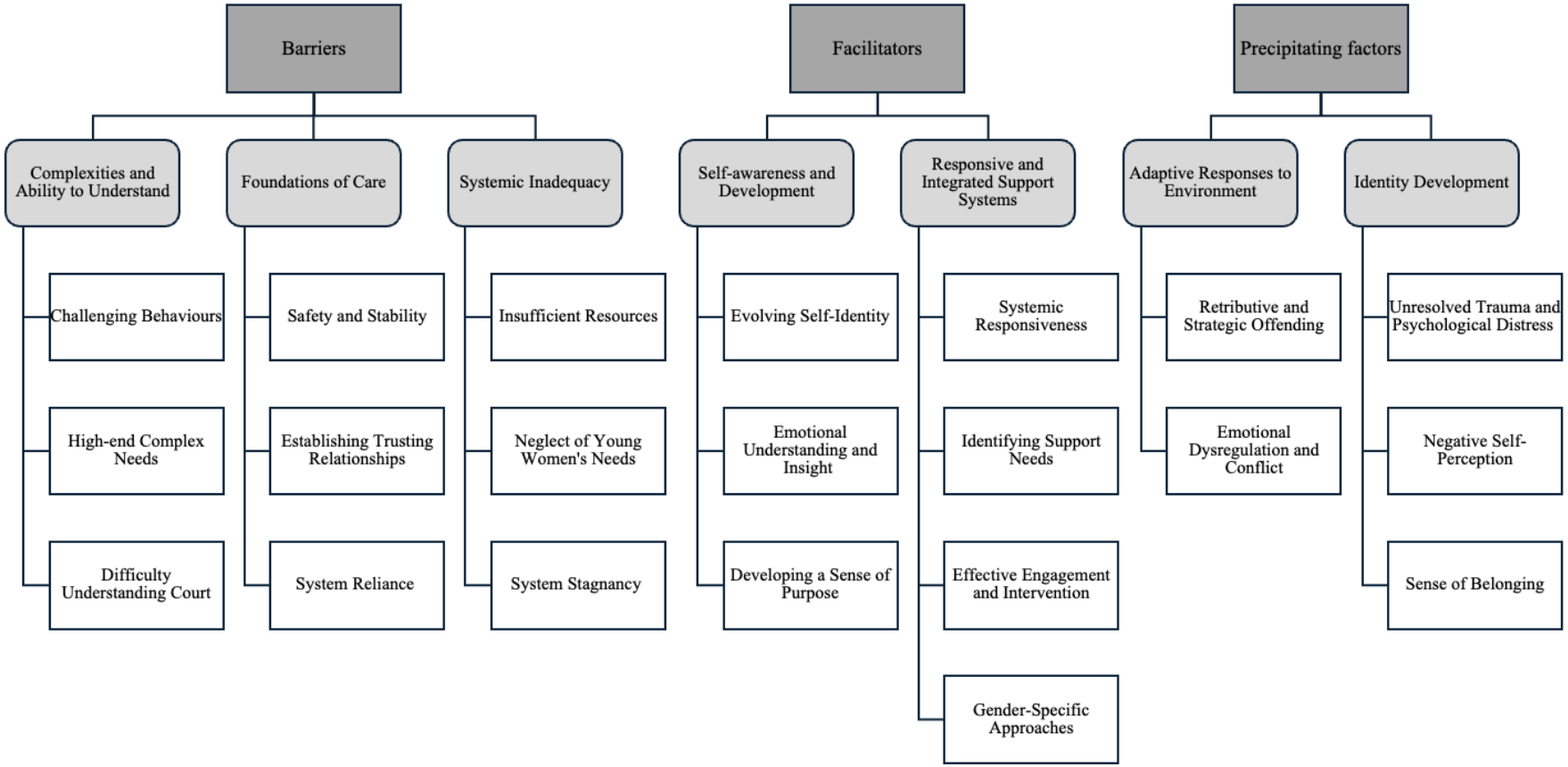
Data collection focused on three main areas of enquiry, the *Youth Justice System, Young Women in the Youth Justice System*, and *Supports and Interventions*. Using reflexive thematic analysis, seven themes were developed across three overarching categories: Barriers, Facilitators and Precipitating Factors. These themes were developed from the data and encapsulate key perspectives and views shared by participants.

The barriers category consisted of three themes: Complexities and Ability to Understand, Foundations of Care and Systemic Inadequacy. Two main themes were derived across the facilitators category: Self-Awareness and Development and Responsive and Integrated Support Systems. Precipitating factors encapsulates two main themes: Adaptive Responses to Environment and Identity Development. Each theme consists of between two to four supporting subthemes as seen in *Figure 2*, that will be explored in greater depth within this chapter.

Themes will be presented with a brief explanation, followed by their sub-themes, with supporting quotes from participants to explore each theme. Sources are listed in accordance with participants' roles. As 12 out of 13 participants were professionals and service providers, the majority of the results are professional opinions across the various different roles. The young woman who participated from the service user group will be presented separately from the professionals.

Figure 2

Overview of Findings by Sections, Themes and Sub-themes



Barriers

This section explores participants' experiences and views regarding the different barriers that are experienced by young women within the youth justice system that inhibits them from accessing adequate support. The themes and sub-themes within this section outline both barriers that young women face as a result of their past experiences, and barriers that lie within the system itself and how it functions.

Complexities and Ability to Understand

This theme encompasses the complex needs and issues that young women present within that can create difficulties when navigating the youth justice system. Participants suggest that the behaviours that present can often appear defiant and can make it difficult to engage. Other difficulties included a lack of understanding of court proceedings that lead to further problem behaviours exhibiting as a protective measure. The sub-themes I developed to explore this theme include Challenging Behaviours, High-end Complex Needs, and Difficulty Understanding Court.

Challenging Behaviours

Many participants felt that young women in the youth justice space tend to present as disrespectful and exhibit challenging behaviours and attitudes that can make engagement difficult or lengthen the court process. Participants contrasted this to their experiences with young males, highlighting the different challenges they experience between the two groups:

> I always find that the girls give us a lot more attitude than the boys. I don't know what it is with girls. Maybe it's just teenage girls…It's quite hard to deal with to be honest. They

> just have no respect and that can be a bit frustrating. A lot of the girls I've had in the youth justice system have also had some really poor behavioural attitudes towards their offending and towards police in general. I feel like they kind of act like they can get away with it to a degree, like, "nothing's going to happen to me". (Police 3)

> It's almost a little bit of shame, whereas you don't see that so much in the boys. Like some boys, yes, but others it's more of a badge of honour. Girls, I think they tend to be a little bit more embarrassed about what they've done and probably a little bit more remorseful once you get below the attitude. You tend to see genuine remorse more from girls. (Police 3)

> I do think a lot of the staying in the system might just be down to choice, in terms of, "I can't be bothered today, I'm not going to do this," or, "I'm not going to go to community work." I think, at an individual level, it's that. You can only do so much for a person before you are actually just forcing them to do something. I think a lot of it is just probably down to choice, but that's probably influenced by stuff going on at home or stuff going on with their boyfriends or stuff going on with other things that we don't necessarily see or hear about in youth court. (Youth advocate 1)

Participants explained that while the initial interaction can be challenging and they have difficulty being able to meaningfully engage, they report a prompt shift in behaviour and a pivotal point in which young women tend to change their mindset, allowing for that engagement:

> It's just the attitude of them. Honestly, at least you can talk to the boys, the girls have a lot of attitude, but they click out of it so much sooner and I think it's a bit more a deterrent because I think girls see that bigger picture or they're a bit more homebody, they like the girl things and things like that, so they do seem to snap out of it quicker. Police 7)

> I definitely think if they don't want to do something, they don't want to do it, so they're quite forward and forthright in their decision making. If they don't want to comply with going to a course or doing something they won't, but equally, what I have found is, once they click and realize that there's a way out and the way out is to just get on with the plan and do what they're supposed to, then they'll do it…I think that's what I've experienced with the few girls that I've had, it's just they're go-getters once they know exactly what needs to be done. Boys are a lot slower on that front, but the girls are a bit quicker to that idea". (Youth advocate 1)

High-end Complex Needs

Many participants described the multitude of significant, and complex needs that young women in youth justice present with cognitively and psychologically, sharing the difficulties and risks that impact how they navigate the court system. Participants described the intersecting of multiple vulnerabilities including developmental issues, trauma and abuse and mental health struggles:

When I first started practicing youth advocacy, it was really rare for a female to actually come to court and then my experience more recently is that we have very high needs young women. They have complicated issues. (Youth advocate 2)

Girls that age, they're hormonal, they're sassy, and their behaviour is that, but it's the extreme, the behaviours are the extreme. (Police 1)

They can often be, I think, more complicated, more complex than assessments of young men because, and this is not to say that young men aren't vulnerable, but there's a vulnerability that women have to somehow negotiate, navigate as part of being a woman that young men maybe don't have to quite the same extent. Young men are often vulnerable as well, and they do get physically and sexually abused and all that. But I think for young women, the vulnerability feels much more acute and real. (Mental health 2)

They've often come from sexual abuse, and this probably is just youth in general, I think we're now experiencing a lot more of the meth babies, who have lots of disorders and also a lot of alcohol, well, actually more drug use probably, getting involved with their male partners, and that's really bringing them on to offend in that way, but also a lot of psychological stuff, and the self-harming, the threats of suicide. (Youth advocate 2)

Participants explained how these presenting concerns and difficulties are so significant and create barriers for young women as the system is unable to meet the need and level of support required to deal with these difficulties:

> It's not something the courts are set up to deal with, it just isn't. The trauma and the damage. (Police 6)

> I wonder if sometimes, when women are offending, because they're generally less likely to offend, I wonder if young women who are offending are typically coping with really significant challenges in their lives. And maybe that might be, in addition to the court just not knowing what to do, maybe also women who present to the court often present with really significant difficulties. Because some of the women that we've seen, they're really up against it. (Mental health 2)

> For girls, I just think they're more needy, and they do need specific assistance. It's multidimensional too, you know? It's drugs, it's self-harming, it's sexual abuse, trauma. It's the whole package, that they really need someone who's specialised who can deal with that. (Youth advocate 2)

Difficulty Understanding Court

Participants spoke about the barriers that stem from young women struggling to follow court proceedings and understand the language used and what it means for them. They also discussed that while they may understand the words being said, the meaning and the impact of the process is not translating as it should:

> You can sit in court in one day, and everyone's talking about the youth, the language that's being used to the young person, they don't get it. They just go, "Yeah." They don't understand it, so we're having to pay people to go and interpret to them what has just been said…There doesn't seem to be, from the young girls, any consequences or understanding of what else needs to happen besides coming to court…I really don't think they understand the gravity of it. They're just doing it because they're told to, whether they understand it or not. You would know if they understood it, because they wouldn't come back. (Mental health 1)

> It's case by case, but a lot of these kids, I don't know if they really understand the gravity of any of it and they may never. (Police 7)

> I think communication is a key factor, so how we talk to our rangatahi and sometimes we need to review the language that we use. I know I've got to check myself about not trying to use legal terms, and even if it's sections and whatnot, just try and use plain language. (Youth advocate 3)

A youth advocate spoke about their experience with a young women presenting with cognitive difficulties and how that impacted her ability to follow and understand court proceedings:

> With her my experience was, at a superficial level, she understood court. I could sit down with her and talk about a case, and she could tell me in a really concrete way what she did

> or didn't do. I think the real concern was just around whether she appreciated the consequences of it. I think that was really where we got, not stuck, but I could see that, at a superficial concrete level she could tell me what she did and didn't do. Whether she got though, that it had a consequence for someone else, I think there was just perhaps not really the empathy there or the insight… We couldn't have long meaningful conversations, because it just doesn't work. It would be those simple things like keeping it short and simple. I couldn't get her to the point though, of appreciating the impact on others, impact on herself. (Youth advocate 1)

The young woman with lived experience of the court system described her experience of trying to follow and understand the language used in court:

> I vaguely understood. They have all those technical terms that I didn't quite get, but they tried to explain it to me and it mostly tracked. I mean, I could pick up on context clues, basically the whole gist of what was happening. (Young woman 1)

In summary, this subtheme outlines some of the difficulties that young women present with as a result of their past experiences and trauma, in conjunction with cognitive and psychological difficulties that outwardly display as behavioural difficulties. The level of care required to adequately address these needs are not being met and can result in young women having superficial understandings of the court process or their offending. These barriers identified reduce the capability for positive outcomes to occur as a result of their youth justice involvement.

