

Institution: London South Bank University		
Unit of Assessment: 20 – Social Work and Social Policy		
Title of case study: Understanding and reducing violence against children and young people		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2008 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Andrew Whittaker Tirion Havard	Associate Professor in Social Work Senior Lecturer in Social Work	2005 – present 2007 – present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: October 2017 – December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The case study details a programme of research focused upon understanding and reducing violence towards children and young people that has led to a reduction in violent crime (London, UK) and improvements in professional child protection systems (Queensland, Australia):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The first research strand focussed upon youth violence and led to a London local authority recommissioning its gang services, resulting in a reduction of 34% in knife crime involving injuries and a 27% fall in overall knife crime in the following 12 months. • The second research strand relates to a model of understanding professional decision-making applied to a child death inquiry in Queensland, Australia, resulting in a new quality improvement service and changes in organisational policy, staff training and support. 		
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>This case study represents a programme of research from 2008 to 2020 led by Dr Whittaker, which has led to a body of knowledge examining how the risk of violence to children and young people can be reduced. This work has had positive impacts in knife crime reduction and policy change.</p> <p>The first strand considers youth violence relating to street gangs, beginning with the <i>Postcodes to Profit</i> study to understand youth violence linked to street gangs in Waltham Forest, London (Funder - London Borough of Waltham Forest, 2017-18). This study [R1, R2, R3] developed a gang evolution model to understand how gangs have changed in the past 10 years since a previous landmark study (Pitts, 2008) in the same area.</p> <p>The research design for the <i>Postcodes to Profit</i> study comprised two stages and was multi-method, with three distinct research methods: interviews; focus groups; and documentary analysis. The first stage consisted of qualitative semi-structured interviews (n=31) with ex-gang members, gang-affected youth, police officers, criminal justice workers, local authority workers and voluntary sector grassroots workers. This work was combined with a documentary analysis of information from local agencies. Once the entire dataset from stage one had been analysed, stage two was undertaken: the preliminary findings were tested with a series of focus groups (total n=37) of key stakeholders from police and criminal justice agencies, local government agencies and the voluntary sector grass roots organisations.</p> <p>Outcomes of the <i>Postcodes to Profit</i> study [R1, R2, R3] were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A gang evolution model was developed that explains how street gangs have evolved from an early 'recreational' stage focused upon defending postcodes, into a more organised and profit-oriented 'enterprise' stage; 		

2. Gangs at the 'enterprise' stage rejected visible signs of gang membership as 'bad for business' because they attracted unwanted attention from law enforcement agencies;
3. Gangs at this stage were recruiting girls and increasingly younger children (11-15 years) to transport and deal drugs as they were deemed less likely to attract police attention;
4. In their recruitment, gangs particularly focused upon children who were at the periphery of education, e.g., in pupil referral units, persistently absent.
5. Faced with a saturated drugs market in London, gangs moved out of the city to capture drugs markets in smaller UK towns in 'county lines' activities;
6. This more business-oriented ethos has changed the meaning of both territory and violence. While gang members in the original study described an emotional connection with their postcode, territory is increasingly regarded as a marketplace to be protected; and
7. Similarly, violence has moved from a means of expressing gang identity to being increasingly used as an instrumental means of protecting business markets.

The second body of research originated from a study of how child protection professionals assessed the risk of violence and abuse towards young people [R4, R5]. The underlying original research (2008-14) had a multi-site ethnographic study design that completed twenty-four interviews and forty days of observations. This study developed a theoretical model for analysing decision-making by examining the vulnerabilities of individual decision-makers to cognitive biases and by examining organisational factors in the decision environment.

As a leading researcher in the field of risk and child protection, Dr Whittaker was approached by the court system in Queensland, Australia as part of an inquiry following the high-profile death of a mistreated child known to child protection services. The court commissioned an analysis of case notes and witness statements using the theoretical framework developed in the original research [R4, R5]. Documentary analysis of approximately 2,500 pages of case files and transcripts of interviews with 10 practitioners and managers was completed using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

The study used the theoretical framework developed by Dr Whittaker [R4, R5] about decision environments to analyse psychological biases and organisational factors. The Queensland analysis [R6] found:

- Organisational factors, such as a problematic management structure and poor support, yielded a problematic decision-making environment and contributed to avoidable errors and inconsistent practice; and
- Practitioners had made a number of predictable errors due to psychological biases that impaired their judgement. This included not recognising when parents were being deceptive and not remembering key aspects of risk assessment during home visits.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

R2, R3 and R4 are published in rigorously peer-reviewed journals. R2 (UoA 03) and R3 (UoA 17) are submitted as outputs for REF2021.

[R1] Whittaker, A. J., Cheston, L., Tyrell, T., Higgins, M. M., Felix-Baptiste, C., & Havard, T. (2018). *From Postcodes to Profits: How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest*. London: London South Bank University.