Foundations of Care

This theme encompasses the different ways that young women experience and receive care in their lives and whilst they are involved in the system. Participants shared views that young women tend to experience instability and dysfunction in their environments and relationships, impacting how they interact with the system and perceive support. The sub-themes I derived for this theme include: Safety and Stability, Establishing Trusting Relationships, and System Reliance.

Safety and Stability

Many participants reported that the environment young women are living in when involved in Court are often characterised by dysfunction and instability and they often have limited family support. Participants raised that sending young women home to the same environment that their behaviour was created in often reduces the effectiveness of supports and interventions and is something that they find difficult to navigate:

> [It] is probably around trying to support them into an environment where subsequent interventions are more likely to be effective. Because sometimes people are living in situations where you can chat to them and you can do the talking therapies and all that, but they're going back to a situation that's not conducive to them doing well anyway. (Mental health 2)

> If you take them away from their parents, they'd probably be lovely kids. But if we keep sending them home, they're just going to keep repeating the same cycle… Just some

> structure, some love, some attention. Attention is what they need, and they're just getting attention from the wrong voice or the wrong people, which isn't helping. (Police 2)

> I can understand why families want their child or young person at home with them, but in most cases we're opposed to that because the environment that they're in is the environment that's created the behaviour, that's got them there in the first place. To me, it seems pointless putting them back in that environment. (Police 3)

> It falls down to the cycle of family violence, family poverty, and everything else. (Police 5)

> That's probably one of the biggest things, we don't change the home environment. We're putting these kids back in the same place every time. So why are we expecting all of a sudden it's going to work? (Police 7)

> It's rare to see someone who's got all the supports and family. That's rare. We get them, but that usually involves drugs or sexual offending. But they're all from dysfunctional families. (Youth advocate 2)

Participants also discussed the pipeline from care and protection to youth justice involvement, explaining that the majority of young women who end up offending have previously been in state care or have had some form of Oranga Tamariki involvement:

> A lot of them have been in care, been under S101 custody orders, or at least support orders, have been separated from biological family for periods of time. That's very common. I mean boys are often with extended whānau but very rarely come from a S101 kind of background, whereas I think with just about all of the girls that have been involved in serious offending have had a background in care and protection. (Youth advocate 2)

> For rangatahi in the family court jurisdiction that have been involved in the care and protection arena, and that has either been a child in care or a child that has come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki and under custodial or support orders. Unfortunately, it is a pipeline that is a trajectory into youth court jurisdiction…And their offending is really symptomatic of trauma, not having their basic needs as a child met by way of a stable secure home, things that we take for granted. (Youth advocate 3)

One participant discussed the increased risk and vulnerability that comes as a result of their living environments that can be exemplified by being a woman, and how it is necessary to ensure that immediate safety concerns are prioritised:

> Think about the person's immediate safety… sometimes we'll see young women, and the worry is, "Oh my gosh, this person's really unsafe". It's just scary. How can we even walk out of the office and let them walk out the door? They could be raped and murdered tomorrow because that's the kind of place that they're living in… If you're a young man and you're in a really bad home environment and you run away from home, that comes

> with some risks. But if you're a woman that runs away from home and you're living on the street, it comes with a much more added risk, I think in terms of sexual assault and things like that. (Mental health 2)

Establishing Trusting Relationships

Many participants expressed that they found it difficult to establish and build trust with young women in the system, indicating that it can take longer than expected. This was understood to be a result of young women's past experiences that have led them to being more guarded. Participants explained that they have to think about how they are coming across and ensure that they are creating an environment to be able to build a relationship:

> It does take quite a lot more work to gain that trust with them or to get some rapport. Sometimes it depends on the person as well, there's some girls that I just don't click with but someone else might. Sometimes they probably get on better with a male police officer as opposed to a female police officer and you just sort of gauge how you go when you meet them and what it's going to be like. (Police 3)

> I do think it is very hard for them to navigate the court process and the system dealing with different people, how to communicate your views, your needs and your wants to your lawyer, to your social worker, when I think the level of trust with adults is pretty minimal or pretty poor. So, it does take a lot of time to build up some form of rapport…sometimes it's not great but you have to settle for it as good as it gets. (Youth advocate 3)

> This is probably not just for women, but they keep a lot to themselves, I think. I think you don't get to see a lot, and they're less likely to trust…it's probably more difficult to build trust with them because for them trust comes with bigger consequences than it does for men potentially. Perhaps they're more guarded, I think almost a lot of people in the youth justice sector are generally very guarded. They generally struggle to trust others. (Mental health 2)

> I'm thinking of one female that I had that, she wasn't wanted back by her mum, and she had no placements to go to, and that was just a source of pain and anguish and anger for her… She was very, very angry, but she had so much validation to be angry. I always think about how would I feel if I was in those shoes. It does take a while to build up a little bit of trust. I definitely think the way in which you treat the rangatahi, especially females, is important, and small gestures or body language, I think can make or break…I think we need to remind ourselves day-to-day that for them this experience is huge. You're actually a person that has influence over their experience, so just reminding ourselves how we treat them, how we talk to them and their body language. I think it's important. (Youth advocate 3)

System Reliance

Participants discussed the normalisation of the system for some young women who have seen their family in the same situation, or they have been involved in the system for a long time. Participants spoke about the sense of stability and structure young people often feel through the system that can be helpful but subsequently creates a dependency that could lead to reoffending:

There are those that have no stability, so they come back to court because it's stable. You get told you've got to be here. You've got to be there. That's stable stuff, so they look for it. Sometimes they may look for that, because they've been told what they need to do. Otherwise, they're out, going free rein out there and getting up to no good. There's no actual stability of curfews. You have to be home at this time. Sometimes the kids will look for that. When all their matters are finished in court, they may offend again, because you're still getting that stability, because you're not getting it in your own home life. (Mental health 1)

Some of them probably, without having any evidence behind it, re-offend to go back into residence because it's a cool environment for them. They enjoy it, but it also gives them the routine and stability that they're not getting at home. It's a bad thing that they're re-offending to get put back in residence. (Police 1)

I guess it's just another norm for them almost. They see their parents go through it; they then go through it. A lot of the time these families aren't even turning up for them. But then you get parents that do, and they try everything, and these girls just don't want to change until they're ready to change. (Police 7)

It is just an occupational hazard for the kids. They've got to come to court, and they see all their mates. It's just part of growing up for them, which is massively complex. (Police 5)

> I do think sometimes there's a dependency that's created which again, I don't think that's what it was designed for. I think it was designed to assist and hopefully gives some people some tools and families and young people, but I think that's probably a negative consequence as well, is that dependency. (Youth advocate 1)

Overall, this theme highlights the type of environments that young women in Youth Court are often experiencing including dysfunctional families, violence, or care and protection involvement. The complexities of the system and the barriers young women face are encapsulated across this theme, highlighting the difficulties professionals experience when trying to build meaningful and trusting relationships, that once formed can provide such a great sense of stability and security for young women that they become dependent on the system and its support. For young people who have never experienced this before and do not have the same structure and support in their home environment, they may reoffend in order to uphold that sense of stability.

Systemic Inadequacy

This theme explores the systemic barriers that young women face in the youth justice system due to inadequacies within the system stemming across resources available and lack of targeted support that fit the needs of young women. Sub-themes for this theme include: Insufficient resources, Neglect of Young Women's Needs, and System Stagnancy.

Insufficient Resources

All participants shared frustration regarding the lack of resources and funding across all areas of the system and the hindrance this has on young people and what can be done to help

support them. They describe a lack of service providers or long wait lists for existing services, and barriers that come as a result of limited government funding. Participants felt that this impacts the ability for the system to be carried out as intended and these restrictions disrupt their ability to carry out their roles. While this is an issue overall, it was felt that this gap is more significant for young women in the system:

> Oranga Tamariki are very restricted by money, very restricted by providers. There's just not a lot of options out there and that is their job to go out and make those. The Act was designed so you had those supervision orders, that next step and then activity… We've got Start Taranaki if you can even get on, and that's pretty much the only option in the country now, which almost causes you to jump steps and it's not a great system. (Police 7)

> The youth justice system is done to deal with people as easy, as cheaply and as quickly as they possibly can, apart from constant check-ins. (Police 5)

> That there's no services out there for them. If they do the offending, what are you going to do with them? There seems to be, "Oh, we go to mental health." But no, other than that. Very little, which doesn't require coming through a mental health service. That shouldn't be the be all and end all. (Mental health 1)

> I think the challenge that we've got, not just with young women in the courts, but young men as well, is that the interventions needed are usually these kind of systemic things,

which meant working with families and working with them probably quite intensively…We need to be looking at this as a system, not just treating the person. I think that the issues that these women are trying to contend with, they're so big, they take a lot of resource, and I think we are just maybe putting out little spot fires, because it's not the person that's the issue, it's this whole system. (Mental health 2)

Where it fails, though, again, it's a resourcing issue from my experience, there's just nothing here. No services, there's just no providers to do anything…I think that the idea of the system is good, I just think that there's just no currency with it, because of the lack of resourcing. (Youth advocate 1)

We get a lot of recommendations from 333 reports for these girls, but the reality is it's a wish and a prayer, because they're not funding the things that these girls need or the high interventions that they need…They all need more funding and unfortunately, care and protection have a deeper pocket. I mean, we can barely get supported bail. We're on wait lists for mentors, family functional therapy, that's all on, you know, waiting lists. (Youth advocate 2)

For the majority of our rangatahi that are increasingly complex in their needs, I don't think it's serving the purpose that it needs to. I think we can absolutely do better. I think at the moment it is just the ambulance at the bottom of the cliff, and we are just putting a sticking plaster on things at the moment and not resourced - and that's all stakeholders involved in youth court. To be able to really take the opportunity to really address some

> of those motivators and triggers for offending, I think it's a missed opportunity. (Youth advocate 3)

One participant whose role involves writing psychological reports that provide recommendations to the court, discussed the difficulties that come with making such recommendations whilst knowing that the resources to carry them out are not there:

> I could go, "Well, I know that actually the only thing available is mentoring, so I'm just going to write mentoring." That's going to help a little bit, but it's not going to be enough. I feel like I need to write everything that I think is going to be necessary to make a difference. If you can't do it, well, you can't do it. But actually, if you want to make a difference, that's what you need to do… Notwithstanding all the limitations on resourcing and all that, I know that that's really hard and I totally acknowledge that I'm writing recommendations where the social worker probably picks up the report and goes, "What the f***? We can't do all that. We can't do that. We haven't got resourcing or people to do that." And so that's frustrating."

Many participants spoke in particular about the barriers that they face trying to help young women access mental health support:

> I get really concerned in terms of the lack of assistance we get from mental health… It's really good when they don't fall through cracks. (Police 1)

> In terms of the trauma informed counselling and stuff, I mean, I think that usually just throw their hands up and they can't resource anything. What they will tend to do now, this is more with family court sort of things, is hold their hand to try and make an ACC sensitive claim so they can tap into it that way, but they won't fund a specific counsellor for a period of time. I think it comes down to a funding resource issue, unfortunately. (Youth advocate 3)

> I think they often have at a certain level, but they might've been picked up and then dropped again. I think it depends on where they live as well in terms of their access to mental health services. (Mental health 2)

The young woman who had been involved in Youth Court spoke a lot about her experiences with mental health services and the need for more support in this area. She reported she had been trying to get support for some time but felt she was only taken seriously after her offending. Despite her mental health difficulties being recognised, she shared frustrations with the limited mental health support offered throughout the process. She also discussed the isolation that she felt during this time, describing it as a unique experience that she felt not many could relate to:

> I had already been warning them for a long time. I was like, "I am on a short string, just the wrong person yelling at me could make me snap. Please get me the support I need to make sure that doesn't happen". And everybody pretty much went, "Oh, you seem very self-aware. Oh, you seem to have it covered. You seem all good." And I was like, "I'm

telling you that I'm not." And it took something actually happening for people to go. "Oh, she wasn't hyperbolizing." People finally realized, oh, I wasn't kidding about how bad my mental health was and about how I could be a danger in the wrong situation.

I feel like a lot of people going through youth justice or justice in general, will have mental health issues. I know a lot of the people that I did community service with, were already stealing cars at 14. There's something going on in your brain. You need therapy, but what therapy's offered? None. Are there any mental health services offered? No. Really, I think the main benefit would just be get these kids in therapy, get some mental health services involved, more than just driving them to do community service and what else?

More mental health support…I think something specific, I might be shooting too high here, but something specifically for people going through youth justice would be useful because it's a very unique experience. It's not your basic, I was depressed, as a year 9 or I've had anxiety growing up. It's "I've committed a crime and now I'm going through the process of making up for it, being punished for it, as fairly as possible." It's a unique experience. (Young woman 1)

Participants highlighted issues surrounding the rate of young people who aren't in education. They also expressed frustration with how the education system functions for youth who have been involved in offending, reporting that they are often met with significant barriers inhibiting them from returning to education:

> The other thing that is concerning for me is the lack of education around, because they're not in education. They haven't been since they were real young. (Police 1)

> It'll always be going to school, so trying to get them into a school enrolled again is a big one… then if they haven't been in school and they can't read or write, it's just mainly getting them enrolled in school or some type of alternative education where they can go and get credits that they need to get a job later on. (Police 2)

> The sense I get is the schools don't want our youth there, and I don't know if that's just the stigma that surrounds kids with charges pending and things like that, but I just always get the vibe that they're not wanted in the schools. They're on a waitlist to get alternative education, which means that they have to be enrolled somewhere for that to even be looked at. (Youth advocate 1)

> I don't think that their rehabilitative needs are met, and even just talking about exclusions and stuff like that from school, MOE can't even tell a school to take someone back or consider taking someone back. How is anyone meant to get through that system? And there's no recognition for, say being excluded when they're 13 or 14, that they've come a year or their maturity has grown. (Youth advocate 2)

Participants discussed a gap regarding specific education for young women, with limited courses or programmes available that are targeted towards things that young women would be interested in doing:

> Usually, a lot of young women are drawn to, particularly at the moment, there's a thing about doing eyelashes, and beauty, and stuff like that, and that's what they want to do. But that cost, it's prohibitive for anyone. So really, what does alternative education offer girls? I'm not sure that it's that much. (Youth advocate 2)

> Most of the girls are like, "I want to do beauty." I'm like, "Okay, we've got nothing to help with that." (Police 2)

The young women who participated shared her experience having been excluded from education following her offending, and the negative impact this has had for her going forward. She describes frustration with the lack of options there are if someone has been excluded from mainstream education:

> It still got me out of school. So, I couldn't continue doing school and now there's this huge gap in my history that I have to explain. And it's like, "Oh, what's this gap here? What have you been doing in this time?"…The only thing that's hindering me there is my lack of education, which I'm trying to deal with through Te Kura but it's really hard to focus at home. It's really difficult. I wish there was more in-person ways I could do that…I just feel like education is probably the hardest part… I feel like the justice system should make it easier to find options for education and options to not get into trouble in the future. Especially since education has the biggest impact on your future. (Young women 1)

A participant discussed a lack of cultural focus among supports and interventions offered and how there is a missed opportunity for young women in the system to reconnect with their cultural identity:

> I think we have a real missed opportunity in terms of when you look at Te Whare Tapa Whā and you look at the spiritual, inner well-being, especially from a Te Ao Māori lens. To my knowledge there is nothing at this point in time that our social workers maybe could tap into. There's lots of wananga that some organizations do, especially for Māori girls or women. So, I think that would be a wonderful opportunity just to be by the awa or the sea and just really reconnect with the land. An opportunity for them just to learn that and figure out with support around them about what it means for them to be a woman too. I think that would be a wonderful opportunity, something with a Te Ao Māori lens. Because I think there's so many broken females and they're just sort of treading along. (Youth advocate 3)

Neglect of Young Women's Needs

Participants reported frustration over the lack of support and interventions that are specifically targeted towards young women, with the system being inherently focused on boys due to the larger volume of male offenders. They reported that while the system is not purposefully designed around young men, the supports available have become tailored to their interests. Participants felt that it would be difficult within the current system to implement female-focused support due to the cost, lesser demand, and those who provide funding being able to see the benefit of doing so:

I don't even know if there are any services out there for young girls in the area. (Mental health 1)

Because we don't get as many girls as we do guys, everything's always focused around the boys. Then you'll get one girl every 10 guys, which is annoying. It's really frustrating… There's just not a whole lot of support in it for girls. There's a lot for kids, but it's not say, boys can go do this, girls go do this. Boys you can put into sports groups, you can put into the gym and stuff. Girls are different. Girls aren't going to want to go and play sports all the time. There just needs to be other activities for girls that girls actually want to do. (Police 2)

I would imagine that for a system, as we said primarily is set up to deal with guys, dealing with girls is going to be harder and because it's harder, it'll cost more, it'll take more time. And again, we want to be as cheap and as quick as possible. (Police 5)

Unless there were some sort of courses running that were opened up to young women who aren't in the youth justice system as well. But that would require government funding, and they'd have to see the positives and the positive outcomes. (Police 3)

The process is the process. I don't think if you start having separate processes for this and that on gender, you start opening up a whole couple of worms, ethnicity and gender diversity and all that. No, too much. (Police 6)

System Stagnancy

Participants spoke about how they found that the system was not moving with the growing needs of young people and remains stagnant. They spoke about how some issues are so systemic that making the necessary changes would be incredibly difficult, and that the Oranga Tamariki Act itself can be inflexible when working with youth:

> I think the system is set up to address probably old needs as opposed to what we're dealing with now. And because of that, people's needs aren't getting taken care of because things as we say, have to be done in a certain way, in a certain time with certain outcomes. It's not particularly tailorable for each offender. (Police 5)

> The Oranga Tamariki Act, it's black and white in terms of how it's written, but then also I find that it's quite grey in a lot of places too, which I get it, because you're working with young people, and you need to be a bit flexible. (Police 1)

> The idea of the youth court is that that's an opportunity to change that trajectory. So when they come to us, the trajectory is bad, and often very bad. I guess the idea is that hopefully the recommendations that come out of these reports is that the youth court is seen as a pivot point to help these women transition in a better direction. But oftentimes the factors at play are so systemic and difficult to budge they really can be in a position that it's hard to make a big difference. (Mental health 2)

These sub-themes highlight the structural barriers that shape young women's experiences of the youth justice system. Participants highlighted that the system is constrained by insufficient resources, a lack of accountability and an absence of support that responds to the needs of young women. It was also recognised that the system has remained stagnant, with minimal effort made to adapt the system to the needs of its users. These barriers reflect a system that lacks the structure to account for young women and the desire to facilitate meaningful change.

Facilitators

While the previous section outlined the barriers that young women experience within the youth justice system, participants also identified what they found to facilitate positive change and progression within young women. The following themes and their accompanying sub-themes are considered to be the facilitators for young women that support them and promote positive outcomes and engagement with the systems. These were found to be both at an individual level, highlighting the growth young women go through, and at the structural level with reference to interventions and supports that are suited to their needs.

Self-awareness and Development

This theme explores the self-awareness and personal development demonstrated by young women in Youth Court, highlighting how their individual growth, insight and abilities can shape their experience and contribute to achieving positive outcomes. The sub-themes I derived for this theme include: Evolving Self-identity, Emotional Understanding and Insight, and Developing a Sense of Purpose.

Evolving Self-Identity

Multiple participants referenced a point in a young women's court proceedings where something 'clicked', and there was a sudden change in how they viewed themselves and how they engaged with support offered. Participants attributed this to a growth in maturity or age, seeing value in themselves and their worth, and a readiness to change:

> There's been one girl that was just an absolute nightmare where she just kept re-offending and then for some reason something just clicked in her, and she came right. I don't know whether it was an age thing. (Police 3)

> I've got one girl that I've had for quite a while, she just loved to steal cars. I couldn't even count the number of cars that she's stolen, and she's probably been on the books now for over a year. She failed a number of plans. She was having family breakdowns… This girl ended up spending a fair bit of time in residence because she had nowhere to go. She's recently come out and gone to a distant relative and she's come right, she's now engaging with a course. She seems to have had almost an epiphany, whether it's an age thing, kind of matured through the process. She's kept herself out of trouble and I think she probably realised that this was her last chance and being 17 as well adds that little bit of maturity. (Police 3)

> The tipping point, the change has actually been, suddenly the young lady has seen self-value in themselves and has suddenly got plans and that's what's been the tipping point…For the females, I think it is gone back to that, you can see them having some

> self-worth, even if it is rebelling against their own family because of how bad the family is and they can be an atrocious, terrible family, but the young lady's gone, "I deserve better than that." (Police 6)

> I mean, we had one really successful girl, the whole family was offending, the three brothers and her, and she actually pulled herself out of it and became a youth worker, which was really amazing to see, because there's not many that can pull themselves out like that. (Youth advocate 2)

Emotional Understanding and Insight

Participants raised that young women involved in the system have a level of emotional intelligence and awareness regarding their circumstances. Participants suggested that this can facilitate their engagement with the system as they are able to articulate what is happening for them and areas in which they need support and understand the impact of their decisions:

> They're a bit more onto it. They're well-aware, I think, of the circumstances in the system. I think they also seem a bit more emotionally intelligent, just in the sense that they're able to better articulate themselves. They're smart, they are smart. There's no way you could say that a lot of these young people are silly or lacking…they express themselves a bit better, I think, than boys do, but I think just in terms of the process generally my experience is I find that they're a lot more engaging with it, because I think it's just that awareness of their circumstances and self, and what needs to happen and not happen. (Youth advocate 1)

> Look, I think usually the girls are more confident in court than the boys are, anyway, and they are more able to tell you about stuff that's going on for them. It's almost like they want to pile a whole load on. (Youth advocate 2)

The young woman who participated spoke about her experience and understanding of her actions, including how she dealt with this and was able to move forward:

> It felt unfair to my family and to my friends, and I just kind of ignored that part and focused on apologizing, which was easy because I was sorry. I was mostly sorry to his mother, in all honesty. Just because imagine getting a call that your son has been injured and is in the hospital. That sucks. No matter what person you've raised, even if they've done something wrong, even if they are a bully, that's still your son. It's still your child. So, I found it very easy to, I just kept her in mind and found that a lot easier to apologise if I just kept that in mind. (Young woman 1)

Developing a Sense of Purpose

Participants reported that once young women in the system were able to identify a plan or a way forward for themselves, providing them with a sense of purpose, they were then able to take the necessary steps to progress out of the system and complete what they needed to do:

> Girls, sometimes they already have a plan. "Oh, I'm going to go be a beautician." They'll say it's just something like, "When I'm sick of getting in trouble, I'm just going to go and be a beautician, or be a hairdresser." They already have the plans, and so it's their way of trying to navigate, I suppose, the world we live, to them. (Mental health 1)

> I think young women are smart, I think once they decide and know that there's a way out, they'll knuckle down and get through a plan and do what they're supposed to do to get out of the system… I've actually had them verbally express it too. One girl, she got to a point where she just was like, "Right, I'm going to be 18 soon. I do not want to be coming back to court at 18, I need to get this done," and she got it done. I think it took her maybe four to six weeks to get it done, which should be the length of time for any plan, but we've been through the system a bit longer than that, because of the, I suppose, lack of engagement or commitments. (Youth advocate 1)

The young woman discussed the impact of Youth Court involvement and how it changed things for her and how she sees her future. She explained how her experience in the Youth Court felt fuelled by her own ability to take initiative as opposed to the system providing these tools:

> Well, it kind of changed my life entirely. I had completely different goals before... I might re-enrol in a school at some point, maybe try [school] again because they originally rejected me because they didn't have enough support… I really have to do my own research to figure out where to go from here. That was the only in-person schooling option offered and they rejected me…I think in some ways it's good, but you really have to put that effort in yourself, and I feel like a lot of people that I've met going through youth justice system don't have that drive. They don't have those goals yet. They need help kind of seeing a different future for themselves. The youth justice system is not helping them see a different future for themselves at all.…they don't see a future for

> themselves, whereas I do and I'm like, "How can they see a future for themselves?"... I know I have the drive to go and get things myself and go for it. (Young woman 1)

The sub-themes outline the level of growth young women are able to achieve as they navigate the time period in which they are involved in the youth justice system. It also highlights that much of the positive change for young women occurs at the individual level and stems from their insight and awareness into their circumstances. The system is not understood to be something that facilitates change on its own, and its users have to both engage and advocate for themselves.

Responsive and Integrated Support Systems

This theme focuses on exploring the responsive and integrated support systems both within and outside the Youth Court that facilitate positive outcomes for young women in the youth justice system. The sub-themes include: Systemic Responsiveness, Identifying Support Needs, Effective Engagement and Intervention, and Gender-Specific Approaches.

Systemic Responsiveness

Some participants discussed the importance and benefit of the Family Group Conference process and the advantage of having a multi-agency approach to address a youth's offending. This was said to reflect a system that focuses on addressing the causes of offending, rather than focusing on punishment alone:

> With the family group conference and stuff, which is where we do our main work to get that corrective stuff happening, a lot has to be addressed. Accountability and all those

> sorts of things. It comes under the wellness of the young person, which is the first part of it, which is generally the main part of it. There's a place called Fast Track, which basically takes a young offender straightaway, puts in the resources straightaway, puts in simple stuff like a mentor or something like that. That can be really good because it happens straightaway with Oranga Tamariki, Police, Ministry of Education, it's like a meeting that can happen every morning…I think that should be broadened and made bigger for all youth. There are limits. (Police 6)

> Where it works, I think the FGC process is a good thing. It's legislated for, but the idea of coming together to come up with a plan and a way to deal with young people and address different things, like their living situation, education, accountability, I think that's a good process. I think it's designed to get everybody who's involved with the young person to come together and come up with a better way of doing things. Rather than just being all about punishment, it's actually trying to address some of the things that might've got them to court in the first place. (Youth advocate 1)

Participants also expressed how this could be improved within the early intervention space across multiple agencies, particularly when issues are identified in school or they have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki within the care and protection space:

> For some of these ones that are being identified perhaps in the schools, that early intervention space where perhaps they're being identified at high school where their behaviour is a little bit concerning or there's issues going on in the family…early

> intervention I think is definitely the key, particularly with girls. But the answer is government funding and getting people in there and doing that work. (Police 3)

> Absolutely way before, because a lot of these kids have previously entered the system, whether it's in contact with the police by way of, I guess, alternate action plans or intention to charge plans. They have come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki by way of family harm and through the care and protection pipeline. So, there are multitude of opportunities that agencies have had with the rangatahi that could provide an opportunity to have some significant input. (Youth advocate 3)

Identifying Support Needs

Many participants highlighted a young person's involvement in Youth Court is often the first opportunity where issues and needs that have been occurring for a long time are identified by agencies and services. Participants expressed that the Youth Court then provides a platform for these needs to be highlighted and subsequently addressed:

> I think it serves a purpose to have an opportunity to address some of those underlying factors for young people, which we know are complex and quite deep-seated. So, it's a small opportunity to sort of step into their life and try and address some of that stuff. (Youth advocate 3)

> What is working well is they can get you screened by the Youth Forensic Service, see if there are underlying issues, that might be the first time ever that something gets picked up. (Police 4)

> Look, I actually think some girls, I'm really lucky to get them involved in the youth justice system. You almost wish they had kind of got into trouble when they're a little bit younger, it's almost really hard to drag some of them back into a normal life or anywhere near normal life because I think the care and protection space is so quick to get rid of them. (Youth advocate 2)

The young woman spoke about the relief she felt in court knowing that people were finally aware she was struggling after trying to get help for so long:

> I felt pretty bad about what I did but also relieved that people finally knew that there was something wrong with me. People want to be like, "Oh, there's nothing wrong with you." But it's like, there is. The chemicals are off in my brain. There is something wrong. That's kind of the definition of something being wrong with you. I'm on medication for a reason. (Young woman 1)

Effective Engagement and Intervention

Participants spoke about how when the court process is delivered effectively and as intended, its design sets out to leave a positive impact on young people and provide wrap-around support through individualised plans to address their needs. The process is also said to open opportunities for support to continue after court has ended:

> The process is set up to be very personalised to the individual who's going through the process, the family group conference and stuff. What do the individuals need? What does

> the whānau need? So in that way, I think it has more than enough scope and capability to deal with whatever the individual's issues are. (Police 6)

> You'd hope that it would be a positive impact, because youth courts designed to introduce them to services and help, and things like that. I know, again, with one girl who'd finished her plan, post that she still had supports in place, and that support was still going to be there regardless of youth courts and youth court finishing. I think you hope for that reason that they've been able to identify the supports and services that can help them and hopefully catch them before getting to the point of wanting to re-offend or something like that. You hope that they've at least developed those tools. (Youth advocate 1)

One participant raised that young people aren't always ready for certain support at the time they're coming through the Youth Court, but the idea can still be raised, and steps can be taken to ensure they are aware of what supports are out there for when they are ready:

> They have to be ready and willing and quite often at that age too it's that they aren't. But I think it's planting the seed, it's having the conversation and discussing what the process would be if they wanted to. And my understanding is if they did, if their social worker or someone at that point in time was involved to assist them making their ACC sensitive claim, at any point in the future, they could go back to utilize that. So, it wouldn't be such a hard process for when they do need it. I think it's about making sure that there's choice

> and there's information provided, and giving them the autonomy that if they choose, that's up to them, and removing barriers because there are so many. (Youth advocate 3)

A participant from Police shared how they try to ensure the whole whānau is included when supporting young people through the court, and the benefit that they have seen as a result:

> I actually try and take the whole family through the process, because that's how I get the best results. My personal style is, what's my end result and how do I get the process to get it to that end point?… It works when the families engage, when they actually open up those scabs and wounds and go, "This is what's happening, this is why it's happening," and allow people to help them. That's when I get my successes. (Police 6)

The young woman with experience of the Youth Court reported that while the overall situation was not ideal, the support she received during and after being in court, made it a positive experience:

> I mean, it was actually pretty good for me. I kind of joke that committing a crime was the better thing I did, just because school was not working out for me. It still had its downsides of course, it sucked, but overall, the support that I got from it was actually pretty good, especially since I was referred to my youth mentor right towards the end, so I would have extra time with that after leaving.

Gender-Specific Approaches

All participants spoke about the inherent benefit that would come with having gender-specific approaches tailored to the needs of young women in court. Participants drew attention to the scarcity of female orientated interventions and programmes, stating this is not something that is prioritised due to the smaller number of females in court compared to males. Participants' ideas for female-oriented interventions included confidence-building, empowerment, mental health and wellbeing, and a girl-only home or safe space for them to go:

> There needs to be educational stuff around not having to be reliant on boys, on men, teaching them independence, self-assurance and that they can make their own way in life. Something that just is for girls that doesn't include the boys, that just helps to build them up. (Police 3)

> If there was a course we could send them to on how to care for themselves physically, emotionally, and mentally. Those things. How to not get pregnant as a teenager because they don't know, they have sex, now they've got another baby and there's another generation of abuse that's going to happen, I think that is really important. Their parents don't teach them. They're not at school, they're truant, they don't learn all of that. They don't know how to shower properly. I think that would be a great intervention, if there was somewhere that the girls could go like a home. (Police 4)

> For girls, I'm all about empowerment and bringing young girls up… especially if they've come from environments that are broken. You think about the exposure to drugs, alcohol,

> family violence, all those things I think are definitely going to shape a young girl in terms of her mindset and what she's prepared to put up with and not put up with…What I'd like to see, is that it's targeted at mental health and wellbeing, those cognitive issues, but also the personal development stuff. (Youth advocate 1)

> I actually think it would be really nice to have a home that could be almost like ordinary situation, bearing in mind that a lot of them are eligible for the independent youth benefit, but how about setting up a home with some really good carers, but they can also be independent? Because so many of them are determined to keep their independence. How many of them are coming through that can't find an address to go to? I would love to see their basic needs met, get some supports around them. (Youth advocate 2)

This sub-theme showcases the positive impact that can come from having a system that is responsive to the needs of young people. Participants outlined the intention of the system to identify the needs of young people and tailor their plans to target their individual needs and provide wrap-around support. For young women, it was identified that supports tailored to their gender-specific needs are limited, but participants understood and highlighted the positive benefit this would hold if implemented across the system.