[R2] Whittaker, A., Densley, J., Cheston, L., Tyrell, T., Higgins, M., Felix-Baptiste, C. and Havard, T. (2020) 'Reluctant Gangsters Revisited: The Evolution of Gangs from Postcodes to Profits'. *European Journal of Criminal Policy and Research*, 26, 1–22. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10610-019-09408-4>.

[R3] Whittaker, A., Densley, J. and Moser, K. S. (2020) 'No Two Gangs Are Alike: The Digital Divide in Street Gangs' Differential Adaptations to Social Media', *Computers in Human Behavior*. Available Open Access at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2020.106403>.

[R4] Whittaker, A. (2018) 'How do child protection practitioners make decisions in real life situations? Lessons from the psychology of decision making'. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48 (7). pp 1967–1984. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcx145>.

[R5] Whittaker, A. (2014). *Professional judgment, practitioner expertise and organisational culture in child protection: an ethnographic study* (PhD thesis, Tavistock Clinic and University of

East London). <https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.676117>.

[R6] Whittaker, A. (2020) Independent expert report concerning professional decision making following the death of Mason Jet Lee held in the Coroner's Court of Queensland, Australia. DOI: <https://doi.10.13140/RG.2.2.28645.01767>

Funding:

From Postcodes to Profits: How gangs have changed in Waltham Forest. Waltham Forest Council, £48,158, 2017-18. PI: Dr Andrew Whittaker. Competitive tender process.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Serious youth violence study in Waltham Forest

Whittaker's *Postcodes to Profit* study enabled Waltham Forest Council, the Metropolitan Police Service and other agencies to redesign their strategies and policies to respond to the new risks identified. As a result of the study, Waltham Forest Council and partner agencies responded by allocating an additional GBP806,000 (£806k) of funding over four years to redesigning their gang strategy and reshaping their existing gang prevention programme, on top of the existing GBP2,200,000 (£2.2m) projected budget [S1].

As a direct result of the research [S1], Waltham Forest Council introduced the following changes:

- Recommissioned all of its gang services to move away from the previous focus on gangs at the 'recreational' stage to address the new risks posed by gangs at the newly identified 'enterprise' stage.
- Funded its first ever financial investigation initiative to address how gangs at the 'enterprise' stage are financially focused and seek to hide their activities [S2].
- In response to the *Postcodes to Profit* report's finding that gangs were increasingly using girls and younger children because they are less likely to be suspected by the police, the Council:
 - Embedded gender responsive service delivery across all programmes [S1] to reduce the involvement of girls in gangs;
 - Introduced a new team for the under 13-year-olds who were vulnerable to gang involvement; and
 - Allocated an additional GBP350,000 (£350k) for an evidence-based Lifeskills resilience promotion programme with primary school children, starting in Year 4 (8-year-olds). This enables children to develop critical thinking skills to enable them to resist gang recruitment at a later age, typically around 11 years.

Finally, the report highlighted how gang involvement has a significant impact on the mental health of young people and, in response, the Council developed a range of trauma informed interventions. These included two evidenced-based interventions, EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprogramming) and Non-Violent Resistance (NVR), funded by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit (GBP50,000 (£50k) over two years).

The change in strategy enabled Waltham Forest Council and the Metropolitan Police Service to successfully disrupt gang activities in drug markets, including a financial investigation team to seek to trace the most senior gang leaders. This led to:

- A reduction of 34% in knife crime involving injuries and a 27% fall in overall knife crime in 12 months following the publication of the report and the service redesign [S3].
- The *Postcodes to Profit* study drew together information from gang-involved young people as well as multiple agencies to identify the central role of a key drug market. In response, a joint operation on this drug market by the Metropolitan Police and the Council led to a 60% reduction in grievous body harm (GBH) and wounding offences in comparison to previous years [S4].
- The *Postcodes to Profit* study also highlighted how gangs recruited young people who were on the periphery of education and the Council achieved a reduction of almost 20% in persistent absence, leading to 19,573 fewer pupils who were affected [S3].

- First cohort of primary school children on the evidence-based Lifeskills resilience promotion programme achieved the best progression rates seen in the UK [S3].