Precipitating factors

This final section encompasses the different factors that precipitate and commonly lead young women to offending. This section is important to understand the context in which young women's offending begins and is maintained. While it explores the environment that these behaviours are created in and the negative experiences that young women have had, it also

highlights the impact of the developmental challenges they are experiencing and how building a sense of who they are impacts their youth justice experience.

Adaptive Responses to Environment

This theme highlights how offending in young women can often occur as a response to their environment and as a means of survival. It seeks to identify how and why young women offend and the risk factors they present with. The sub-themes I derived include: Retributive and Strategic Offending and Emotional Dysregulation and Conflict.

Retributive and Strategic Offending

Participants viewed young women as planners when it comes to offending and stated it is often fuelled by necessity or rebellion, differing from the impulsive offending seen in young men. Participants described young women as displayers of strategic and manipulative behaviour, but reported that this is often learnt behaviour as a means to survive within their environment:

> I would call girls manipulators. That's just generalizing. They're a pack of little manipulating girls. It's quite calculated. Probably can be seen as being calculated, some of their charges…the boys, they're more impulsive…But I don't think they're actually really seeing it as they're getting into trouble. It's more of a way of them making, what they think are, adult group decisions, but not taking into account that they're actually hurting people or property, and there's consequences to that. (Mental health 1)

> I think they can be, in a way, much more manipulative than young men. That manipulativeness has got a negative connotation, but I don't know if I mean it in a

> negative way. I think lots of people generally, and particularly people in the youth justice sector, they've had to learn to survive their environment. I think for women, because they're maybe less physically violent, not always, but maybe less physically violent or physically domineering, they've had to learn to manipulate the people around them. (Mental 2)

> [Boys] They do a lot more brazen stuff, so they'll just go out in the public and just do it, and they post it because they want their street cred…The girls do it because in their head, they have process to believe that what they're doing is the right thing to do. (Police 1)
> These girls are pretty bloody streetwise, pretty tough. I mean, normal girls are just catty bitches that might get into a bit of strife at school, but these ones are just, they're streetwise, you know, often had to look after themselves… Unless they're a partner of a gang member, I think the other stuff is just completely different motivation, necessity, need, rebellion. (Youth advocate 2)

> Definitely with females is the sense of... At that age it's very black and white, the sense of you have either wronged me or you have wronged my boyfriend or my friend's friend of a friend. And I heard X, Y, and Z, which quite often doesn't even pan out to be the accurate story. And so, it's retribution, taking it in their own hands. (Youth advocate 3)

Emotional Dysregulation and Conflict

Participants reported that there had been a growth in the number of young women who commit violent offences and that they were typically quite serious assaults. Violence in young women was understood to present differently to violent offences in young men. Participants

described an element of psychological aggression that is more commonly seen among females, and that it typically boils over due to a lack of other outlets for emotional expression:

> For young females, it's normally theft, shoplifting and that goes through to older females as well, but certainly see more younger females now being involved in violent crime as well. It's the assault, not so much ram raids, agg robs and all that, but they certainly are involved in relatively nasty assaults normally in relation to them being slighted or something's happened in a relationship. (Police 5)

> Their offending is more aggressive to people. Aggressive, assaults. And it's serious things, it's not just a slap, it's actually using a weapon. (Mental health 1)

> I think sometimes there's an element of not believing a female can be aggressive or angry or do something as bad as that…When a female comes in and has done something aggressive, there's an element of, "No, surely not, surely not. They weren't involved in that stuff." Everybody is aggressive, everybody is offensive, but a guy is physical, a female is psychological aggression. (Police 6)

> Surprisingly some of the offending can be really high-end in terms of assaults on other females. And I think most of those young people had a history of trauma themselves, and it has been a bit of a self-protection mechanism to lash out before you're lashed at. Very complex…I think for our young females that have come through that there are definitely always factors, either whether it's within their household or their history that probably

> compounds that for them, that they don't have any baseline of emotional regulation or an outlet to be able to tunnel that anger. (Youth advocate 3)

This theme explores how emotional dysregulation and conflict can be reflective of internal struggles that are outwardly displayed through anger and violence. It also presents the idea that young women feel that they need to respond in these ways as it is the only way they have learnt to protect themselves. Participants presented the idea that violence among young women doesn't occur on impulse and is done strategically to obtain certain outcomes.

Identity Development

This theme embodies how young women in the justice system navigate feelings of low self-worth, social pressures and their identity development that stem from the trauma and adversity they have experienced. Further, it identifies how they navigate a need for acceptance and belonging alongside a lack of prosocial role models. The sub-themes I formed for this theme include: Unresolved Trauma and Psychological Distress, Negative Self-Perception and Sense of Belonging.

Unresolved Trauma and Psychological Distress

Participants highlighted the significance of mental health difficulties and unresolved trauma seen within the population of young female offenders. Participants described histories of complex trauma, abuse, underlying difficulties and mental health disorders that drive and contribute to offending:

> There's a lot of mental stuff in the background probably driving that offending… girls offend more because of trauma and because of their mental health… boys do it for more of the anti-social credit and stuff like that, they think it's cool. The girls they don't think it's cool. They do it more because there's something going on. There's underlying causes there. And it's probably more my perception that it's to do with mental health and family trauma, home trauma, they may have been sexually assaulted when they were younger by family members. There's a lot more of that in terms of how females make their decisions. (Police 1)

> There are some girls that have intellectual disabilities that have been abused and stuff when they grow up, and so they're doing what they had done to them when they were younger. (Police 2)

> There's some sort of trauma or some sort of changing point that put them in this position to be here. (Police 4)

> I've dealt with young ladies before and it's basically like dealing with an adult almost, and the women that we come across are often damaged quite badly. (Police 6)

One participant described how young women tend to present with a more typical mental health presentation in psychological assessments. They also explained how trauma plays a more salient role in what motivates offending and heightens the risk of violent offending:

> Typically, there's a lot more kind of, I guess, they would call it kind of internalizing disorders or difficulties. It's a lot more of a typical mental health presentation when we see young women…I think it's often underpinned by distress and relationships, maybe more so than men. And I think probably trauma might have a more salient role... I mean, trauma has a strong role particularly for violence in men, but I wonder if trauma in particular is more salient for women. I think for women who are involved in maybe general offending, maybe a lot of the risk factors are quite similar. But for women who are violently offending, I think trauma might have a kind of stronger presence in terms of a risk factor for them. (Mental health 2)

Negative Self-Perception

Participants identity that they found young women that they encountered in the system to present with low self-esteem and self-worth. Participants felt that typical age group seen within the Youth Court is a difficult developmental time for any young women, however the experiences and backgrounds of this population were felt to exemplify these feelings of low self-worth and self-esteem:

> I wouldn't say typical of women of that age. I think typical within women of that age, within that peer group that is more the antisocial peer group…The kids that we deal with tend to have, I'd imagine a relatively low opinion of themselves that they're in this position. They don't want to be in this position and it's normally down to poverty, family violence, drug addiction, and all the negative things that they've ended up here. (Police 5)

> The ones who seem to get themselves in trouble seem to have low self-esteem. Well, they have a low self-image, they don't respect themselves, and if they can't respect themselves, then other people aren't going to respect them…when a guy is abused against, they're a victim and they fight back. But when a female is abused, especially as a child, it's their self-worth that's taken away and therefore there's no thought of wanting or feeling they should be treated any better. They accept the circumstances where they become victims. (Police 6)

> In terms of typical of that age, when you think about being a female, and you think of sort of the preteen, teenage, it is a... I mean, it's a harrowing time to go through. In any event, your body is doing all these changes and you're not secure in your own skin and you feel that pretty much everyone's down on you. (Youth advocate 3)

Sense of Belonging

Many participants expressed that young women often engaged in offending as an attempt to be accepted within a peer group and are commonly driven by male attention. Participants indicated that young women present with an understanding that their actions are wrong, but the need for acceptance and belonging overrides this. They also indicated that this type of offending from girls does not typically continue, and they are more susceptible to redirection, rather than becoming repeat offenders:

> As a group, they come with some knowledge of what wrong is. They know that. (Mental health 1)

> They just get caught up, and they're inside that car. They don't go through court as often. But they just do it because their boyfriends are there, and they don't come back through court. They're not repeated offenders. (Police 1)

> They're now hanging out with boys and the boys are doing this, and they're like, oh, this is a cool thing, I'm going to go do this. Most of the time when they get caught, the girl's always like, "Oh yeah, enough," and they'll stop and realise what they've done is wrong. (Police 2)

> I think for girls it seems to be just to fit in… It's kind of a peer pressure thing. I think the girls do it because they just get caught up with the boys and they go along and get encouraged to get involved by the boys or they do it because they want to be accepted into a group. (Police 3)

> You can see if there's things that have gone on in the background that forms their worldview about something and their decision making, it's those fires that they then catch up with other antisocial young people. Again, it's not their fault, it's not because they actively choose to be bad, if you could use that word, but it's more circumstances. It's they get together, "Let's go do this" you don't want to be the person left out. (Youth advocate 1)

This theme explores how young women in the youth justice system tend to present with low self-esteem and self-worth, influenced by both their developmental age and the complexities

and adversity they have experienced. This creates a strong desire for a sense of belonging that can then lead to offending acceptance among a peer group. However, participants raised that young women who offend in this context were often more responsive to support and redirection, highlighting that their sense of identity was not yet defined by this behaviour.

Discussion

This research was designed to explore the barriers and facilitators that young women encounter within Aotearoa New Zealand's youth justice system and to determine whether the system was developmentally informed based on an Eriksonian model of psychosocial development. In doing so, this research set out to understand how positive change is understood and observed for young women in the youth justice system and if the system is fit for purpose within this context. Qualitative measures were used to obtain and explore the perspectives of those who worked in different roles across the system and one young woman who had previously been before the Youth Court.

Participants identified a number of barriers young women face within the youth justice system relating to young women's *Complexities and Ability to Understand, Foundations of Care* and a general feeling of *Systemic Inadequacy.* These barriers negatively impact the experience of young women and hinder the ability for them to receive adequate care within the system. Participants felt that the needs of young women were neglected within the youth justice system and indicated that the system is not fit for purpose when it comes to their immediate and developmental needs.

Further, elements both within and outside of the system's mechanisms were identified as facilitators for young women. *Responsive and Integrated Support Systems* were found to be facilitators of positive change when effective interventions are delivered that are tailored to identified needs. A further need for gender-specific approaches was highlighted as something that would be beneficial to young women but was found to be missing from the current system. Young women's *Self-awareness and Development* was found to facilitate personal growth and

was significantly connected to the potential for positive outcomes within the youth justice system.

Lastly, a number of precipitating factors that are connected to young women's pathways to offending were identified. These are important to consider as if they are left unaddressed, they can become perpetuating factors that continue the cycle of trauma and offending. It was found that young women's offending often occurs as a result of *Adaptive Responses to Environment* that highlights learnt behaviour based on a need to protect themselves, often in the context of conflict. This was found to stem as a result of adversity that spanned across their development and was marked by unresolved trauma and instability that creates a pathway to increased risk of offending. These factors were found to negatively impact *Identity Development* in young women, impacting their self-worth, how they perceive themselves and what they believe they deserve.

In this section, the key findings will be presented according to the identified themes and their relation to the research questions and existing literature. Each theme will be examined in accordance with Eriksonian theory and will explore the developmental appropriateness of the system. This section concludes with an outline on the studies limitations and recommendations for further research.

Barriers

Complexities and Ability to Understand

The results show that young women who are involved in the youth justice system present with significant complexities that span across developmental, psychological, social and behavioural domains. Participants identified that young women often have histories of abuse with sexual abuse being increasingly common, along with mental health difficulties including

self-harm and suicidal behaviours. The impact of parental alcohol and drug use in utero was also highlighted as something that has seen an increase and is understood to be a risk factor for future offending. These complexities identified by participants are consistent with previous research that suggest women's pathway to offending is unique and is characterised by persistent and severe trauma (Smith et al., 2020). This history and the pathway it creates significantly increases behavioural and emotional risks (Smith et al., 2020) and the risk of serious and violent offending in young women (Best et al., 2021).

Participants described their experiences of young women presenting with challenging behaviours that on the surface appeared disrespectful and that they lacked regard for their offending and its consequences. Previous literature has reflected similar ideas regarding the external behaviour of young women in Youth Court that at face value can appear rude and disrespectful but is often a protective mechanism that reflects their need for survival (Eivers, 2022). This was further reflected in participants' description of a shift in young women's behaviour following the initial interaction and the suggestion that they would show more remorse over their offending compared to young men who view offending and its ramifications as a badge of honour.

Participants in this study and previous literature (Best et al., 2021) have identified that young women in the youth justice system are often victims of abuse, an experience that would have left them feeling powerless and with a lack of autonomy over their wellbeing. For young women who have experienced this kind of trauma for a sustained period of time, it is likely to have impacted their development and how they perceive the world, in what an Eriksonian model of development would understand as a personal control over their physical competencies (Maree, 2021). Other research has found when interviewing young women in secure justice settings, that

they found it anxiety inducing having no privacy and being held in rooms that staff had visual access to at all times, blurring the line between safety and punishment (Schliehe, 2014). For adolescents who have experienced these levels of trauma, their body can respond in externalised behaviours that appear aggressive and problematic but are reflective of the trauma they have faced (Laricchiuta et al., 2023). The act of being arrested, held in a cell and then brought before a Judge in a courtroom would likely enact feelings of powerlessness that are then exhibited through the externalised behaviours as described by participants.

Further, participants identified concerns regarding the cognitive difficulties that young women present with, and the ability for young people to understand and follow court proceedings. This issue has been explored in New Zealand, with Howard et al. (2021) submitting that young people's communication difficulties being unaddressed compromises their right to a fair process. Even in the absence of cognitive or communication difficulties, participants felt that it was common for a young person to experience difficulty understanding the language used in court. For a young person who is already unnerved by the process, a lack of understanding of what is being said about their case is likely to increase the level of externalised behaviour and invoke feelings of inferiority (Maree, 2021), that inhibit the ability for positive progression through the youth justice process.

The barriers this creates for young women in the youth justice space is reflected in professionals taking young women’s problematic behaviours at face value and failing to understand just how complex their presentations are. Research has highlighted that the narrative that young women are ‘difficult’ and ‘challenging’ to work with leads to a reduced focus on young women in funding and policy making, creating systemic barriers for this group and limits the ability for change to be enacted (Schliehe, 2014).

This highlights the cognitive, emotional and social disconnect for young women and the expectations of the youth justice system that work as barriers to accessing support. It suggests that the system is not developmentally informed in its functionality when dealing with young people who have complex and deep-rooted issues. If these needs aren't adequately understood and space isn't provided to understand where these behaviours stem from, it can further perpetuate feelings of inferiority and reinforce the forming of identity around anti-social behaviour (Modi et al., 2023).

Foundations of Care

The findings relating to foundations of care reflect the basic frameworks that should support young women's healthy development and their wellbeing. The results, however, indicate that the absence of these foundations leads to significant barriers that hinder their ability to meaningfully engage with the support available across the youth justice system.

Participants identified that as a result of growing up in dysfunctional and unstable environments, young women often lack the foundational groundwork for meaningful and effective interventions. It was often stated that while there is the opportunity for good support to be implemented, the Court often sends young people back to the environment that the behaviour was created in, diminishing the possible impact of said interventions. Participants understood this to be a widespread issue within the system that was not specific to young women. However, previous research reports that young women offenders present with a significantly higher risk of experiencing three or more subtypes of child abuse or neglect in the context of family dysfunction, domestic violence and childhood maltreatment compared to young male offenders (Best et al., 2021), identifying this as a significant risk factor for this group.

Earlier studies have also explored the role of multiple early adversities and identified the dynamic processes children go through when adversity is present. It is said that child adjustment is a dynamic process that encompasses three key factors, the attributes of children themselves, characteristics of their families and influences from their wider social environment. These factors are understood to either mitigate or exacerbate children and adolescents externalising or internalising their problems, that can further impact their development (Hayden et al., 2014).

For young women in the youth justice system, the level of instability that is reported in these findings are persistent across all three of these factors and are likely exacerbated more when coming into contact with the youth justice system. Eivers (2022) highlights the prevalence of mood disturbances, behavioural difficulties and inability to trust that is seen in young women in the Youth Court and suggests this is reflection of unresolved trauma. Without safety and stability, young women lack the foundation to be able to reflect and plan for their future as they remain in survival mode and are more heavily focused on having their immediate needs met (Douglas & Plugge, 2008).

Participants' accounts of the difficulties they face when trying to establish meaningful and trusting relationships with young women is reflective of this level of childhood difficulty. From an Eriksonian perspective, this would reflect adversity that begins in infancy that is marked by the developmental stage Trust vs. Mistrust and is characterised by care and trust related needs that when unmet, impacts the ability to trust others and the successful development of later developmental stages (Maree, 2021). Without a basic level of trust, it is difficult for professionals in the system to connect in the way that is required to make change, and the system's functionality and rigid process was not understood to be reflective of the level of vulnerability that is present. Participants expressed that it takes time to develop these kinds of

relationships that enable the ability to support young women and get to a level where they are able to engage meaningfully.

The impact of this is also likely to carry on into adulthood, where young women who have had youth justice involvement have an increased risk of further negative life outcomes including abusive and violent relationships and high rates of mental health difficulties (Smith et al., 2020; Best et al., 2021). Erikson's model categorised this stage of development as Intimacy vs. Isolation that occurs in early and emerging adulthood and is reflective of the type of relationships people seek out and maintain with people they can trust (Maree, 2021). Failure to fulfil the previous developmental stages and maintain an understanding of healthy and supportive relationships continues to perpetuate the cycle of abuse that these young women have often experienced and adds to their victimisation and trauma (Smith et al., 2020).

Participants' accounts of this suggests that there is a level of disconnect between the functionality of the youth justice system and the developmental needs of young women, reflected by the limited time and space they have to build the level of trust needed to rectify the disruption in their development. Young women need to be provided a level of emotional safety to be able to progress and accept support (Smith & Smith, 2005).

Further, difficulties can arise as a result of the positive support that the youth justice system provides. Participants' experiences suggest that there is a level of reliance on the system that stems from the lack of stability young women have experienced and a level of normalisation that impacts the ability for accountability and restoration. For many young women who have experienced the level of adversity and neglect as described, the system was understood to provide the structure and stability that was missing from their lives. Participants raised concerns regarding the rate of reoffending, suggesting that for many young people the system allows for

their basic needs to be met and therefore increases the risk of young people reoffending to maintain that level of support.

Previous research has identified this as a concern particularly for young women in the system, and outlines that the youth justice systems often fail to provide a continuity of care once a young person exits the system (Smith & Smith, 2005; Douglas & Plugge, 2008). Participants indicated that this was not how the system was designed to function, and the recent Ministry of Justice (2024) report on youth offending outlines a growing rate of significant complexities in the youth offending population. This suggests that the level of need exceeds what the system was designed to account for, leading to a system that is reactive, and the interventions that initially help to stabilise a level of care, turns into a maintaining factor for continued youth justice involvement.

Systemic Inadequacy

The analysis identified structural and systemic difficulties across the youth justice system and its associated supports that create persisting barriers for young women. These difficulties reduce both the effectiveness of the system and the level of developmentally informed support, resulting in young women remaining entangled in the system. This creates challenges for professionals as the ability to make changes sits at a level higher than them, leading to the system remaining unsupportive of young people.

Participants described having limited access to service providers, funding, therapeutic interventions and culturally responsive resources that were identified to create disadvantages for young people in the system, more so for young women who typically present with a range of significant needs. Without adequate resourcing the youth justice systems risks imposing further harm and institutionalisation of young people by not addressing the needs that lead to their

offending. This can in turn lead to disruption in their identity development due to a lack of positive support and increases the risk of their identity forming through an antisocial lens.

Young women were identified to present with a variety of social, cultural and psychological needs that create multiple vulnerabilities that increase their risk of negative outcomes and the opportunity to build life-skills and prosocial self-concepts. These vulnerabilities, combined with a lack of sufficient support increases their already high risk of negative life outcomes (Smith et al., 2020; Best et al., 2021). Girls in the system are considered to be more complex and were understood to require more time, resources, and money that participants felt were unlikely to be provided in the current state of the system.

There was an understanding that while not explicitly pursued, the system has by default become tailored to male-centric needs and therefore misses the key developmental focus that surrounds identity and belonging that differs between young women and men. Research has identified that the male-focus begins with the risk assessment tools that are designed using male populations and are based on their needs, failing to acknowledge that the risk factors may be different between genders (Braithwaite, 2023). For young women, a higher value is placed on approval from others that constitutes their feeling of self-worth (Modi et al., 2023). This indicates that their involvement in the youth justice system presents a crucial time to develop and provide a sense of achievement in positive forums (Swift, 2011).

Lastly, participants suggested that despite awareness of the growing needs of this population, the system has not adapted. There was an identified stagnancy within the system, and the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989 was understood to be limited in its capability to adapt to the changes in the needs of young offenders. The period of adolescence according to Erikson is characterised by growth and adaptation (Maree, 2021) that clashes with a stagnant system,

blocking the ability for new pathways to develop that can support positive change. It also presents a barrier for further research to prompt future developments, if the system is unwilling to change or adapt.

Facilitators

Self-awareness and Development

The personal development and progression made by young women in the youth justice system was identified as a facilitator for growth and sets the foundation for supportive relationships, experiences and interventions. Participants highlighted that they had observed clear changes in young women throughout their journeys in the system, understood as a growth in maturity and reflecting on who they were and what they wanted for their future. While some participants suggested this surrounded a fear of aging out of youth justice and transferring into the adult justice system, participants described watching as young women began to see their self-worth, assisting them to make the necessary changes to exit the youth justice system.

These findings support Erikson's (1950, 1968) developmental theory and the stage of Identity vs. Role confusion that reflects an adolescent's exploration of who they are and what is important to them, including their morals and values (Klimstra et al., 2011). This sudden change described by participants may reflect what has actually been an ongoing internal journey for young women before they even enter the youth justice system. Previous research has shown that creating an environment that fosters care and support and focuses on building meaningful and trusting relationships supports young women who are offending to form a healthier identity and develop the skills needed to create emotional safety (Smith & Smith, 2005).

The phenomenon that participants described as something ‘clicking’ in these young women may therefore reflect the impact of the support put in place through involvement in the youth justice system, such as stable relationships and wrap-around support. When the youth justice system functions in this way, it allows young women to have the foundation for meaningful and positive change that comes as a result of the growth in their self-identity and being able to recognise their self-worth.