The study was referenced in a House of Commons Debate by Stella Creasy MP (Walthamstow) (Lab/Co-op):

“We know the gangs are changing. In my borough of Waltham Forest—what happened there has led to this debate—the problem was territory a few years ago. We have fantastic research on this by... [Andrew Whittaker]: young people felt a sense of pride in being in a gang with other local people and said that that was who they were. Now, it is a commercial enterprise that is driving the toxin of drug dealing in our communities. There is a business ethos, as... [Andrew Whittaker] calls it, and young people are being sent through county lines all around the country to make money for the elders.” [S5]

The *Postcodes to Profit* study has had impact across and outside London. For example, Dr Whittaker was invited by the London Borough of Enfield to be a Commissioner for their Poverty and Inequality Commission. The Commission was chaired by Baroness Tyler of Enfield and run by the Smith Institute. Dr Whittaker’s *Postcodes to Profit* research directly influenced the Commission’s recommendations [S6]. For example, the *Postcodes to Profit* study had shown how children outside of education were vulnerable to being recruited by gangs. This led to the recommendation that the Council should work with schools to set a target to reduce the use of fixed-term and permanent exclusions (Recommendation 15, S3). Another example is the emphasis in the final Commission report on the importance of prioritising youth employment opportunities to rival the economic offer by gangs identified in the *Postcodes to Profit* report (Recommendation 17, S3). These recommendations were accepted by Enfield Council when the final report was launched at the House of Lords in Westminster in January 2020 [S7].

The *Postcodes to Profit* report has been influential nationally in shaping understanding of how street gangs have changed. For example, the Head of Staffordshire Youth Offending Service [S8] stated that the research shaped their understanding of how gangs were operating and had helped them to understand that they had a problem in their area.

Analysis of professional decision-making for child death inquiry in Queensland, Australia

The final judgement of the court following the inquiry devoted nine pages to the findings of the analysis and confirmed that the Queensland government had accepted all of the 10 recommendations made by Dr Whittaker [S9]. As a direct result of the report, the Queensland government (which serves a population of 4,700,000, including 1,170,000 under-18s, and responds to 129,000 child protection referrals each year) identified the following changes [S9]:

1. Development of a practice focused, multi-team branch called Child and Family Practice Connect located in the department’s central office. Its role is to promote consistency and quality in practice across the state through the development of practice resources, practice standards and rigorous review and feedback processes.
2. Introduction of training to increase awareness of cognitive biases and their potential influence on risk assessment.
3. Introduction of training on parental deception in their core, four day “Safe and Together” training module and introduction of accredited ‘Safe and Together’ trainers in each region of Queensland.
4. Development of Structured Decision-Making Safety and Risk assessment card wallets for easy prompting during home visits.
5. Introduction of the Integrated Client Management System prompt scripts in electronic assessment and case planning forms.
6. Strengthening of practice panel processes, case consultations and complex case clinics supported by additional resourcing.
7. Development of a supervision framework, including a component to address emotional support and promote emotional safety in front-line practitioners.
8. Development of the REFLECT coaching program that matches coaches and practitioners to provide mentoring and a peer support system.
9. The matrix model of management identified in the analysis as highly problematic was discontinued.

10. Introduced key changes in child protection procedures to avoid unnecessary delays. For example, decision-making will not be delayed if the key meeting is not quorate.
11. Review of workloads for staff and health and wellbeing of staff as a whole.

The then-Executive Director of Child and Family Operation at the Department of Child Safety, Youth and Women in the State of Queensland testified to the impact of Whittaker's work [S10].

'One of the things we appreciated about Dr Whittaker's report was that he understood and explained the complexity of the decision-making environment in child protection work. He explained about the stress that child protection work has for individual workers and understood and made explicit the resource constraints of child protection services...He reflected how child safety officers have to make decisions based upon a considerable volume of information, which can be really difficult to analyse and synthesize...The acknowledgement of these factors was very meaningful for us as recipients of his report.'

Dr Whittaker's report was credible, succinct and easily digestible. It was reassuring to know that he clearly understood the contexts that influence child protection decision making.'

The changes implemented as a result of Dr Whittaker's recommendations will benefit the children receiving services in Queensland as well as the 1,110 child safety officers and 200 senior team leaders.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [S1] Testimonial from Waltham Forest Council on the impact of Dr Whittaker's work.
- [S2] Waltham Forest Council publishes ground breaking report that shows how gangs are more money than territory orientated compared to a decade ago
- [S3] Waltham Forest Violence Reduction Annual Report 2019:
- [S4] 38 per cent decrease in violent knife crime following Operation Langdale and St James Street pilot.
- [S5] Hansard: Knife Crime Volume 653: debated on Thursday 24 January 2019 <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Commons/2019-01-24/debates/A70F0AA4-4B01-4E7A-8331-5EBC67CE8DDB/KnifeCrime?highlight=waltham%20forest#contribution-7DF4E37C-CC22-4CC7-AF94-ED174A0265DA>
- [S6] Testimonial from Enfield Council on the impact of Dr Whittaker's contribution to the Poverty and Inequality Commission in Enfield
- [S7] Final report of the Enfield Poverty and Inequality Commission
- [S8] Testimonial from the Head of the Staffordshire Youth Offending Service.
- [S9] Findings of the inquest into the death of Mason Jet Lee confirming the contribution of Dr Whittaker's analysis to the inquiry and the government's response to his recommendations (pp.54-62).
- [S10] Testimonial letter from Queensland Government.