Young women were identified to have a level of emotional intelligence and insight that participants felt facilitated engagement within the system through self-awareness and understanding of their circumstances. Participants outlined that young women are often able to articulate what is going on for them and demonstrated that with adequate support, there is a level of trust established where they feel comfortable sharing what is going on for them. This is important as historically young women have been criminalised for their behaviour and attempts to seek help, causing a strain in their sense of self and their identity (Schliehe, 2014). These findings suggest that the system provides space for emotional development and a level of support from professionals that facilitates young women getting the help and care that they need.

This level of emotional intelligence was also reflected in the young woman's account of her experience and the level of empathy she displayed in relation to her offending. Despite possible feelings of justification, there was a basis of moral reasoning and acknowledgement of wrongdoing. Erikson’s (1950, 1968) model suggests this reflects a successful developmental trajectory and the building of identity achievement in which a stable set of morals and ideals are solidified. This level of insight can help target the causes of offending and help young women to understand their triggers and how this impacts their behaviour and choices. Research has

indicated that this has a greater impact on positive outcomes and change as opposed to focusing on moral reasoning that is still developing (Klimstra et al., 2011).

This further supports the development of a sense of purpose that participants attributed to young women learning how to navigate the world and starting to see and plan for their future. However, it was suggested that this was not necessarily a result of the system, with the young woman who participated stating that it required initiative and a level of maturity and insight that she felt was not reflected across the typical population of youth offenders. An individual's sense of self is understood to stabilise in children that follow a normal developmental trajectory (Modi et al., 2023) which is not commonly seen among young offending populations, suggesting that it may require a significant amount of time and support to get to that same level.

The findings suggest that the youth justice system may be developmentally informed on the basis that a young person has followed a successful trajectory of development and has met their developmental milestones in accordance with Erikson's (1950) model. However, the reality for many young people in the youth justice system is that they have experienced significant challenges across each phase of development. This creates additional challenges when they become involved in the youth justice system as they navigate the development of their identity as well as the effects of trauma and previous developmental needs being unmet. For young women who have developed a level of emotional intelligence and insight into their behaviour, this can act as a facilitator and promote positive change across the interaction with the youth justice system.

Responsive and Integrated Support Systems

When working as intended, the system itself was identified as a facilitator for young women through its ability to identify needs and provide targeted, individualised support.

Participants identified that system responsiveness was reflected through early intervention practices and the identification of needs at the earliest occasion upon entering youth justice. The FGC process was understood as the main facilitator for this, allowing for a multi-systems approach to target youth offending. Research focused on New Zealand's youth justice system supports the idea that the FGC process is the most effective and unique practice for targeting the needs of young people and has been praised for its versatility and flexibility (Slater et al., 2015). The responsivity of the system and the focus on employing a multi-system approach to youth offending is reflective of the developmental variability of this population and the complexities that span across young people, their whānau and their social environments that impact their wellbeing (Hayden et al., 2014).

Participants reported that the interaction with the youth justice system is often the first time that certain needs or previous short fallings across a range of systems are identified. This is supported by previous literature that notes many of the factors that precipitate offending such as abuse go unreported and undetected, only brought to the attention of professionals in the court setting (Best et al., 2021). While this is not ideal and is consequential to other systemic failures, this element of the youth justice system is possibly the most significant facilitator for young women in the system.

Both professionals and the young woman acknowledged the benefit of involvement in the system through its ability to identify and acknowledge specific areas of need. This reflects a developmentally informed system that provides a forum to identify areas of need that often have spanned across the entirety of young person’s life and begins to implement support that is focused on these areas of deficit. For young people that have experienced adversity throughout their life and challenges in their identity development, the identification of needs and attendance

to foundations such as building trust and developing autonomy over their life (Maree, 2021) facilities their developmental progress and the successful development of their identity (Klimstra et al., 2011).

Effective engagement and implementation of interventions was identified as the facilitator for leaving a lasting, positive impact on young women. This stems from the identification of the needs and focuses on ensuring that the delivery is consistent and effective. It was noted that some young women aren't ready for the kind of support that may be available to them and suggested that if the system is functioning as intended and reflective of young people's autonomy to make their own decisions, it is the system's duty to ensure they are aware of the support available to them. Again, this relates to the continuity of care that has been outlined as necessary to assist with reducing reoffending, and also to account for the environmental circumstances that continue to exist once the court process is over (Douglas & Plugge, 2008).

The most important facilitator for young women's success in the youth justice system was identified as gender-specific approaches and interventions that focused on gendered needs and activities that girls and young women enjoy doing. Participants reported that this was not something currently being implemented in the youth justice system and there was a scarcity of female-centric programmes due to the minority status of young women compared to young men. This issue has remained consistent across historical research (Smith & Smith, 2005; Swift, 2011) and has continued to be identified as a growing need in New Zealand (Best et al., 2021; Doyle, 2022; Eivers, 2022).

Participants envisaged support for young women centred around empowerment, independence and self-assurance alongside a focus on their mental and emotional wellbeing. These supports identified by professionals reflect an understanding of the developmental stage

young women are in and a recognition of the impact this has on their behaviour (Hayden et al., 2014).

While it is not currently reflected in New Zealand's youth justice system, gender-specific approaches have been shown to positively impact the lives of young women who are offending (Smith & Smith, 2005; Gobiel et al., 2016) and acts as the pioneer for positive outcomes within this population. Despite identification from within the system, the systemic barriers remain in place, with funding holders and policy makers continuing to not see the benefit due to their minority status in the system (Arnull, 2009; Braithwaite, 2023).

Precipitating Factors

Adaptive Responses to Environment

The findings suggest that the behaviours that lead to offending in young women often form as an adaptive response to their environment. While young women were said to exhibit ‘manipulative’ and ‘calculated’ behaviours according to participants, this was understood in the context of survival and as a means of gaining control over a situation. These survival tactics are closely linked to the lack of safety and stability that is prevalent among young women who offend and supports the notion that this group are often focused on trying to have their basic needs met, as opposed to offending motivated by antisocial attitudes or behaviours (Douglas & Plugge, 2008; Bui et al., 2021). This also perpetuates the idea for young women that their offending is rational and done out of necessity, reflecting the challenges they have faced throughout their development that have led to mistrust of others (Erikson, 1950) and increased sensitivity to threats (Modi et al., 2023).

Participants' views regarding violence in this group reflects previous research that highlights the normalisation of violence as a means of protection or rectification of wrongdoing, and that their behaviour is representative of internal conflicts (Swift, 2011). The impact of this is centred in the way that the justice system deals with this type of offending. Punitive measures are not going to be successful and fail to provide the social and emotional skills that are required to target the cause of the offending (Mitchell, 2018). If the system fails to recognise these challenges and complexities, it leads to the criminalisation of behaviours rooted in trauma (Eivers, 2022) and reduces the ability for developmental progress, increasing the risk of recidivism.

Identity Development

The pathways to offending for young women were identified to be influenced by deep set trauma and family adversity. As previously identified, the youth justice system is often the first point of contact with any support services, meaning that this trauma is often unresolved and has manifested into significant mental health and behavioural difficulties. Participants' accounts of young women presenting with typical mental health presentations identified a higher rate of internalised disorders, consistent with previous research (Hayden et al., 2014). While these challenges are commonalities across all young people who offend, the presentation and motivation for offending was understood differently across participants, with trauma playing more of a key role in young women's offending.

From a developmental lens, the childhood adversity that young women present with, as outlined in previous research (Smith et al., 2020; Braithwaite, 2023) and in this study, appear to significantly contribute to the rate of internalised behaviours seen in young women. This level of trauma and adversity negatively impacts the ability to develop a stable identity and can lead to

difficulties forming trusting relationships and establishing a sense of self (Dereboy et al., 2018). Research has found that young women and indigenous youth in offending populations experience a significantly higher prevalence of mental health disorders and adverse childhood experiences that can lead to further barriers within the system (Akpanekpo et al., 2025). Additionally, adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of violent and serious offending in these populations (Craig et al., 2017), highlighting a range of interacting risk factors that can contribute to poor outcomes for young women and system involvement.

While these are understood to be precipitating factors that increase risk of involvement with the youth justice system, they can become perpetuating factors once they are in the system due to the lack of trauma-focused and gender-specific support. The findings of this study suggest that the youth justice system is more equipped and designed to manage young men whose trauma or adversity is more likely to present through externalising behaviours (Braithwaite, 2023).

It was identified that young women in the system often present with feelings of low self-worth and have diminished self-esteem as a result of their experiences that extends beyond the typical wavering self-concept that is common in adolescence. Young women are understood to be more socially driven in what conceptualises their feeling of self-worth and are often motivated by the appraisal of others. Following a normative adolescent trajectory, this is said to stabilise and the outsourcing of approval declines as an adolescent develops their self-concept. However, for those who have disrupted development, their sense of self can remain fixated on others' perceptions and lead to an unstable sense of self and sense of belonging (Modi et al., 2023).

For young people who aren't engaged in typical adolescent environments such as education, they lack a sense of achievement and social reward that is critical to development and provides the earlier foundations for the Identity vs. Role confusion stage (Erikson, 1950).

Academic achievement is understood to be particularly important for development in girls and young women (Smith et al., 2020), indicating that disengagement from education and the lack of perceived achievement presents as a significant risk for offending.

The findings suggest that young women's backgrounds of adversity and familial conflict lead to them searching for approval among antisocial peers or others who are engaged in offending behaviours. This is not an uncommon theory in young people who have experienced developmental disruption (Klimstra et al., 2011; Modi et al., 2023), however participants differentiated this from typical antisocial patterns and indicated that young women who present to youth justice often know right from wrong and respond more positively to prosocial interventions. This is known as moral development that begins in childhood and extends into adolescent development, where they are presented with multiple sources of authority that often have opposing views spanning across different areas of their social environment. A core part of identity development is understood as the act of choosing a pathway or "truth" (Côté & Levine, 2016) and reflects participants narratives that these young women are not recidivist offenders and understand the consequences of youth justice involvement.

When examined together, negative self-perception and desire for a sense of belonging highlights the impact that adversity and trauma have on young women's beliefs about themselves and their perceptions of the world around them that influence their contact with the youth justice system. They are considered to be precipitating factors that manifest prior but can be amplified after involvement through misconstruction of their behaviour and deeming it as "wrong" or "bad" (Eivers, 2022). Interventions and support for young women need to focus on building their self-worth and helping to foster a positive identity to mitigate and redirect the impact of these precipitating factors.

Limitations

This research includes some limitations that should be acknowledged when interpreting the data and analysis. A limitation of this study is that there were limited voices from the service user group, with recruitment only being able to obtain one of the intended three young female participants. This is reflective of the nature of the sample population and limitations due to the desire to not include any young women who were still engaged in the court process for ethical reasons. This limits the scope of this research and its ability to understand the lived experiences of young women in the youth justice system, with a heavier weight on professional experiences and perspectives. The sample population was somewhat limited and did not canvas the entirety of professionals that work within the youth justice space, meaning that this research is not a complete look at all of the different perspectives that exist in the Youth Court.

Further, participant recruitment was conducted in only one location with participants being connected to the same Youth Court geographical area. This could have some implication on the generalisability of the results across New Zealand, such as participants' accounts of resourcing issues both in the Youth Court and from service providers, as it may be an isolated issue among this particular area. However, this issue is more prominently focused on the lack of female-focused resources that is consistent with other research (Best et al., 2021) and has been identified as an issue by the former principal Youth Court judge (Doyle, 2022) and former Children's Commissioner (Eivers, 2022), suggesting that this is an issue nationwide.

Lastly, given the reflexive nature of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019) it is possible that the analysis was subject to researcher bias. My dual role as someone who works in the youth justice space and as the researcher may have had implications as to how I interpreted the data, and I may have been unconsciously influenced by my own experiences and views. This

is something that is difficult to eliminate in qualitative research and reflexive thematic analysis is interpretive in its nature that acknowledges this difficulty (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This research is reflective of one interpretation of the data under the guidance of a specific framework to generate meaning and could be interpreted differently by another researcher if they employed a different theoretical framework. The findings of the research were largely in line with previous theoretical interpretations of youth offending (Klimstra et al., 2011; Hayden et al., 2014; Modi et al., 2023) and built upon areas identified in prior research that centred on young women (Smith & Smith, 2020; Best et al., 2021), suggesting that researcher bias did not significantly impact this research.

Implications for Future Research

The findings of this research may serve as a foundation for future research that centres on the voices and experiences of young women from within the system. This research provides a developmental perspective to understand and highlight the experiences of young women who offend. This is significant as research that uses Erikson's (1950, 1968) theory as a lens to understand offending populations typically centres on young male offenders (Klimstra et al., 2011). Future research could investigate the role of intersectionality more closely, particularly in relation to ethnicity. This research could be replicated with a wider sample pool that includes participants from different regions and could extend to other roles that are included within the system such as social workers.

As outlined throughout this study, the need for gender-specific approaches for young women in the system has been identified as an issue for some time, and yet there continues to be a lack of targeted support available to them. This research and supporting literature have identified that for change to be implemented, governments need to be able to see the proposed

positive impact in order to allocate funding. Future research could focus on the development and implementation of a female-centric youth justice programme that addresses the needs of young women in the system and their pathways to offending. The voices of young women who have first-hand experience of the system would be key to the development of this kind of programme, as well as key stakeholders such as Oranga Tamariki that were not included in this research. This would also require evaluation of the programme and its effectiveness that could provide evidence to policy makers and funding holders that this is necessary and beneficial for promoting positive outcomes among this group.

Conclusion

This research set out to explore the experiences and perspectives from within New Zealand's youth justice system to understand how it functions to fit the developmental and gender-specific needs of young women who offend. Stemming from a range of research that identified young women to be underrepresented in youth justice discourse, this research utilised a qualitative approach, together with reflexive thematic analysis to examine the data from professionals and one young woman from within the system.

Multiple themes were developed that present a range of factors that interconnect to create barriers to young women accessing adequate support including their own social, cognitive and psychological difficulties, disrupted foundations of care that keep them trapped in survival mode, and a system that is not adequately equipped to handle their needs. Facilitators of positive change were reflective of young women's own awareness, positive identity development and responsive systemic support. Participants identified a number of factors that precipitate offending behaviour, including adaptive responses to challenging environments and unresolved trauma that impacts their identity development and increases the risk of offending. These findings highlight an experience for young women that is highly complex and is shaped by structural and individual factors that influence the impact of the youth justice system.

Future research directions could look to build on these findings through the inclusion of young women's voices to compare the wider themes that could then provide scope to design and implement a female-centred programme within the youth justice space, that would work to lift some of the barriers identified and increase the rate of positive outcomes driven by the system.

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Appendix A: Email to Participants

Service user group (young women)

Kia ora “name”,

I am currently doing my Master’s research at the University of Waikato, and am hoping to obtain perspectives and experiences from young women who have previously been involved in the Youth Justice system in New Zealand and would be incredibly grateful if you considered being a part of it. This research is not associated with the Court or justice system and participation is solely for the purpose of this research.

The information sheet attached outlines more detail and I am happy to answer any further questions you may have. Any participation in this research will be confidential and your identity will be protected at all times, including after the research is finished.
If you choose to participate, this will have no implications on your current or previous involvement in youth justice.
For any reason, if you are ever before the Youth Court again, you have the right to ask that I do not have any involvement in your case, if you do not wish for me to be involved. If you have any further questions regarding your privacy, please let me know and we can discuss this further.

Ngaa mihi
Jade

Service providers (professionals)

Kia ora “name”

As you may know, I am currently completing my Master’s degree at the University of Waikato. My research is looking into how the youth justice system is set up to fit the needs of young women. I am currently recruiting participants for my research, which hopes to include key stakeholders such as yourself. Further information is detailed in the information sheet, and there is also a consent form attached that you can look over.

If you wish to participate, you will be kept anonymous and this research has no affiliation with my place of work or Youth Justice.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please let me know.

Ngaa mihi
Jade

Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Seeking your perspective: Is the Youth Justice system fit for young women?

What are the barriers and facilitators that young women in Aotearoa/New Zealand face when they are involved in the Youth Justice system? I am seeking your perspective to help try and find the answer.

You are invited to take part in a master's research project being completed by Jade Main through the University of Waikato that seeks to investigate and gain insight to what is currently working for the young women navigating the Youth Justice system, and what areas of the system are not working as well as they could be.

I am asking those who have personally experienced the Youth Justice system or work within the space to share their perspectives and views in the hopes that it can lead to positive changes. You are being asked to take part in an approximately one-hour, voice-recorded interview. This can be at a location you feel comfortable in, otherwise will take place at the University of Waikato campus. If you would prefer the interview to be completed in a group setting with others, that can be arranged. You are also welcome to bring a support person.

The purpose of this research is to gain your perspective and what you believe to be important within this area. You have the right to not answer any question asked or discuss anything you do not want to. Your participation is completely voluntary. Your involvement is solely for the purpose of this research and if there are any conflicts of interest involving myself, this can be discussed and managed accordingly.

Confidentiality:

- Your identity will be kept confidential and anonymous.
- Any information that could identify you from your interview, will be removed from the transcript.
- You will have the opportunity to review this transcript and can ensure that all identifying information has been removed.
- The original transcript of the interview will only be seen by myself and Armon Tamatea (supervisor).
- The data will be stored securely throughout the research process and will be safely destroyed five years after completion of the research.
- The research findings will be reported in a thesis that will be published on the University of Waikato's Research Commons - https://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/

Should you wish to withdraw from participating:

- You have the right to withdraw consent at any time before the interview and at any point during the interview.
- Once you have received a copy of your transcript, you have up to two weeks to withdraw your consent.
- To withdraw consent, utilise the contact details as printed below.

Thank you for your consideration. If you would like to accept or decline this offer, or if you have any further questions, please contact me at jm307@students.waikato.ac.nz. I am also happy to meet with you prior and discuss any concerns prior to the interview.

Contact details:

Researcher: Jade Main - School of Psychology, University of Waikato
Email address: jm307@students.waikato.ac.nz

Supervisor: Armon Tamatea
Email address: armon.tamatea@waikato.ac.nz

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION of ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Seeking your perspective: Is the Youth Justice system fit for young women?

CONSENT FORM

I have read and understand the Information Sheet that was provided to me. I understand the research I am being asked to participate in. Any questions I had, have been answered to my satisfaction and I understand that I can ask any further questions at any time. I have had enough time to consider if I would like to participate and I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I can withdraw from the research at any time up to two weeks after I have received the transcript of my interview.

1. I understand that I have the right to not answer any questions during the interview and I can stop the interview at any time.
2. I understand that my participation in this study is confidential and that no material which could identify me personally, will be reported in the findings of this study.
3. I understand I will receive a copy of the interview transcript and can raise any concerns I have with the information shared.
4. I agree to participate in the interview as outlined in the Information Sheet.
5. I agree for my interview to be used for this research.
6. I would like to receive a copy of the research findings (YES/NO) *(please circle)*.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ consent to participating in this research.

OR

I _____parent/caregiver of _____ consent to their participation in this research.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Email address: _____

(The copy of your transcript and findings will be sent to this email address once it has been completed).

Appendix D: Interview Schedule

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

DIVISION OF ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

Interview Schedule for Service Providers

1. What is the focus of your role within the Youth Justice system?
2. What do you understand to be the purpose of the Youth Court?
3. From the point of being charged with a crime, what is the court process meant to be?
    a. What parts of the system work as intended?
    b. What parts of the system aren't working as intended?
    c. What happens instead? - Why do you think this is?
4. What is your experience working with young women who come through the youth court?
    a. When they first come to your attention, are there any particular things that you think about?
    b. What are the commonalities that you see across the young women in this group?
    c. Are these commonalities or experiences typical of young women that age?
    d. How do you think this impacts how they navigate the court system?
    e. What are the common motivations for offending? Are these different from boys?
    f. What do you think the long term impact is on these girls from having involvement in youth justice?
5. Are there any supports or interventions that you typically see more often on girls' plans?
6. What are the key things that interventions need to focus on for young women?
    a. Is this currently implemented?
    b. Is the system set up to do this?
    c. What could be done differently?
7. What are the barriers for young women in the youth justice system?
8. What keeps young women in the court system?
    a. Do you think that this is a reflection of the system?
    b. How could we combat this?
9. What do you think is missing from the current system to promote better outcomes for young women?
    a. Is this possible with the way things currently stand?
    b. What would be the potential outcomes?

10. What is the impact of having a system that is set up to address the needs of young people in court?

Interview Schedule for Service Users

1. What did you know about the youth court before you were involved in it?
2. From your perspective, what do you think is the purpose of the youth court?
3. Can you tell me about your experience coming through Youth Court?
    a. How did you feel throughout that process and having to be in court?
    b. Was the process explained to you?
    c. Were there people who helped you understand what was happening?
4. How would you describe your life before you came to Youth Court?
    a. Were there things happening that you feel led to you offending/coming to Court?
5. How did you feel about yourself during this time?
    a. How were you treated by the people in Youth Court?
    b. How did this impact how you felt about yourself? (positively or negatively)
    c. Did any of your relationships change during this time?
6. What kind of support did you receive throughout your involvement?
    a. What support did you find helpful?
    b. Was there anything that wasn't as helpful?
    c. Do you feel like you had enough support to deal with what was going on?
7. Were there any things that you found challenging throughout the process?
    a. How were you supported through this?
8. Did the process feel like it was set up to help you?
9. How has the experience of being involved in youth justice changed things for you?
10. What kind of things are important to you?
    a. Have your views or beliefs changed after being involved in youth court?
11. How do you see your future?
12. What do you think could help others who are experiencing similar things to what you did?
13. What would you want to change about the youth court system, to make it better for young people?

Appendix E: Ethical Approval Letter

Te Wānanga o Ngā Kete | ***Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences***

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Jade Main
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Associate Professor Armon Tamatea

School of Psychological and Social Sciences
Psychology Programme

4 November 2024

Dear Jade

Re: **FS2024-52: Young women and the New Zealand Youth Justice System**

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee. We have reviewed the final electronic version of your application and the Committee is now pleased to offer formal approval for your research activities.

We encourage you to contact the committee should issues arise during your data collection, or should you wish to add further research activities or make changes to your project as it unfolds. We wish you all the best with your research. Thank-you for engaging with the process of Ethical Review.

Kind regards,

Dr Oleg Medvedev, Deputy Convenor
Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics