



**CONTRIBUTORS TO CRIMINAL BEHAVIOURS AMONGST JUVENILES AT DURBAN YOUTH
CORRECTIONAL CENTRE: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY**

BY

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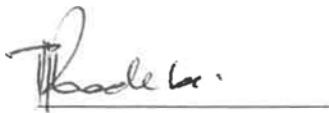
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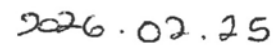
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DECLARATION

I, Thandekile Loveness Radebe (Student No. 34779175), declare that this dissertation, *Contributors to Criminal Behaviours Amongst Juveniles at Durban Youth Correctional Centre: A Qualitative Exploratory Study*, is my own work. All sources used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



Signature



Date

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my late nephew, Mphathi Nhlokomo Dlamini, who passed away at the age of 17, and to all juveniles who lost their lives due to crime. It is further dedicated to victims of crime who have lost loved ones or continue to experience unresolved trauma, including sexual, emotional, and psychological abuse. May God grant you strength every day to see tomorrow and overcome the past.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CC	CORRECTIONAL CENTRE
CJCP	CENTRE FOR JUSTICE AND CRIME PREVENTION
CREC	COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
DCS	DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES
DOJ	DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
DYCC	DURBAN YOUTH CORRECTIONAL CENTRE
KZN	KWAZULU-NATAL
NGO	NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS
NICC	NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COORDINATION COMMITTEE
NYCA	NATIONAL YOUTH COMMISSION ACT
SA	SOUTH AFRICA
SANDF	SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DEFENCE FORCE
SAPS	SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICES
SSA	STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA
UN	UNITED NATIONS
UNISA	UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

ABSTRACT

In South Africa's criminal justice system, juvenile delinquency is still a major problem, especially in high-crime cities like Durban. The factors influencing the criminal behaviour of fifteen (N=15) male juveniles at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC) were examined in this qualitative exploratory study. The study used semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis, based on Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST), to identify the lived experiences and pathways leading to criminality. **Findings:** Four main themes were found to contribute to offending trajectories: (i) the absence of positive role models and the fragmentation of families; (ii) the widespread influence of gang subcultures that offer a substitute sense of belonging; (iii) systemic socioeconomic despair brought on by high unemployment and poverty; and (iv) institutional failures within the social welfare and educational safety nets. **Conclusion:** According to the research, juvenile criminality may be a maladaptive reaction to ongoing structural and environmental stress. In an attempt to restore a sense of agency, vulnerable kids in urban townships frequently turn to delinquent peer groups due to status frustration resulting from relative lack. **Recommendations:** The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) should switch from offense-based to factor-based rehabilitation, with a focus on family-mediated reconciliation. In addition, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR)-aligned vocational training and "trauma-informed" aftercare must be given top priority by policy in order to alleviate the structural obstruction of genuine economic opportunities.

Keywords: *Gang culture, juveniles, offenders, offensive behaviour, socioeconomic, General Strain Theory, Durban Youth Correctional Centre, Strain, Rehabilitation*

OKUFINGQIWE/ ISIFINGQO SOCWANINGO

Umnyango weZobulungiswa eNingizimu Afrika, ubugebengu obenziwa abantu abasha busalokhu buyinkinga enkulu ikakhulukazi ubugebengu obusezingeni eliphezulu emadolobheni amakhulu anjenge Theku. Imithelela ebanga izenzo zobugebengu ebantwaneni besilisa (N=15) eDurban Youth Correctional Center (DYCC) yahlolwa kulolu cwaningo olujulile. Ucwaningo lusebenzise izinhlokhono ezingahlelekile ngokuphelele nokuhlaziya ngokwezihloko, okususelwe kwi Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST), ukukhomba izimpilo zansuku zonke nezindlela eziholela ebugebengwini.

Okutholakele: Izindikimba ezine ezibalulekile ezibe nomthelela emizileni yobugebengu: (i) ukungabi khona kwabantu abayizibonelo nokuqhekeka kwemindeni; (ii) umthelela osabalele wamasiko angaphansi kwamagenge (gang) onomuzwa wokwamukelwa okungamelayo; (iii) ukuphelelwa ithemba kwezomnotho nezenhlalakahle eziyisisekelo ezidalwa ukungasebenzi kanye nobubha emphakathini; (iv) ukwehluleka kwezikhungo ezibhekela ezenhlalakahle nezinsiza zokusekela ezemfundo.

Isiphetho: Ngokocwaningo, ubugebengu babantu abasebasha bungaba yimpendulo engazuzisi kwingcindezi yezakhiwo nezemvelo eqhubekayo. Emizamweni yokubuyisela umuzwa wesimo esiphuthumayo, abantu abasha abasebungozini emalokishini isikhathi esiningi ziphendukela emaqenjini obugebengu.

Izincomo: Umnyango Wezokuhlunyelelwa Kwezimilo (DCS) kumele usuke ekulungisweni kwezimilo okusekelwe ebugebengwini noma okusekelwe kwicala, kubukwe ekulungisweni okugxile ezimbangeleni nasekubuyiselweni kobudlelwano bemindeni. Ukwenezela, Inguquko Yesine Yezimboni, ukuqeqeshwa kwezobuchwepheshe okuhambisana nezimfuno, ukunakekelwa kobuhlungu bengqondo kumele kunikwe indawo yokuqala ngokwenqubomgomo ukuze kuphakanyiswe ukuvimbela kwezakhiwo zamathuba omnotho angempela

Amagama abalulekile: Isiko lamaqembu amagenge (gang), intsha, izephulamthetho, ukuziphatha okungafanele, ezomnotho nezenhlalakahle, umkhuba wokucindezela okujwayelekile, Isikhungo sokulungisa intsha saseThekwini, ukuhlunyelelwa kwezimilo

CHAPTER 1

1.1 Introduction and background of the study

Evidence suggests that South African young people between the ages of 12 to 21 are at the highest risk of committing crimes in the society (Badebhorst, 2021). Juveniles continue to be the group most affected by, and involved in, offending behaviour in South Africa. Although individuals between the ages of 15 and 24 are formally defined as “youth” by the United Nations General Assembly (United Nations, 1985), South African legislation provides a more specific framework for the criminal justice system. The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) further classifies “youthful offenders” as individuals up to the age of 25, while the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 defines a “child” as any person under the age of 18. The Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998 and the 2005 White Paper on Corrections legally require the DCS to provide age-appropriate rehabilitation. These regulations prescribe that juvenile offenders be accommodated in a safe, secure, and supportive environment that prioritises rehabilitation over punishment (Department of Correctional Services, 2023).

According to the Republic of South African Gazette (2020), the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) is mandated to detain incarcerated individuals in a safe, secure, and humane environment, while ensuring that rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are effectively implemented to reduce the likelihood of reoffending. This directive is derived from the Criminal Procedure Act, 1977 (Act 51 of 1977), the Correctional Services Act, 1998 (Act 111 of 1998), the 2005 White Paper on Corrections in South Africa, and the 2014 White Paper on Remand Detention Management in South Africa (South African Gazette, 2020). This legislation further enables the Department of Correctional Services to contribute to the preservation and development of a just, secure, and peaceful society. Within this mandate,

the definition of offending behaviour is central to Correctional Practise. Divergent viewpoints about the precise boundaries of criminal behaviour are reflected in scholarly discourse. Although the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) mandate and the previously described legislative frameworks provide the institutional background for this study, it is crucial to make clear that an assessment of rehabilitation outcomes or recidivism rates is not the main emphasis of this research. Rather, the aetiological predecessors of the particular demographic, socio-political, psychological, and cultural factors that initially drive young people into the criminal justice system are the focus of this study. Any meaningful correctional practice requires an understanding of these elements; without first thoroughly examining the structural and environmental pressures that drive criminal behaviour, it is impossible to develop an adequate rehabilitative response. As a result, this study uses the Durban Youth Correctional Centre's (DYCC) correctional setting as a point of reflection to examine the life-history triggers and outside influences that influenced the participants' paths toward criminality.

According to Siegel (2023), offending behaviour is any deliberate act or omission that violates the criminal code and is carried out without a valid reason or defence. According to Badenhorst (2024), it is psychologically defined as maladaptive behaviour that deviates from social norms and frequently results from disturbed cognitive-social development. Moreover, Agnew (2022) defines it as behaviours that cause others to experience unpleasant emotional responses, like rage or embarrassment, as a sign of social strain. According to recent criminological and psychological discourses (SAPS, 2025; Ward, 2023), "digital desensitization" and post-pandemic economic changes are increasingly associated with the emergence of adolescent offending in the South African setting. These findings highlight the need for a transdisciplinary strategy that incorporates psychological, social, and structural

factors in order to successfully treat offending (Badenhorst, 2024; Jantjies & Popovac, 2024). Drawing on General Strain Theory, Agnew (2022) contends that such behaviours function as a source of strain, mounting the likelihood of further deviance by those who experience them.

According to Badenhorst (2021), juveniles are particularly at risk of falling behind in terms of education, employment prospects, and health and well-being at a critical moment in their development. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO] (2021) further reports that the consequences of poverty, school closures, and high unemployment rates affect more than one billion juveniles, representing approximately 60% of all learners. These complex issues have been found to be important criminogenic risk factors that are associated with substance abuse, violence, and delinquency. These factors may increase juveniles' vulnerability to victimisation and offending behaviour, which in turn can negatively affect school attendance (UNESCO 2021). Siegel (2020) identifies such risk factors as inadequate access to education and employment, inequality, family conflict, poor mental health, and the breakdown of community and social structures.

Incarcerated juveniles face heightened vulnerabilities, including risks of exploitation, abuse, and assault, as well as exposure to cyberbullying and recruitment by terrorists or criminal networks (Estevez & Nicholas, 2019; Flannery et al., 2018; Siegel, 2020). These risks are compounded by social strain: stigma, distrust of authority and fear of retaliation which reduce the likelihood that incarcerated juveniles will seek assistance or access support services (Siegel, 2020). This dynamic is further exacerbated by limited access to constructive coping strategies such as volunteering, formal or informal education, sports, and other forms of physical activity (Flannery et al., 2018; Siegel, 2020).

Estevez and Nicholas (2019) argue that children are influenced by the broader culture of their communities, including changing family structures, urbanisation, and industrialisation. Exposure to digital environments also significantly shapes contemporary youth experiences (Prinstein, 2022; Tenzin et al., 2023). In the specific context of this study, socioeconomic vulnerabilities and the cultural norms within home communities are closely associated with the psychological and social development of incarcerated juveniles (Muntingh, 2021). Muntingh (2021) emphasises the significance of sexual behaviour as a perceived transition into adulthood within certain South African cultural contexts. Muntingh (2021) further notes that the loss of autonomy and the restrictions inherent in institutional settings may complicate these developmental transitions for juveniles involved in the criminal justice system.

Arnett (2018) and Nilan (2021) note that juveniles are frequently portrayed in the media as pleasure-seeking and highly influenced by consumer culture, including fashion, music, and popular media. Disadvantaged juveniles may experience “status frustration” in response to media-driven consumer expectations and may engage in offending behaviour to obtain the material symbols of success portrayed online (Badenhorst, 2021; Tenzin et al., 2023).

Systemic poverty, sexual abuse, exposure to community violence, and political instability negatively affect juvenile development (UNICEF, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). In this context, “culture” refers to the shared values, norms, practices within a community. When traditional social structures weaken or are replaced by adverse external influences, juveniles may become vulnerable to deviant subcultures (Badenhorst, 2021; Nilan, 2021). Research on social learning further indicates that repeated exposure to glamorised violence in digital and

broadcast media may contribute to desensitisation and provide models of antisocial behaviour (Prinstein, 2022; Tenzin et al., 2023). This may be exacerbated by poor educational outcomes, which limit pro-social opportunities. Statistics South Africa [StatsSA] (2023) reports that a significant proportion of juveniles from disadvantaged backgrounds experience literacy challenges, which are associated with high school dropout rates and increased involvement in the criminal justice system (Badenhorst, 2021; StatsSA, 2023).

Furthermore, the persistence of aggressive and offending behaviour in South Africa is a complex issue that requires multifaceted responses. The age-crime curve, suggests that criminal activity peaks in late adolescence and early adulthood as a result of a combination of developmental impulsivity, increased sensitivity to peer pressure, and socioeconomic marginalisation, is frequently used to explain this phenomenon (Agnew, 2022; Siegel, 2020). Juveniles are disproportionately represented in South Africa as both victims and offenders of crime and violence (Badenhorst, 2021; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020). It is crucial to remember, however, that many young people from underprivileged backgrounds can overcome these obstacles and contribute significantly to society (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020).

An estimated 17.4% of adolescents are still marginalised and denied access to socio-political and economic prospects (CJCP, 2021). This marginalised group is still highly susceptible to psychosocial-criminogenic behaviour despite numerous government initiatives aimed at youth development, this marginalized population is still very vulnerable to psychosocial-criminogenic behaviour (StatsSA, 2024). The Department of Correctional Services' (DCS) Risk-Need-Responsively (RNR) model and the National Youth Development Agency's (NYDA) vocational programs are important interventions (Department of Correctional Services, 2023). High staff-to-inmate ratios, which impede tailored psychological

care, and a lack of ongoing post-release assistance, which frequently results in high recidivism rates, are two major obstacles to these interventions (Muntingh, 2024; Ward, 2023). Additionally, a considerable quantity of programs is criticized for being "one-size-fits-all," neglecting to take into consideration the unique cultural and psychosocial characteristics of juveniles in places like KwaZulu-Natal (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to comprehend the systemic and subjective problems this group encounters in order to create long-lasting, efficient crime-fighting strategies.

Juvenile offending behaviour is influenced by several criminogenic needs, including antisocial peers, pro-offending attitudes, antisocial personality traits, unemployment, aggression, substance abuse, and low motivation (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020). These central eight risk factors are dynamic and may be addressed through targeted rehabilitative interventions. Although South Africa has made progress since the democratic transition in 1994, crime rates remain high (Badenhorst, 2021; SAPS, 2024). Over 1.8 million serious crimes were reported in South Africa during the 2023–2024 reporting period, underscoring the magnitude of the public safety challenge (SAPS, 2024). Addressing these systematic factors is necessary to fulfil constitutional obligations and ensure that citizens live in safety and dignity (SAPS, 2024; StatsSA, 2023).

Demographic factors such as geographic location, social isolation, marginalisation, and systemic poverty significantly reduce a juvenile's likelihood of completing formal education (Badenhorst, 2021; StatsSA, 2023). Education disengagement often precedes delinquent pathways. High youth unemployment rates are further associated with gang membership and exposure to domestic violence (Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention [CJCP], 2021; Ward et al., 2022). These intersecting socioeconomic vulnerabilities are significant factors in the high rate of adolescent crime in South Africa, according to Ward et al. (2022).

Furthermore, alcohol addiction in particular continues to be a major contributing factor to a variety of violent crimes, including murder, sexual offences, and gender-based violence (SAPS, 2024; Ward et al., 2022).

Badenhorst (2021) notes that rapid urbanisation following apartheid contributed to complex social dynamics in previously underdeveloped communities. These environments frequently lack sufficient adequate social infrastructure, which has led to high youth crime rates, severe juvenile offending rates, and consequent congestion in penal facilities. According to the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) Annual Report (2023), approximately 2,450 adolescents were serving sentences, and 3,800 juveniles were remand detainees during the most recent reporting period. This places considerable strain on the DCS to fulfil both custodial and rehabilitative mandates.

The DCS utilises risk assessment measures to determine appropriate intervention levels of each juvenile. These include criminal history, type of offence, age, substance use, and gang affiliation (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Wooldredge & Smith, 2018). Understanding these risk factors is essential, as they directly influence recidivism and inform rehabilitation programme design.

The researcher, a Correctional Official with 20 years of experience at Durban Westville Correctional Services, has observed recurring patterns of poverty, unemployment, substance misuse, and domestic instability among incarcerated juveniles. These observations motivated an in-depth exploration of the underlying factors contributing to juvenile offending within this context.

This study has the potential to assist various stakeholders, including the South African Police Services (SAPS), South African National Defence Force (SANDF), Department of Justice (DoJ), National Intelligence Coordination Committee (NICC), and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), in addressing juvenile crime in South Africa. By understanding the contributing factors to offending behaviour among juveniles, preventative and rehabilitative strategies may be strengthened.

1.2 Problem Statement

The Durban Metropolitan Area still has a high rate of juvenile offending, especially when it comes to violent crimes and gang-related activities, even after the Child Justice Act (2008) was put into effect. Although systemic poverty and unemployment are identified as broad risk factors by current research and national statistics, there is a notable paucity of qualitative investigation into how incarcerated juveniles themselves interpret these particular catalysts for their deviance. The majority of scholarly discourse effectively silences the offenders' subjective lived experiences by concentrating on structural factors from a macro-perspective. By examining the individual stories of incarcerated juveniles at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC), this study fills this gap. This study aims to pinpoint the precise "tipping points" that result in criminal activity by examining the interaction of demographic, sociopolitical, psychological, and cultural aspects from the viewpoint of juveniles. Preventative and rehabilitative interventions remain general and fail to address the particular ecological strains experienced by KwaZulu-Natal youth in the absence of such context-specific, qualitative information.

1.3 Aim of the study

The study explored the factors contributing to offending behaviour among juveniles at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre, KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa.

1.4 Research Questions

This study's primary research questions are:

- i. What are the demographic factors that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles?
- ii. What socio-political factors contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles?
- iii. What are the psychosocial factors that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles?
- iv. What are the cultural factors that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles?

1.5 Objectives of the Study were to:

- i. Explore demographic factors which contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles.
- ii. Identify socio-political factors which contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles;
- iii. Explore psychosocial factors that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juvenile; and
- iv. Investigate the cultural factors that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles in the Durban Youth Correctional Centre.

1.6 Definition of Concepts

Offending behaviour: In this study, offending behaviour refers to criminal acts that violates statutory law and societal norms. These include offences such as robbery, rape, murder, and other criminal acts that resulted in the incarceration of the participants at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. Although the South African Police Service (SAPS) Annual Report (2023) acknowledges that certain forms of offending conduct may constitute contextual public nuisance offences, this study thus adopts a broader criminological perspective. The term refers specifically to serious criminal conduct that led to formal charges and custodial placement.

Juvenile: According to the Juvenile Justice Act 75 of 2008, a child who is less than eighteen is considered a juvenile. However, in the context of this study and the South African Department of Correctional Services (DCS), the word refers to youthful offenders who are housed in specialised youth facilities and are between the ages of 14 and 25.

Offender: Any individual who has been accused or found guilty of breaking the law is considered an offender. The phrase is used explicitly in this study to refer to people who are presently serving sentences or being remanded at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre.

Correctional Centre: For the purposes of this study, a correctional centre is any secure facility run by the Department of Correctional Services that is intended to house, rehabilitate, and provide custodial care for incarcerated juveniles. It should be emphasised that although the phrases young people and youth are used in broader socio-political contexts in South Africa to refer to people up to the age of 35, this study only utilises the term juveniles to refer to the group housed within the DYCC who are between the ages of 14 and 25.

1.7 Rationale for the study

The DCS implements various rehabilitation programmes aimed at addressing criminogenic needs and reducing recidivism among incarcerated individuals. These interventions are designed not merely to suppress unlawful behaviour, but to enhance pro-social reasoning, challenge cognitive distortions, and develop constructive decision-making skills. The objective of these programmes is to equip juveniles with the cognitive, emotional, and social competencies necessary to make responsible choices and pursue lawful life trajectories.

Specific programmes implemented within correctional settings include the *Murder Programme*, which is especially designed to address violent behaviour through victim empathy and restorative justice principles, and the *New Beginning Programme*, which focuses on life skills development and social reintegration. These structured interventions aim to facilitate behavioural change by addressing underlying risk factors associated with offending behaviour.

The main justification for this study is the investigative need to uncover the pre-custodial elements that trigger these offenses, even if these structured interventions are meant to support behavioural change after incarceration. The project intends to identify the demographic, sociopolitical, and cultural factors that influence offending trajectories in the Durban region by investigating the lived experiences of juvenile offenders. The study's objective to investigate the "why" behind the behaviour is directly aligned with this focus. It is crucial to comprehend these underlying variables because rehabilitation attempts are frequently compromised if the underlying structural and environmental stressors that initially caused the criminal behaviour are not recognized and addressed.

Recent studies indicate that juvenile delinquency in South Africa is frequently linked to perceived erosion of moral frameworks, weakened family structures, and declining social cohesion (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Family disintegration limited parental supervision, and instability within educational environments have been identified as significant contributing factors to juvenile offending. Despite this, many existing interventions continue to focus on superficial awareness campaigns rather than evidence-based, systemic approaches that address structural and psychosocial determinants of offending behaviour.

This study's importance stems from its careful analysis of the structural and ecological factors that influence criminal paths among juveniles incarcerated at correctional facility in KwaZulu-Natal. By exploring the lived experiences of these juveniles, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the contextual, social, and psychological dynamics that shape offending trajectories.

The findings of this study may assist social workers, psychologists, probation officers, correctional officials, and policymakers in strengthening preventative strategies and diversion programmes. A clearer understanding of the underlying contributors to juvenile offending may enhance the development of targeted rehabilitation initiatives, ultimately supporting efforts to reduce recidivism and promote successful reintegration into society.

1.8 Setting of the study

The study was conducted at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC), located in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. The DYCC is a specialised correctional facility that accommodates juveniles and youthful offenders, as defined in Section 1.6. The institution

houses individuals who have committed various categories of offences and who are classified according to different security and risk levels.

The centre is divided into six sections and accommodates both sentenced offenders and remand detainees. Juveniles housed at the DYCC are further categorised into low-, medium-, and high-risk groups based on institutional risk assessment procedures. These classifications guide the allocation of rehabilitation programmes and security management strategies within the facility.

A distinctive feature of the DYCC is the presence of Usethubeni High School, which is situated within the Durban Westville Correctional Services premises. The provision of formal education forms a central component of the rehabilitation process for incarcerated juveniles. The availability of educational services within the correctional environment creates an opportunity for academic progression and skills development during incarceration.

The DYCC, therefore, provided an appropriate and contextually relevant setting for examining the lived experiences of incarcerated juveniles and the factors that contributed to their offending behaviour. The institutional environment enabled access to participants whose direct experiences offered insight into the social, psychological, and structural influences shaping their offending trajectories.

1.9 Structure of the study

This dissertation is structured into five chapters, each addressing a specific component of the research process.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Study Background

This chapter provides an overview of the research, including the study's introduction and background, issue description, goals and objectives, research questions, definitions of terms, and justification. It also describes the environment in which the study was carried out.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

This chapter thoroughly reviews the literature on juvenile offending behaviour, its contributing factors (demographic, sociopolitical, psychosocial, and cultural), and the environment of correctional facilities, especially in South Africa. The review provided a theoretical basis for the current research by drawing on relevant literature and theories.

Chapter 3: Methods of Research

This chapter goes into great length on the methodology and research strategy employed in this qualitative exploratory study. It includes an explanation of the research paradigm, qualitative methodology, sampling strategy, data gathering methods (like semi-structured interviews), and data analysis techniques (like thematic analysis). Additionally, according to accepted qualitative research standards, the ethical considerations and the stringent measures taken to ensure the study's reliability, including credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability, are described in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Chapter 4: Results Presentation

This chapter presents the study's findings, which were based on data collected from participants at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. The results are organised in accordance

with the topics and categories that arose from the thematic analysis method in order to directly address the research questions and objectives. These results provide a thorough description of participants' experiences. Chapter 5 offers a thorough analysis of these findings, examining them in light of the theories and literature discussed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5: Discussions and Recommendations

This chapter focused on a discussion of the findings, along with general conclusions on the elements that contributed to offending behaviour among incarcerated juveniles in the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. The chapter highlights the study's strengths, limitations, and recommendations for stakeholders, such as the Department of Correctional Services, welfare organisations, and legislators, along with ideas for future research.

Chapter Summary

The study on factors that contribute to juvenile offending behaviours at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC) was explained in this introductory chapter. Citing pertinent evidence-based laws like the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008 and the 2005 White Paper on Corrections, it started by describing the background and context of juvenile offending in South Africa. After that, the chapter presented a precise problem description that highlighted how complicated and multifaceted juvenile offending behaviour is in the current South African environment (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Along with the general research question and sub-questions that directed the qualitative examination of demographic, socio-political, psychological, and cultural elements, the study's main goal and particular objectives were described. A justification was given, emphasising the importance of the study for different stakeholders in the welfare and penitentiary sectors, and important ideas that were crucial

to the investigation were explained. The chapter concluded by outlining the format of the dissertation and designating the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC), which is located within the Durban Westville Management Area, as the study site. The groundwork for the topic's in-depth analysis in later chapters is laid down in this introductory chapter.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically examines the literature on juvenile offending behaviour. The review aims to achieve two main goals: first, to identify existing gaps in the literature, especially regarding incarcerated juveniles in the South African context; and second, to establish the current scholarly understanding of the various contributing factors to juvenile offending, highlighting key empirical findings and theoretical frameworks. The literature has been carefully chosen to provide a strong theoretical basis for the study and to ensure direct applicability to the research aims. The chapter is organised as follows: it begins by examining the environmental factors, then the parenting factors, and is followed by the socioeconomic factors influencing juvenile offending behaviour. It further investigates the connections between juvenile offending and political or cultural circumstances. Additionally, the psychological factors contributing to such behaviours are discussed. The chapter concludes with an overview of Agnes's General Strain theory, which serves as the study's theoretical framework.

2.2 Environmental factors and offending behaviour

Offending behaviour is greatly influenced by environmental elements, such as neighbourhood features, peer relationships, and community infrastructure (Badenhorst, 2021; Banham, 2020; Simandan, 2020). According to research, there are more opportunities for offending behaviour because juveniles living in "socially disorganised" neighbourhoods frequently lack formal and informal social controls like community surveillance or efficient policing. Additionally, severe economic hardship in a society can cause "strain", where juveniles resort to criminal activity in order to obtain material status or to survive (Ward et

al., 2022). A higher likelihood of chronic offending in later years is associated with early developmental exposure to these risk variables. Although delinquency cannot be predicted by a single factor, a trajectory toward offending behaviour is created by the accumulation of risks in the individual, school, and community domains (Hawkins & Catalano, 2020; Ward et al., 2022).

2.3 Parenting and offending behaviour among juveniles

A key factor in determining how children behave is the type of interactions they have with their primary caregivers. A major deterrent to delinquency is effective parental supervision, characterised by emotional warmth and non-coercive disciplinary techniques (Farrington et al., 2021; Wakschlag et al., 2020). On the other hand, dysfunctional household dynamics, such as inconsistent punishment, parental conflict, and exposure to substance misuse within the home, are frequently linked to violent behaviour in juveniles (Badenhorst, 2021; West & Farrington, 2022). Juveniles frequently look for a sense of belonging in extrafamilial settings as a reaction to domestic instability or “strained” family circumstances. This change often results in a greater dependence on delinquent peer groups, where the adoption of antisocial norms is driven by peer approbation and social pressure (Jacobs & Slabber, 2019; Mudau et al., 2019). Peer association is one of the most powerful predictors of juvenile offending, according to criminological research, because it offers opportunities for criminal action and social reinforcement (Raine et al., 2022; Rutter, 2020). A juvenile's developmental trajectory is primarily influenced by these outside factors when constructive parenting is lacking, which frequently results in recurrent interactions with the criminal justice system.

2.4 Social factors and offending behaviour among juveniles

A country's economic stability, social cohesiveness, and future progress are all negatively impacted by juvenile offending behaviour (StatsSA, 2023; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2022). Since the younger generation is the main force behind social and economic transformation, academic discourse highlights that the systemic nature of delinquency necessitates immediate intervention (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Siegel (2020) defines juvenile delinquency as crimes committed by those who fall within a certain legal age range, usually under 18 or 21, depending on the jurisdiction. The legal basis for handling these behaviours in South Africa is provided by the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, which emphasises restorative justice. However, financial difficulties, high unemployment rates, and persistent poverty frequently impede the nation's socioeconomic advancement and act as triggers for juveniles to become involved in criminal activity (Badenhorst, 2021; StatsSA, 2023). According to Ward et al. (2022), juveniles' educational environment is a crucial social structure that provides a platform for the development of virtues and career skills. On the other hand, as academic failure and disengagement from educational systems are high-risk indicators of future criminality, a secure learning environment is crucial (UNESCO, 2021).

Juvenile delinquency and violence in South Africa have escalated to the point of a national public health emergency (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Ward et al., 2022). These actions are seen as serious transgressions of accepted social standards and seriously jeopardise the community's mental and physical health. High rates of armed robbery and gang-related violence have been found to be the main causes of juvenile delinquency in some KwaZulu-Natal regions, such as KwaMashu and Inanda (SAPS, 2024; Van Raemdonck, 2018). According to Badenhorst (2021), prevention works best when it tackles the convergence of community-

related risk factors, such as the availability of firearms, substance misuse, and social norms that desensitise juveniles to violence. Additionally, studies identify several significant risk factors related to the social environment, such as severe economic deprivation, high mobility, and poor community management (Agnew, 2022; Siegel, 2020). According to Hawkins and Catalano (2020) and StatsSA (2023), persistent academic failure and a lack of commitment to study are the main risk factors for entry into the criminal justice system. Each juvenile offence is the result of a complex interplay of inequities, lack of access to resources, and the perceived incapacity to succeed through legal means; these social determinants are rarely isolated (Bonta & Andrews, 2017; Ward et al., 2022).

2.4.1 A Critical Analysis of Social Contributors

Individual-risk models and structural-strain viewpoints are at odds, according to a critical examination of the sociological literature. While international researchers like Lipsey and Derzon (2021) frequently highlight individual psychological characteristics as the main predictors of delinquency, South African researchers like Badenhorst (2021) and Ward et al. (2022) contend that structural injustices like systemic poverty and educational marginalization take precedence over individual predispositions in a post-apartheid setting. According to this study, juvenile delinquency at the DYCC is a "situated response" to a social setting marked by persistent shortage rather than just a product of personal choice. When these perspectives are combined, it is evident that the "strain" that South African adolescents suffer is complex, involving not just a lack of resources but also the psychological "status frustration" that results from the obstruction of legitimate routes to success (Siegel, 2020). As a result, this literature review goes beyond simply outlining risk factors to make the case

that social contributors need to be viewed as a network of interrelated institutional failures that require deviance in order to survive.

2.5 Political factors and offending behaviour among juveniles

There is growing evidence that juveniles worldwide are feeling increasingly politically alienated and disenchanted with conventional electoral procedures (Resnick & Casale, 2014; UNODC, 2022). Since 1994, the goal of integrating juveniles into South Africa's political system has been a major focus; yet institutional obstacles frequently impede significant involvement. Even as juveniles in Africa are acknowledged for their inventiveness and capacity for civic leadership (Langa, 2020), many of them are still shut out of platforms for socioeconomic development and decision-making. A major socio-political factor influencing offending behaviour is a sense of marginalisation brought about by this lack of political agency. In a “political vacuum” created by the state’s failure to provide sufficient venues for youth engagement, juveniles may turn to gang membership or delinquent subcultures as a substitute sense of belonging in an attempt to gain status and power (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Therefore, empowerment for youth should be viewed as a process that changes awareness and gives juveniles the tools, they need to take charge of their life in a democratic setting (UNICEF, 2021).

2.6 Psychological factors and offending behaviour among juveniles

The development of juveniles’ aggressive behaviour is significantly influenced by individual psychological factors, such as deficiencies in self-regulation, impulsivity, and sensation-seeking (Prinstein, 2022; Siegel, 2020). Both the juvenile’s surroundings and neurobiological development frequently influence these intrinsic characteristics. According

to Lipsey and Derzon (2021), domestic situations like long-term exposure to violence or substance misuse can profoundly impact a person's personality development and make them more likely to engage in antisocial behaviour.

Additionally, early-onset delinquency is often correlated with mental health issues, such as unresolved trauma and conduct disorders. For example, early childhood behavioural problems are strong indicators of future delinquency, according to Herrenkohl et al. (2022). According to research, if interventions are not given, juveniles with a history of untreated conduct disorder (CD) or oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) are statistically more likely to pursue a road of criminality (Tremblay, 2021). Because juveniles find it difficult to integrate social norms and pro-social rules, inadequate cognitive development in early childhood may further explain the link between delinquency and scholastic failure (Rutter, 2020; Wakschlag et al., 2020). Although parenting factors are important for psychological well-being, offending behaviour is directly driven by the psychological effects of these elements, such as poor attachment or a lack of empathy (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

2.7 Cultural factors and offending behaviour among juveniles

South African cultural customs frequently stem from the preservation of social purity, traditional legacy, and communal togetherness. However, when certain traditions go against contemporary legal frameworks and constitutional rights, they may result in offending behaviour (Artz & Hoffman-Wanderer, 2017; Muntingh, 2021). For instance, virginity testing is a custom meant to encourage moral purity and postpone young women's sexual debut, but it is still debatable in terms of the right to consent and physical autonomy (Maluleke, 2012; Ward et al., 2022). The practice of *ukuthwala* is crucial to addressing juvenile delinquency. Modern misinterpretations of the practice have resulted in criminal allegations of kidnapping

and rape, despite the ritual's historical purpose as a kind of mock-abduction for marriage negotiations between families (Koyana & Bekker, 2007; Muntingh, 2021). Without a thorough knowledge of legal “consent” or “autonomy”, minors who are raised in settings where these behaviours are accepted but legal boundaries are unclear may commit grave crimes. When (violent crimes against women and children are justified by traditional “cleansing” rites or forced marriages, this permeates criminality (Artz & Hoffman-Wanderer, 2017; Badenhorst, 2021). Therefore, when traditional standards are abused to circumvent people’s legal rights, cultural factors contribute to juvenile offending, creating a vicious cycle of gender-based violence and social conflict.

2.7.1 Synthesizing Argument: Strain's Ecological Environment

A thorough analysis of the literature shows that risk factors alone are insufficient to comprehend juvenile delinquency in South Africa. Rather, this study promotes a "holistic ecological" viewpoint in which political alienation, dysfunctional parenting, and environmental deprivation all contribute to a strained environment. Although researchers like Farrington (2021) and Siegel (2020) frequently classify these elements independently, the South African experience especially in the KwaZulu-Natal context shows that they are intricately linked. For example, poverty is not the only result of socioeconomic despair (Theme 3); it also undermines the family's "social capital" (Theme 1), which leads the young person to look for alternative belonging in gang subcultures (Theme 2). Thus, the overarching thesis of this review is that criminal activity is a natural, although maladaptive, reaction to a systemic environment that lacks pro-social safety nets rather than the product of a singular "trigger." By presenting crime as a complex survival strategy within a disrupted social ecology, this

synthesis goes beyond a collection of summaries and lays the essential groundwork for Agnew's General Strain Theory.

2.8 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework serves as a conceptual lens through which data is analysed, and conclusions are developed, and it is crucial for giving a research project structure and direction (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Kivunja, 2018). It offers a starting point for investigating the intricate elements influencing the offending conduct of juveniles presently housed at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. Agnew's (1992, 2022) General Strain Theory (GST) serves as the foundation for this investigation.

Agnew's theory is preferred over single-factor models because it integrates environmental, psychological, and sociological components, offering the all-encompassing perspective needed to understand the difficult behaviours of juvenile offenders. According to GST, delinquency is a maladaptive reaction to "strains" or stressors, especially when juveniles don't have the pro-social resources to deal with them (Agnew, 2022).

2.8.1 General Strain Theory

Following the release of his ground-breaking book, *Foundation for a General Strain Theory of Crime and Delinquency*, Robert Agnew officially developed the General Strain Theory (GST) in 1992. Agnew's 1992 formulation, which drew from Merton's (1938) earlier structural strain traditions, offered a more thorough psychological focus by highlighting how delinquent behaviour is driven by negative emotional states that arise from individual-level social pressures. Agnew's (1992, 2022) General Strain Theory states that delinquent behaviour is the result of a dynamic interaction between an individual's predispositions and

the ecological systems in which teens are embedded. According to the theory, there are three primary types of strain: (1) the inability to achieve positively valued goals (such as financial success or status); (2) the removal of positive stimuli (such as the death of a caregiver or the end of a relationship); and (3) the presentation of negative stimuli (such as victimization, domestic violence, or community crime).

Although Agnew (2022) serves as the main psychological lens for this investigation, his paradigm is enhanced when examined in conjunction with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1977) and Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969). Stress by itself does not necessarily result in crime, which is why this theoretical synthesis is required. The tipping point is created by the combination of "strains" (Agnew) and "loss of social bonds" to family and school (Hirschi, 1996). This is made worse in the South African context by "differential association" (Sutherland, 1947), where young people who have been estranged from pro-social organizations pick up criminal skills from gang subcultures. The study offers a strong, multi-theoretical explanation for why young people at the DYCC give in to criminal behaviour by incorporating numerous analytical viewpoints, moving away from a descriptive reliance on a single author.

These claims are consistent with well-established criminological research, such as Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) focus on self-control and Steinberg's (2017) discoveries about the neurological bases of teenage risk-taking, such as increased reward sensitivity and peer pressure. But according to Agnew, personal weaknesses such as impulsivity only become criminogenic when they combine with unfavourable social circumstances like inconsistent parenting, academic failure, and living in high-crime areas (Agnew, 2022; Badenhorst, 2021). Criticism of the Theory: Although GST is widely commended for its capacity to account for a variety of adolescent transgressions, academics such as Bonta and Andrews (2017) have

criticised it for heavily depending on subjective reports of “strain”. The theory's detractors contend that it falls short of explaining why some juveniles endure severe stress without resorting to unlawful activity. Because it takes into consideration the structural poverty and marginalisation that characterise the local context, GST continues to be a "gold standard" in South African juvenile research (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Ward et al., 2022).

2.8.2 Application of the Theoretical Framework

The theory in this study centres on the interrelated domains of mental, physical, home, school, occupational, and community influences that lead to teenage criminality. This investigation is guided by Agnew’s framework, which provides a structured viewpoint for analysing the research sub-questions:

- i. Age and socioeconomic position are examples of demographic traits that are thought to be “conditioning factors” that affect the kind of stress a juvenile face and the tools at their disposal to deal with it (Agnew, 2022).
- ii. Socio-Political Factors: A “community-level strain” where resource scarcity causes alienation and a tendency toward delinquent subcultures for status is caused by widespread structural defects and political disillusionment (Ward et al., 2022).
- iii. Psychosocial Factors: These are closely related to Agnew’s “negative stimuli”, such as parental death or family strife, which cause negative emotional states like rage or frustration that eventually show up as offending behaviour.
- iv. Cultural Factors: A juvenile’s perception of legal boundaries may be influenced by cultural norms around behaviours such as *ukuthwala*. This could lead to a clash between traditional expectations and contemporary law, creating a distinct cultural strain (Muntingh, 2021).

2.8.3 Chapter Summary

The literature review outlined the existing state of scholarship on juvenile offending and emphasised the need for research that is specifically tailored to the South African setting. This chapter created a solid theoretical framework by combining fundamental ideas from Agnew (2022), Badenhorst (2021), and Ward et al. (2022). As a result, this chapter provided the conceptual foundation for the qualitative methodology described in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the research methodology utilised to look at the reasons that lead to the offending behaviours of juveniles now housed in the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC). A qualitative exploratory study methodology was deemed acceptable to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and contextual influences that shaped participants' trajectories into offending.

This study focuses on the demographic, psychological, and cultural factors that shaped the individuals before they were incarcerated rather than the atmosphere within the correctional centres. The study paradigm, sampling plan, data collection, and analysis techniques are covered in this chapter. Ethics and reliability are then covered.

3.2 Research Paradigm

According to Saunders et al. (2019), a research paradigm is a "worldview" or a collection of ideas that directs the study and includes ontology, epistemology, and technique. The researcher's perspective on the nature of reality is called ontology. Instead of a single objective fact, this study views reality as subjective and multifaceted.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), epistemology is the study of knowledge and the connection between the researcher and the subject of the investigation. This study used the interpretivist paradigm to better understand the factors contributing to offending behaviour. According to interpretivist academics, language, consciousness, and shared meanings all contribute to the co-construction of social reality (Saunders et al., 2019). The researcher, a Department of Correctional Services (DCS) official, admits their participation in the co-construction of meaning in accordance with this paradigm. Rather than

taking a detached approach, the researcher engaged directly with the juveniles in order to understand their stories. To comprehend the subjective causes of their delinquent behaviour, this reflexive method was crucial (Creswell & Poth, 2018). According to Saunders et al. (2019), interpretivism acknowledges that human meaning is context-dependent and cannot be investigated with the strict, mathematical tools of the natural sciences.

3.2.1 Application of the Interpretivist paradigm

The interpretivist paradigm prioritised the juveniles' accounts and interpretations of their own lives in this study. The main source of information on the interpersonal and personal elements that shaped their criminal paths was these testimonies. This method made it possible to comprehend how participants interpreted the situations that led to their actions on a deeper level. Additionally, the interpretivist method ensured that the study continued to attend to the socioeconomic backdrop of KwaZulu-Natal and the contextual specifics of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC). The study offered a comprehensive view of the intricacies of juvenile delinquency in South Africa by placing the experiences of the participants within these systemic contexts.

3.2.2 Qualitative Research approach

Due to the delicate and subjective character of criminal aetiology (the study of causes), a qualitative approach was considered necessary in addition to filling the previously indicated vacuum in localized research. It is impossible to reduce criminal behaviour to simple statistics or numerical correlations since it is a complicated human phenomenon. A qualitative lens is necessary to comprehend the internal motivations and meaning-making processes of the criminals, even while quantitative statistics can track the number of crimes committed. This

method enabled a "thick description" of the sociocultural stressors that define the KwaZulu-Natal landscape in the context of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. By delving further, the researcher was able to examine the relationship between structural tension and individual agency a subtlety that is sometimes overlooked in quantitative research. In order to ensure that the results accurately represent the "lived experience" of juvenile offending rather than predetermined variables, this methodology permitted the participants to construct their own reality.

3.3 Research design

For this study, an exploratory qualitative research design was used. The main goal of an exploratory design is to investigate a phenomenon that has not been precisely described or understood in a particular setting (Hennink et al., 2020). This method enables the researcher to provide "context-informed and perceptive accounts" of human experiences, according to Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 104). There is a known need for more focused exploratory research in the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) region, particularly in the Durban metropolitan area, despite juvenile offending behaviour having been thoroughly studied in Western contexts and in South African provinces such as the Western Cape (Muntingh, 2021). This study gives a shape and contour to the particular psychosocial and cultural elements that fuel delinquency in this high-crime area by concentrating on the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC) (Labuschagne, 2017). Since a qualitative approach emphasises subjective meaning over statistical generalisability, it was thought to be the most appropriate for identifying the elements influencing these young juveniles.

3.4 Sampling

Purposive sampling, a non-probability selection method in which individuals are chosen according to their particular traits and significance to the study topics, was employed by the investigator (Patton, 2015; Saunders et al., 2019). Because it ensures that the participants in this case, incarcerated juvenile have the lived experience required to offer rich data, this approach is perfect for qualitative research. There were fifteen (N=15) individuals in the sample. Data saturation, or the point at which no new themes or insights emerge from the interviews, determines sample size in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Hennink et al. (2020) state that in a somewhat homogeneous group, like male offenders in a single correctional centre, a sample of 12 to 15 participants is usually sufficient to achieve saturation.

3.5 Population of the study

Durban Youth Correctional Centre is a juvenile facility that accommodates all offenders who are aged below 27 years exclusively for maximum offenders. Currently, the centre accommodates male inmates who are both sentenced and remand detainees.

The Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC), a major hub for young offenders in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, was chosen as the study site due to its advantageous location. People from high-crime urban areas (such Inanda, KwaMashu, and Umlazi) are housed in this facility, which offers a diverse yet contextually specific population for investigating the psychosocial and systemic causes of crime. Purposive sampling was used in this cohort to deliberately choose individuals who could act as "expert witnesses" to the criminal experience. The researcher was able to obtain comprehensive, "thick" descriptions of the

particular turning points and environmental stressors that statistics alone cannot convey by selecting people who have already committed significant crimes (such as robbery and murder). This deliberate focus made sure that the information collected was closely related to the study's objective of determining actual factors that contribute to criminal behaviour. As of the 1st of January 2026, the centre had a total of 558 inmates, which comprises 290 Remand detainees and 268 sentenced offenders, with 0.71% of overcrowding. Participants who met the inclusion criteria, which are discussed below, were purposively sampled from the juvenile unit of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre.

Two considerations led to the deliberate delimitation of female juveniles. First, institutional logistics: the DYCC is a center exclusively for men. This limited Master's project was not logistically or financially feasible to expand to geographically remote locations in order to include females. Second, statistical prevalence: violent contact crimes in South Africa are disproportionately committed by male youths (SAPS, 2024). The study was able to conduct a more focused examination of the particular intersections between masculinity, social strain, and violence in the Durban environment by concentrating just on this cohort.

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Gender: Currently housed at the DYCC are male juveniles.	People who lack the mental or emotional capacity to give informed consent are considered incapable of doing so.
Age at Offense: The offense must have been committed by someone who was 20 years of age or younger.	Age at Offense: People who broke the law after turning 20. Language Barrier: People who can't read, write, or speak isiZulu or English.
Current Age: According to the facility's definition of a juvenile offender, I am between the ages of 18 and 27.	Legal Status: Remand inmates who have not yet received information about their legal rights with regard to research.
Language: Fluent in either isiZulu or English.	

3.5.1 Recruitment Process

The Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC) provided the study population. Following clearance by the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (CREC), the approval from the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) Research Ethics Committee, and Gatekeeper Permission, access to this population was made possible. Care was taken during the hiring process to prevent institutional coercion. For a duration of two weeks, the researcher put up recruitment posters in the DYCC's units where incarcerated juveniles are housed. Through the unit manager at the centre, interested parties contacted the researcher.

The researcher then held a formal information session with possible volunteers. The researcher described the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw at any moment during this session. To reduce power disparities, the researcher did not wear a correctional officer uniform. For the study to be reliable and transferable, this thick description of the hiring procedure is crucial (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.5.2 Ethical Permission Procedures

Ethical compliance was central to this study. The approval process began with the Departmental Higher Degrees Committee of Psychology at the University of South Africa (UNISA), leading to provisional ethical approval from the College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee (CREC) at the UNISA resulting in full ethical clearance (Ref #: 3766). As the primary gatekeepers, the Department of Correctional Services- Research Ethics Committee (DCS-REC) Head Office granted permission to conduct the study. Once this gatekeeper permission was secured, access to participants was further facilitated by the Head of the Correctional Centre, Unit Managers and social workers at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre.

3.5.3 Voluntary Participation and Coercion

Every participant was informed that participation in the study was voluntary. They were made clear that they might stop participating at any time without suffering institutional consequences, losing their privileges, or having their parole outcomes negatively impacted. There was no coercion or improper influence on participation. In a custodial setting, this was especially important to reduce “institutional pressure” the propensity for prisoners to comply with orders from superiors (Muntingh, 2021). No ward officers or senior correctional officials

were present during the informed consent or recruitment process to further reduce the possibility of coercion. Despite being a DCS official, the researcher clearly defined their function as an independent academic researcher and performed all meetings in civilian attire. According to Saunders et al. (2023), this transparency ensured that the participants' decision to engage was based on an informed choice rather than a sense of obligation to the facility.

3.5.4 Data Collection

The main method of data collection was semi-structured interviews. This method was selected because it permits the researcher to investigate the complex, subjective experiences of the participants while upholding a basic framework that ensures all study goals are met (Hennink et al., 2020). When examining delicate criminogenic factors, semi-structured interviews offer the flexibility to probe for deeper meaning when participants provide succinct or complex responses (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Interviews were conducted in a secure consulting room within the DYCC unit manager's office to promote a sense of security. A digital gadget was used to record the audio of each interview. Instead of being side-tracked by taking copious notes, the researcher was able to concentrate solely on the participant's non-verbal cues and emotional state throughout the process, which ensures the narratives' verbatim accuracy (Saunders et al., 2023). To preserve participants' linguistic and cultural subtleties, the researcher, who speaks both English and isiZulu fluently, personally transcribed and translated the recordings after the interviews. The interviews were done in isiZulu, the chosen language of all fifteen participants, to ensure maximum comfort. A back-translation procedure was used to guarantee conceptual equivalency and linguistic precision. An independent bilingual person who was not involved in the original data gathering process translated a sample of the translated English transcripts back into isiZulu. This confirmed that

the translation procedure accurately captured the cultural subtleties and psychological impact of the participants' original narratives (Saunders et al., 2023).

3.5.5 Rationale for Data Saturation and Sample Size

Data saturation was used to estimate the sample size. When new data collection no longer yields themes, categories, or important insights into the study subject, saturation is reached (Braun & Clarke, 2021). It shows that the researcher has adequately recorded the range of perspectives relevant to the study's scope (Hennink et al., 2020).

A sample of fifteen people (N=15) was used for this investigation. In research with a somewhat homogeneous group, such as male juvenile offenders in a single facility, data saturation is often reached within 12 to 15 interviews, according to (Guest et al., 2020). Inductive monitoring was utilised to track saturation; by the 12th interview, the main themes of economic strain and peer pressure were recurring, and these conclusions were verified by the last three interviews. As a result, the saturation point ensured that the findings were derived from a reliable and comprehensive dataset. Participants who met the inclusion criteria, which are discussed below, were purposively sampled from the juvenile unit of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC).

3.6 Data analysis

The interview transcripts were examined using Thematic Analysis (TA), as described by Braun and Clarke (2022). TA is a technique for finding, examining, and summarising patterns (themes) in data. It was chosen because it allows for the examination of different interpretations of the factors influencing delinquent behaviour, which is extremely suitable for the interpretivist aspect of the study. TA focuses on the semantic and latent meanings of

the data rather than the particular verbal structures employed by participants, in contrast to linguistic approaches (like Discourse Analysis) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The six stages of the analysis were as follows:

- i. **Familiarization:*** Through the transcription and back-translation of the isiZulu interviews, the researcher regularly interacted with the data, noting preliminary thoughts about the importance of family and peers.
- ii. **Initial Coding:*** During this stage, the researcher labelled text passages using inductive coding. For instance, statements about "empty cupboards" or "no money for school" were classified as Material Scarcity, whereas statements about "wanting branded sneakers" were classified as Status Frustration. A strict three-cycle inductive technique was used during the coding process. First-cycle coding involved "In-Vivo" coding, in which participants' own words were used to create labels that captured the core of their experiences (e.g., "izinkwari style"). Second-cycle coding: These initial codes were grouped into more general conceptual categories, like "Institutional Betrayal" or "Identity Seeking," using "Pattern Coding." Third-cycle (Selective) coding: This involved mapping these categories against Agnew's General Strain Theory and the study's research objectives in order to distill them into the four main themes.
- iii. **Theme Search:*** After that, codes were grouped into potential themes. Codes like "supportive grandmother," "absent father," and "emotional neglect" were arranged under a possible topic related to family dynamics.
- iv. **Examining Themes:*** To make sure the themes appropriately reflected the voices of the participants, they were compared to the complete dataset. At this point, it

was seen that "poverty" and "unemployment" were so closely related that they combined to form a single overarching theme of socioeconomic despair.

- v. ***Defining and naming topics:*** The four main topics were determined by the researcher. This was accomplished by making sure every topic had a distinct "central organizing concept" that clearly addressed the research issues pertaining to cultural, psychological, socio-political, and demographic contributors.
- vi. ***Reporting:*** To produce the analysis shown in Chapters 4 and 5, the final themes were combined with the theoretical framework (GST).

3.7 Trustworthiness

The researcher used Lincoln and Guba's (2013) criteria for reliability in order to ensure the study's quality and integrity. The quantitative ideas of validity and reliability are paralleled by this qualitative framework.

- i. ***Credibility:*** Through extended engagement and member checking, where participants were given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of their transcribed summaries, the researcher made sure the results were consistent with the participants' actual experiences. Cross-referencing interview data with researcher's field notes and DCS institutional records about inmate demographics allowed for triangulation.
- ii. ***Transferability:*** The DYCC setup and the sampling procedure were thoroughly described by the researcher. The researcher enables future readers to ascertain whether the results are applicable to various juvenile correctional environments by describing the distinct participant profiles (now moved to Chapter 4).

- iii. **Dependability:** Every procedural decision made during the investigation, from sampling to analysis, was recorded in a thorough audit trail kept by the researcher.
- iv. **Conformability:** By making sure that all conclusions were solely based on participant tales, the researcher preserved objectivity. Reflexivity, which acknowledged how the researcher's positionality affected the study, strengthened this.

3.8 Reflexivity

To determine how a researcher's positionality affects the co-construction of knowledge, reflexivity is essential (Braun & Clarke, 2022). During the interviews, the researcher was a "co-constructor" of meaning because she worked for DCS. Both an advantage (institutional access) and a problem (participants may perceive the researcher as an authority figure) were offered by this.

To address this, the researcher kept a reflexive notebook in which they tracked their own prejudices and preconceptions regarding juvenile offending. To create a neutral atmosphere, the researcher did not wear a uniform when gathering data. This made it possible to gather data more authentically, ensuring that observations were based on participants' viewpoints rather than expert assumptions. Reflexivity was incorporated as an active analytical technique in recognition of my positionality as a correctional official (insider). I used peer debriefing with academic supervisors to challenge my interpretations and make sure they stayed based in the facts in order to manage any Social Desirability Bias, where participants might give responses, they believe an official wants to hear. In order to verify that my official lens had not warped participants' personal narratives, I also employed member checking by giving them summaries of my preliminary findings. Lastly, in order to

guarantee a fair and accurate portrayal of the participants' lived circumstances, I actively sought out disconfirming evidence cases in which their narratives did not fit the conventional criminogenic risk profile during analysis.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

A dedication to upholding human rights is necessary for social research ethics (Denscombe, 2021). The following precautions were adopted because this study involved a vulnerable group in a correctional setting:

Informed Consent was attained through a process that prioritised voluntariness. Before signing, participants had a full day to go over the consent documents. To ensure complete understanding, the study was explained in isiZulu. Anonymity was also maintained throughout the investigation, the researcher utilised pseudonyms (as indicated in Table 2) to safeguard the participants. Hard copies were stored in a secure cabinet at UNISA for five years, and all digital material was password-protected.

Voluntary Participation was emphasised to minimise coercion. The researcher stressed that involvement would not affect facility privileges or parole outcomes. The assurance was indispensable to ensure that consent was freely given and not influenced by perceived authority

3.9.1 Privacy

By conducting all data collection in a secure, non-threatening setting, the researcher complied with the privacy principle. Each interview was placed in a quiet, soundproof office within the DYCC Social Work Unit to make sure the young participants were at ease discussing delicate personal experiences. To prevent other adolescents and correctional officials from

listening in on the conversations, this particular location was selected. In order to lower the risk of participant guardedness, the propensity of people in a custodial situation to withhold information because they feel unsafe or are afraid of institutional repercussions, maintaining this degree of privacy was crucial (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Ethical research in correctional settings must strike a compromise between the need for robust data collection with participants' right to privacy (Dhai & McQuoid-Mason, 2023).

3.9.2 Emotional and psychological constraints

To protect the participants' safety and well-being, the researcher addressed any psychological and emotional concerns. The researcher was ready to manage distressing disclosures with sensitivity and professional boundaries because talking about criminogenic factors and life history is inherently delicate. A formal referral procedure was created with the on-site DYCC social worker and psychologist prior to the start of data collection. Each participant was made aware of this resource and assured that, should they experience difficulty, the interview would be halted immediately, and they would be referred for expert psychiatric assistance.

3.9.3 Respect for Participants, Beneficence

*i. **Autonomy:*** According to Dhai and McQuoid-Mason's (2023) principles, autonomy is the ability of an individual to make rational, self-directed decisions. Before obtaining consent, the researcher made sure that each young person had access to comprehensive, understandable, and unambiguous information about the goal of the study in order to uphold this objective

*ii. **Protecting Vulnerable People:*** The juvenile participants were classified as a vulnerable group because of the institutional setting. To ensure participants completely understood their

rights, including the right to withdraw, the researcher used an informed consent procedure that was carried out in isiZulu, the participants' native tongue (Muntingh, 2021).

iii. Beneficence: The researcher operated in accordance with the ethical principle of beneficence by minimising potential harm and maximising the research's benefits for the larger community of juvenile justice practitioners (Beauchamp & Childress, 2019). The participants' well-being was given first priority. By making sure that the sampling rules did not unjustly exclude or target particular people, fairness was maintained. Hennink et al. (2020) state that beneficence in qualitative research necessitates that no study be conducted with the intention of causing harm to participants or wasting their time without producing significant knowledge. Before beginning the study, the researcher conducted a risk-benefit analysis to make sure that the advantages of creating more successful rehabilitation techniques for young people outweighed the possibility of mental suffering.

3.10 Data management and storage

Strict preservation procedures were followed to protect the data's integrity and confidentiality. In the researcher's main academic department at UNISA, all identifiable information (including signed consent forms) was kept in a physically distinct, locked filing cabinet.

The digital files, including anonymised transcripts and audio recordings, were kept on a password-protected, encrypted external hard drive. To prevent unwanted access, this drive was stored in a fireproof safe. All data will be securely stored for 5 years in compliance with the University of South Africa's research ethics guidelines before being safely deleted via digital erasure and shredding. The long-term intractability of the participants' identities is guaranteed by this protocol.

3.11 Delimitation of the study

Both intrinsic methodological restrictions and researcher-imposed delimitations (boundaries) applied to this study.

3.11.1 Delimitation

The researcher established the following boundaries to give the investigation a manageable scope:

- i. Contextual Focus: The study only included young individuals residing at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre. Therefore, the scope did not encompass the behaviours of children and young juveniles in the general population.
- ii. Gender and Offence Age: Regardless of their age at the time of the interview, only male participants who had committed an offence while under 20 were included in the study.

3.11.2 Limitations

Due to its qualitative, exploratory design, the study recognised the following limitations:

Limited Generalizability: Due to the limited sample size $N = 15$ and the subjective nature of qualitative research precluded both the direct generalisation of findings to other contexts and statistical verification of the results.

Researcher Influence: Despite reflexivity measurements, the observations and findings were influenced by the researcher's personal experiences and expertise due to the subjective nature of qualitative research.

Time and Flow: The one-on-one conversations that were used to gather data occasionally resulted in conversations that deviated from the primary goals of the study (Tiley, 2017).

Data Analysis: The qualitative approach required a laborious data analysis process that relied more on interpretation and judgment than on quantitative findings.

3.12 Conflict of interest disclosure

The investigator hereby certifies that there were no financial, professional, or personal conflicts of interest that might have influenced the study's design, data collection, or interpretation. Since the study was carried out exclusively for academic purposes and the findings were not utilised to guide any administrative or employment decisions, the researcher's position within the larger correctional or academic sector did not present a conflict of interest.

3.13 Monitoring and reporting of adverse events

Clear guidelines for recognising and reporting adverse occurrences were set under the ethical protocol. Any unexpected psychological distress or emotional burden a participant encountered throughout the interview procedure was considered an unfavourable event in the context of this study (Dhai & McQuoid-Mason, 2023). The researcher remained highly sensitive to participants' emotional states throughout the data-gathering phase. If a subject displayed signs of severe discomfort, the researcher was prepared to end the interview right away in compliance with the authorised ethical clearance. Through on-site DYCC social work and psychological services, a pre-arranged referral system was in place to offer prompt assistance. Additionally, the University Research Ethics Committee would have been notified

of any such incident within a day. It has been verified that no adverse incidents occurred during this study.

3.14 Plan for Research Dissemination

The results of this study will be shared across a variety of platforms in order to advance both scholarly understanding and real-world implementation in the correctional environment. This strategy consists of:

- i. **Academic Publication:** Prepare articles for publication in peer-reviewed academic journals in the disciplines of Criminology, Psychology, or Youth development after submitting the dissertation for review.
- ii. **Conference Presentations:** Delivering the main conclusions at pertinent national and international symposia and conferences.
- iii. **Stakeholder Workshops:** Giving the Department of Correctional Services, the administration and employees of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre, and other pertinent non-governmental groups involved in juvenile rehabilitation an overview of the main conclusions in a format that is conducive to policy.

3.15 Chapter Summary

In conclusion, this chapter described the qualitative methodological framework that was employed to investigate the factors influencing the offending behaviour of juveniles at the DYCC. Qualitative research has inherent limitations even if it offers profound, context-rich insights into human experiences. In contrast to quantitative research, this study aims to provide a thick description of the participants' lived realities rather than statistical generalizability or numerical verification (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hennink et al., 2020). Given

that qualitative research is subjective, the researcher must admit that their own professional experiences and reflexivity have co-constructed and affected their findings (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

The results are not meant to be representative of all South African Youths, because this study used purposive sampling to choose fifteen specific subjects. Rather, the emphasis stayed on the results' transferability, enabling readers to ascertain how these localised insights may guide treatments in comparable correctional environments. The researcher maintained a thorough audit trail and used thematic analysis to ensure that all conclusions were grounded in participants' true stories, thereby ensuring the reliability and rigour of the findings. The presentation and analysis of the results in the next chapter were made possible by this strong approach.

CHAPTER 4: DATA PRESENTATION AND RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings derived from the qualitative exploration of the factors contributing to offending behaviour of incarcerated juveniles at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre (DYCC). The study sought to investigate the demographic, socio-political, psychosocial, and cultural factors that contribute to delinquency, as stated in Chapter 1. Fifteen (N=15) people participated in semi-structured interviews that yielded the data reported here. After providing a thorough demographic profile of the participants, this chapter analyses the four main themes that surfaced: (i) the lack of positive role models; (ii) the influence and impact of gang culture; (iii) socioeconomic despair; and (iv) systemic failures.

4.2 Profiles of Participants and Recruitment

Participants were recruited, receiving ethical approval and gatekeeper authorisation from the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). For two weeks, the DYCC had recruitment posters on display. Interested juveniles were invited to an information session where the study's voluntary nature and confidentiality procedures were described in both English and isiZulu.

Table 2: Demographic Summary of Participants

Participants	Current Age	Age at Time of Offense	Race	Primary Crime(s)	Childhood Family Structure	Childhood Environment
Sgoloza	23	16	African	Robbery	Multi-generational (Grandmother/Aunt)	Urban
Thaka	22	15	African	Robbery	Nuclear (Absent due to work)	Urban
Zenze	24	15	African	Robbery	Single Parent (Father deceased)	Urban
Singa	24	19	African	Robbery	Multi-generational (Grandmother)	Urban
Sjava	24	15	African	Murder & Housebreaking	Multi-generational (Abusive Grandfather)	Urban (Street-involved)
Ntokozo	25	20	African	Robbery	Nuclear Family	Urban
Thulas	25	17	African	Murder	Multi-generational (Mother/Grandmother)	Urban
Zeks	27	19	African	Sexual Assault	Nuclear Family (Financial hardship)	Rural
Phila	23	18	Coloured	Murder	Single Parent (Grandmother)	Urban (High-Crime)
Zakewu	23	16	African	Robbery	Single Parent (Mother; Father absent)	Urban
Ayanda	25	19	African	Rape	Extended Family (Hostile relations)	Urban
Sandy	26	18	African	Hijacking & Kidnapping	Single Parent (Mother; Father deceased)	Urban

Efesu	25	20	African	Robbery & Kidnapping	Nuclear Family	Urban
Jonah	18	18	African	Rape	Single Parent (Mother; separated)	Urban
Mqondisi	19	14	African	Robbery	Multi-generational (Mother/Grandmother)	Urban

4.2.1 Brief narrative description of the participants

With the exception of one participant who identified as Coloured, the sample consisted of fifteen incarcerated juveniles who all identified as African, in accordance with the demographic profile shown in Table 2.

Participant 1: Sgoloza

Sgoloza is a 23-year-old male with a history of juvenile offending behaviour. Raised by his grandmother and aunt in the absence of his biological parents, he identifies the death of his grandmother during his Grade 8 year as a pivotal turning point. Following this loss, he sought belonging within a delinquent peer group. Motivated by peer pressure and a desire for status symbols (specifically expensive clothing), he began committing robberies within his community. This trajectory led to his initial arrest at age 16.

Participant 2: Thaka

Thaka is a 22-year-old male who was involved in delinquency at the age of 15 and was charged with Robbery. He grew up in the presence of both parents, but the parents were not always around. There may have been a breakdown in protective parental supervision since Thaka's parents were not aware of his early shift into offending behaviour due to work

obligations. He started this offending behaviour when he felt he was being ignored at home and needed money to cater for himself at school, which was not provided by his parents. During the interviews, he indicated that he had to find his own way of getting money, which led him to be involved in robbery and was then charged and incarcerated.

Participant 3: Zenze

Zenze is a 24-year-old male with a history of offending behaviour. Raised by his father and grandmother, who were very supportive, he identified the death of his father during his grade 7 year as a pivotal turning point. He started to get involved in robbery, since he was struggling even to obtain financial resources, as she was staying with his granny, who was also a pensioner. He used to come home from school to find there was no food. He started to engage in carjacking with his peers because they needed quick cash, and that is why he ended up incarcerated for carjacking.

Participant 4: Singa

Singa is a 24-year-old male with a history of offending behaviour. He was raised by both parents, who were very supportive, although he was staying with his grandmother, hence the parents were working away from home. His behaviour started to change at the age of 19, after he compared himself with his peers who were involved in car hijacking, and had a considerable quantity of money due to unlawful conduct. Singa indicated that it was his first offence, which was carjacking, and that led to his incarceration.

Participant 5: Sjava

Sjava is a 24-year-old male who started engaging in offending behaviour at the age of 15 and was charged with Murder and Housebreaking. Raised by his grandparents, his father passed on whilst he was very young. Due to domestic violence within the household, his grandparents separated and he was left with his grandfather, who was abusing him physically, emotionally and sexually. As a result, he spent about 95% of his life on the street. His grandfather tried about 3 times to kill him, and he used to run away and stay on the street. As he mentioned that, his life was not easy, and he ended up killing his grandfather and was then incarcerated.

Participant 6: Ntokozo

Ntokozo is a 25-year-old male who was involved in unlawful activities at the age of 20 and was charged with robbery. His major challenge was that he was comparing himself with his peers and sought belonging within a delinquent peer group and desired status symbols. The lack of employment after finishing matric also played a huge role in his life, and he started to need quick cash. He then started to commit crimes with his peers, which led to his incarceration.

Participant 7: Thula

Thula is a 25-year-old male who started to engage in unlawful behaviour at the age of 17 and was charged with murder. He grew up in a warm and supportive family under the care of his mother, grandmother, and uncle. Although the participant was not living with his father, the father would visit him occasionally. During interviews, Thulas indicated that he started to

be engaged in unlawful activities at the age of 17, just after his mother passed away, and was incarcerated at the age of 21.

Participant 8: Zeks

Zeks is a 27-year-old man who was incarcerated at the age of 19 for Sexual Assault. Zeks grew up in a warm and supportive family, living with his parents and brother. At the age of 17 years, his father resigned from work, and they began experiencing financial challenges. His parents relocated to a rural area and were left with his elder brother. One day, Zeks arranged a model's photo shoot at his uncle's place and fell in love with a 21-year-old girl who ended up reporting him for sexual assault, and he was then arrested.

Participant 9: Phila

Phila is a 23-year-old man who started involving himself in offending activities at the age of 18, and he was charged with murder. During the interview, Phila explained that he was only staying with his grandmother, his mother died when he was 2 years old, and his father committed an unlawful activity and was arrested. Phila grew up in the community where the rate of crime was high, as he mentioned that most of the people in his community were on drugs, gangs, and there were always fights that took place every night. Phila experienced lots of abuse as he mentioned that he had been bullied, hit by a *sjambok*, and couldn't get any assistance. At the age of 13 years, he started to join older schoolmates who were taking drugs, and people in his community started to be afraid of him. Phila explained that he had so much anger, as a result, he started to look for people who had bullied him for the purpose of revenge. One night, he met the man who used to bully him and stabbed him, and he was rushed to the hospital, where he died. As a result, Phila was charged with murder.

Participant 10: Zakewu

Zakewu is a 23-year-old man who was involved in an unlawful act at the age of 16 and was charged with Robbery. He grew up with his mother and siblings, and they had a good relationship with his family. After his mother got married, Zakewu was left with his siblings, and he further mentioned that there was a lack of a father figure in his life, and he needed so much advice from his father, who was not part of his life. Zakewu revealed that he faced some challenges of being bullied at school. When he was in grade 10, he started to engage himself in robbery, which resulted in his incarceration.

Participant 11: Ayanda

Ayanda is a 25-year-old man who was involved in unlawful activities at the age of 19. Ayanda specified that he grew up with his grandparents, father, aunt, and his siblings, although his father died when Ayanda was 7 years of age. He didn't know his mother, and his relationship with his aunts and cousins was not good. During interviews, Ayanda mentioned that as he was growing up, he experienced so many challenges at home, his aunt used to blame him even for the things that he didn't do. He further explained that there was a time when his aunt tried to get him arrested when he was 16 years old, but they failed. Ayanda tried by all means to get to the stage when he started to be independent, but at the age of 19 years, he was accused of rape and then was incarcerated. Ayanda insisted that he was innocent and that his relatives had conspired to concoct the accusations against him.

Participant 12: Sandy

Sandy is a 26-year-old man who began engaging in offending behaviour at the age of 18. During the interview, he stated that he grew up with his mother and 09 siblings. Sandy's father died while his mother was pregnant with him. Even though Sandy participated in sports, the lack of institutional community support caused him to eventually stop playing sports and join criminal peer groups. During the interview, Sandy indicated that he used to compare himself with his peers who wore expensive clothes and got pressure from his peers. Sandy started to involve himself in house and car robberies and was incarcerated for hijacking and Kidnapping.

Participant 13: Efesu

Efesu is a 25-year-old male who was involved in an unlawful act at the age of 20. He grew up with both parents and his grandmother, and he had a good relationship with his family. Efesu stated that his parents tried in every way to be supportive of him. After finishing matric, Efesu mentioned that he used to spend more time with his peers who were also not working. They engaged in offending behaviour to get quick money. Efesu was charged with robbery and kidnapping.

Participant 14: Jonah

Jonah is an 18-year-old male who was charged with rape at the age of 18. He grew up with both parents, even though they were not married. At the age of 9, his parents separated, and he was raised by his mother. During interviews, Jonah mentioned that he needed his father's support and guidance, but that it was not available. Jonah, together with his peers,

used to love girls and send each other porn pictures, which contributed to his committing the unlawful act. After engaging in an unlawful sexual act, he was then incarcerated.

Participant 15: Mqondisi

Mqondisi is a 19-year-old male who started offending at the age of 14 and was charged with Robbery. Mqondisi grew up with his mother, grandmother, and his siblings, and they had a good relationship with his family. He further mentioned that his grandmother was the one who was looking after the family, and after his grandmother lost her job, he started gambling. Peer pressure also played a huge role in Mqondisi's behaviour. When he was in grade 9, he made peers with notorious young people who were involved in robbery. They formed a gang of 15 young men and planned to steal Uber cars. Mqondisi mentioned that after numerous immersions in unlawful activities, he was caught and incarcerated for robbery.

Most participants initially engaged in unlawful activities between the ages of 14 and 18. They were currently between the ages of 18 and 27, with the majority of participants being between the ages of 22 and 25. Although the offences were different, crimes against people and property predominated, especially robbery (8 out of 15 participants), which was followed by sexual assault/rape and murder. In accordance with the institutional policy of the Durban Youth Correctional Centre, it was required to include people up to the age of 27 to ensure that all participants met the inclusion criteria of having committed the felony while still deemed a juvenile (under 20).

Table 3: Summary of Key themes and Sub-Themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes
Lack of positive role models	i. Disintegration of family structure ii. Internalized feelings of rejection and emotional neglect
The influence and Impact of Gang culture	i. Peer association and alternative belonging ii. Normalization of criminal lifestyles and peer pressure
Socioeconomic despair	i. Systemic poverty and unemployment ii. Barriers to educational opportunities
Systemic failures	i. Perceived failures within the criminal justice system ii. Inadequacy of community-based social services

Theme 1: Lack of Positive Role Models

Growing up in dysfunctional, unstable, or emotionally unsupportive familial situations has significant negative effects, as demonstrated by the participant accounts. The psychosocial elements mentioned in the research objectives are directly addressed by this theme. The statistics imply that the absence of pro-social advice is a major motivator of adolescent entry into criminal paths.

Sub-theme 1.1: Disintegration of family structure

This sub-theme analyses the developmental consequences of being raised in a household defined by the absence of a major caregiver or positive masculine figure due to death, incarceration, or parental desertion. A structural void characterised the individuals' childhood:

Phila [Incarcerated for murder at the age of 18, currently 23] described a childhood defined by this void:

"My mom passed away when I was 2 years old, and my father went to prison not so long after that. and I've never met him whilst I was growing up."

Zakewu [Arrested for robbery at the age of 16, currently 23] echoed this sentiment, highlighting the specific guidance he missed:

"My father was not part of my life. I used to seek for father advise and couldn't get that help... If I face some challenges, I had to keep them because there was no one to talk to as a father."

Jonah [Arrested for Rape at the age of 18, currently 18] described a similar lack of paternal support after his parents separated:

"My relationship with my father was not good at all. In fact, I didn't get any love or support from my father."

Thulas [Arrested for Murder at the age of 17, currently 25] pinpointed this absence as a key factor:

"For me it was the absence of the father in my life to give me proper directions."

Zenze [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 15, currently 24] explicitly linked his offending to the death of his father, who provided both financial support and moral guidance:

"My father was able to give guidance, and reprimand me if I engage in wrongful actions... I had no one to guide me and teach me as a man on how to conduct myself."

Ntokozo [Arrested for robbery at the age of 20, currently 25] articulated the importance of parental supervision by connecting his offending directly to the point when his grandparents moved away, leaving him to live alone:

"The absence of parents did play a big role... if my grandmother and grandfather still lived with me, I don't think I would have committed the crime as they were strict."

The above instances show how the dissolution of the traditional family unit creates an "oversight vacuum", where a juvenile is more susceptible to harmful influences from the outside world due to a lack of parental supervision and moral direction (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

Sub-theme 1.2: Internalised Feelings of Rejection and Emotional Neglect

Participants reported feeling deeply alone in multiple instances, even while caregivers were physically present. This sub-theme emphasises how an antisocial identity was influenced by emotional neglect and a perceived lack of parental connection.

Sjava [Arrested for Murder at the age of 15, currently 24] provided an account of abuse, which drove him to a life on the streets:

"I was raised under abusive environment, called by names and they said I'm useless. I was abused physical and sexual... My grandfather... wanted to stab me with spear and I ran away". This abuse culminated in him murdering his grandfather in self-defence.

Phila [Incarcerated for murder at the age of 18, currently 23] felt completely ostracised by his extended family:

"My family my cousins never treated me the way that I felt acceptable, they only treated me like an outcast... I only felt like an outcast and isolated."

Thaka [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 15, currently 22] and **Sjava** both described feeling neglected after a younger sibling was born, with parental attention and resources being diverted.

Thaka explained,

"...when my little sister was born... all the attention went to her, and I no longer had any attention from my parents and that really affected me."

Ayanda also described his family life as *"quite a mess,"* ...feeling targeted by relatives because he was the only child without a present mother.

Summary of theme one

In South African psychological and criminological research, there is ample evidence that dysfunctional family structures and absenteeism are major contributors to juvenile offending rather than its exclusive causes (Badenhorst, 2021; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Muntingh, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). These results demonstrate that when a family does not provide emotional support and protective supervision, a young person develops a foundational vulnerability.

Theme 2: The Influence and Impact of Gang Culture

This theme examines how gang culture offers young people who feel excluded by their families or society a substitute source of status, identity, and safety. The study's sub-questions of the social and cultural factors that influence offending behaviour are directly addressed by this. According to the research, there is a difference between people who

intentionally joined gangs in order to make money and others whose actions were impacted by the widespread normalisation of gang activity in their neighbourhoods.

Sub-theme 2.1 Peer association and alternative belonging

To avoid social isolation, individuals developed a desirable character by hanging out with deviant peers, as this sub-theme illustrates.

Phila [Incarcerated for murder at the age of 18, currently 23], after enduring years of being bullied, saw drugs and gangsterism as a gateway to social acceptance:

"I noticed that girls started to like me and started to get friends, and I had something to do with my life."

Sgoloza [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 16, currently 23] was motivated by a desire for status and notoriety:

"I wanted a thing that will make me to be well known as well, to be respected."

Thaka [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 15, currently 22] manufactured a feared identity at school to command respect:

"I would carry knives to school, and I was a big shot no one could touch me, and people were scared of me."

Thulas [Incarcerated for Murder at the age of 17, currently 25] explicitly linked his offending to being involved in "gangsterism," where a dispute over a cell phone escalated into a fatal stabbing.

The identification of criminal acquaintances and pro-offending attitudes as crucial criminogenic needs is consistent. Alienation, rebelliousness and peers who are involved in problem behaviour were significant risk factors.

Sub-theme 2.2: Normalisation of Criminal Lifestyles and Aspirational Pressure

This sub-theme focuses on how the participants' surroundings created a strong pressure to fit in by normalising crime as a legitimate and frequently valued way of life.

Zakewu [Arrested for robbery at the age of 16, currently 23] stated that although his basic needs were met, the social environment was the primary factor:

"I used to see my friends wearing branded clothes and leaving lavish life. And the people that we were looking up to were successful but were involved in criminal activities."

Sgoloza [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 16, currently 23] described how seeing his peers succeed through crime without consequence made it seem like a logical choice:

"People I grew up with, had things that I didn't have, and what they had, they got it through crime... I was not aware that I will end up being incarcerated because my friends were committing crime without being caught."

Singa [Incarcerated for Murder at the age of 15, currently 24] confessed that his crime was driven entirely by aspirational peer pressure:

"My only problem was to compare myself with my friends, seeing that they have something that I like... I failed to wait for the right time."

Efesu [Arrested for Robbery and kidnapping at the age of 20, currently 25] described the direct pressure of being with his peers after they had committed a robbery:

"I was the only one who had no money. As a result, I was hurt by the fact that I had no contributions either for meals or transportation." This feeling of inadequacy directly motivated him to join them.

Mqondisi [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 14, currently 19] echoed this sentiment:

"I was also having peer pressure, looking at the life, they were living, the clothes they were wearing, I really got tempted."

Summary of theme two

In conclusion, this theme's findings offer factual proof of how juveniles gravitate toward unlawful peer groups to create a surrogate social structure when they lack positive role models. The findings show that peer association allows people to create a valued identity and demand respect through offending behaviour, acting as a coping mechanism against past feelings of rejection. Furthermore, a powerful social learning environment is produced by the normalising of a criminal lifestyle that is often motivated by the "status frustration" of unfulfilled material ambitions. According to Badenhorst (2021) and Ward et al. (2022), this atmosphere portrays crime as an acceptable and accessible path to financial gain and respect within their particular community context rather than as a deviant behaviour.

Theme 3: Socioeconomic Despair

This issue examines the structural determinants of desperation, such as systemic poverty and the absence of viable economic possibilities. These results highlight the harsh

reality of the “poverty” and “unemployment” demographic factors that were noted as the main causes of youth criminality in South Africa in Chapter 1. The research implies that socioeconomic hardship not only impacts offending; it often needs it for existence.

Sub-theme 3.1: Poverty and Environmental Deprivation as Drivers of Survival Crime

Participants gave examples of circumstances in which a complete lack of material resources immediately resulted in criminal activity.

Sjava [Incarcerated for Murder at the age of 15, currently 24] provided a stark example of survival crime, breaking into houses only for essentials:

"The main thing I used to take was just food and then if there are clothes that fit me, I would also take those... eating from the rubbish bins was hard for me."

Mqondisi [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 14, currently 19] linked his family's financial hardship directly to his decision to commit a crime:

"When granny lost the job, she used to go for gambling because we had no money... I knew that as I was going there my intention was to get money so that I can provide at home."

Zenze [Arrested for Robbery at the age of 15, currently 24], after his father's death, faced dire poverty:

"Sometimes when I came back from school, I found that there was no food at home, and I had to make means of getting something to eat." He explicitly cited poverty as a key reason for his crime.

Zenze's story offers a moving example of the deep connection between adolescent crime and structural poverty. His home was left without basic essentials like food due to the sudden financial difficulties that followed his father's death. The "poverty" and "unemployment" demographic variables mentioned in Chapter 1 as important risk factors in the South African setting are supported empirically by this story. As emphasised in current research work, socioeconomic hardship in South Africa is often a direct stimulus for "survival crimes", when the immediate need for sustenance outweighs legal boundaries (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). According to General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2022), Zenze's experience exemplifies the "presentation of negative stimuli" (chronic hunger) and the "removal of positive stimuli" (loss of a breadwinner). Juveniles, especially those without a strong social safety net, frequently lack the resources to deal with this enormous psychological burden without turning to criminal activity. Therefore, by framing unlawful action as a perceived necessity for existence, financial hardship actively changes the trajectory of offending conduct rather than only affecting the juvenile's surroundings (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Muntingh, 2021).

Sub-theme 3.2: Barriers to Educational and Vocational Advancement

Participants gave examples of circumstances in which a complete lack of material resources immediately resulted in criminal activity.

Efesu [Arrested for Robbery and kidnapping at the age of 20, currently 25] turned to crime after a legitimate job failed due to health reasons, and he could not find other work:

"After quitting my job, I had to stay at home because I couldn't find any other job. Yet I was applying with no positive results. As I was staying at home, the surrounding people were also not working, and they were doing criminal activities."

Ntokozo [Arrested for robbery at the age of 20, currently 25] shared a similar experience, turning to robbery after failing to find a job post-matriculation:

"I would submit my CVs, but I wouldn't be successful."

Zakewu [Arrested for robbery at the age of 16, currently 23] [Robbery at 16] said that a lack of community-level commitment prevented him from pursuing his pro-social goals:

"I used to play soccer but because the government failed us and that is why I was not successful and opt for crime."

Thulas [Incarcerated for Murder at the age of 17, currently 25] linked his drug use and subsequent crime to the stress of being rejected from tertiary education multiple times.

Similarly, **Sjava [Murder at 15]** had a sense of institutional desertion when the institutions failed to protect him from a domestic violence situation:

"I... reported to the nearest police station and they said I must go back to sort out family issues. That created anger because I had no one to cry to."

Summary of theme three

Socioeconomic Despair is a theme that links structural factors that contribute to offending behaviour to vulnerabilities within families and individuals. The findings demonstrate that deep-seated poverty and environmental deprivation often precipitate crimes committed out of sheer necessity. Importantly, the data also emphasises the deep sense of despair brought on by interrupted education and lost career opportunities, demonstrating that for many participants, crime was a last resort following the persistent blockage of what they believed to be valid paths to social advancement.

Theme 4: Systemic failures

This subject examines how the participants' pre-existing vulnerabilities were made worse by institutional flaws in the legal system, social welfare programs, and educational support systems. Due to these structural defects, juveniles frequently lacked a "safety net", which inadvertently drove them toward delinquent subcultures in an attempt to survive or find safety.

Sub-theme 4.1: Institutional neglect and the failure of formal support systems

This sub-theme clarifies situations in which interactions with formal systems were punitive rather than restorative. **Phila [Murder at 18]** described in graphic detail how his own anger increased as a result of his boarding school's lack of a protective system:

"I was very violent and stabbed one of the security guards at the boarding school, and the securities beat me into a point that I ended up on wheelchair, and I couldn't go anywhere. My granny came to visit me for the first time at the bodying school because I was critical sick after being assaulted by security guards."

This passage implies that the institutional security system failed to handle the conflict appropriately, resorting to excessive force that caused serious harm. Phila later encountered the police in an incident that resulted in his current incarceration, exposing a system that detected criminality after the fact rather than preventing it and ultimately failed to provide de-escalation or urgent protective relief:

"When I got home, my uncle advised me to call the police and report the matter. I then called the police who came to pick me to check on the victim... and only to find that he passed on."

This story demonstrates a methodical disregard for the psychological suffering that preceded the crime. As Phila pointed out, authorities never addressed his prior bullying experiences, which led to a cycle of “unhealed” trauma that ultimately resulted in severe violence. This indicates a serious deficiency in preventative, restorative justice actions before incarceration.

Sub-theme 4.2: Inadequate Social Services

This sub-theme examines the structural constraints within social support networks, including community resources, educational support systems, and family welfare programs. According to the statistics, these “safety nets” were either non-existent or ineffective, failing to offer the required treatments to lower the risk factors for offending behaviour.

The stories highlight a serious gap in the timely provision of social welfare support for households that unintentionally lose their principal provider. **Zenze** described how the death of his father exposed the systemic inadequacies of the state's support for child-headed or pensioner-led households:

"I started to lack on the things that I needed including clothes, food and money to carry at school. Most of things started to change... I was staying with granny who was a pensioner."

This case illustrates how, in the absence of official social service involvement, young juveniles living in impoverished households are frequently driven to utilise illegal measures to obtain “quick cash” in order to lessen the financial strain on older caregivers (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

Additionally, the data indicate a lack of readily available social and psychological therapies in the community and educational setting. Although **Phila [Murder at 18]** had previously discussed the psychological effects of being an outsider, his story also highlights a shortcoming of the “referral system” in which domestic religious counselling was the exclusive means of addressing severe bullying:

"Most of the times I used to cry and tell my granny who was so religious and used to tell me that I should be like Jesus, if someone slap you, you must give him another cheek and as a result I didn't get help from being bullied."

The participant's experience in this situation illustrates the dearth of professional social services that may have provided protective relief or defused his increasing aggressiveness, such as school-based counselling or community outreach programs. Juveniles in high-risk communities frequently lack the resources to deal with trauma due to the reliance on informal, non-protective guidance, which ultimately results in violent reprisal as a perceived solution (Muntingh, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

Additionally, peer pressure frequently took the form of a direct comparison of lifestyle and material standing. **Singa [Robbery at 19, now 24]** demonstrated how his exposure to urban township culture, more especially, the “township style” known as *izinkwari* created a sense of relative scarcity that drove him to turn to crime:

"I used to travel on a daily basis to township... I am the one who came up with township style and told my friends from the rural area about the life that is being lived at township, like "izinkwari" ... my friends were affording to live such life, but I was not... I had plans to go to rob and get clothes and money that I was going to use or spend at "enkwarini"..."

This story demonstrates that aspirational peer pressure rather than biological need was the driving force behind the heist. **Singa's** story highlights a psychological vulnerability in which the young person uses illegal means to obtain “status symbols” (money and branded clothing) in order to match his peer group and justify his social identity (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). He lacked the protections required to deal with these metropolitan socioeconomic pressures because his rural surroundings lacked financial literacy initiatives and pro-social mentorship.

Summary of theme four

The results show that a variety of institutional, economic, and psychosocial factors interact to cause adolescent offending at the DYCC. The data shows empirically that the normalisation of gang culture fills the hole left by absent role models, which is one of the major factors (not main causes). According to Badenhorst (2021) and Ward et al. (2022), these issues are made worse by socioeconomic despair and the perception that the state does not offer sufficient protection or educational help.

4.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter reports the qualitative findings that surfaced from the study. Lived experiences, which demonstrated a complex and multidimensional understanding of the psychosocial factors influencing hostile behaviour. Lack of positive role models, these juveniles' experiences brought to light the significant effects of dysfunctional, unstable, or emotionally unsupportive family systems as well as the lack of guiding adult figures, which can cause participants to feel abandoned and neglected. A crucial second issue was the influence and impact of gang culture, which showed how delinquent peer groups provide

people a skewed sense of identity, respect, and belonging. Peer pressure and exposure to harmful influences frequently lead to juveniles engaging in offending behaviour. The third theme, Socioeconomic Despair, focused on the widespread impact of systemic disadvantages, including unemployment, poverty, and restricted educational opportunities, which together create a sense of helplessness and push certain young people in the direction of deviance. The systemic failures, which highlighted flaws in the social services, legal system, and educational establishments increase, youth vulnerability and obstruct successful rehabilitation. All of these results highlight the intricate interactions between individual situations, social settings, and institutional shortcomings that influence the development of young people who engage in disruptive behaviour. This study offers a solid empirical basis for comprehending the intricate phenomena of juvenile offending within the South African setting by fusing these lived experiences with the well-established theoretical frameworks covered in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter 4 in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2 and the theoretical framework guiding the study, namely Agnew's General Strain Theory (GST). The purpose of this chapter is to interpret the findings within a broader scholarly and contextual framework, highlight their implications for practice and policy, acknowledge limitations, and present recommendations for future research and intervention.

5.2 Discussion of findings

Through synthesizing these findings with international literature on relative deprivation, the researcher contends that the South African experience offers a crucial case study in how neoliberal consumerism and structural inequality combine to trigger persistent offending trajectories. This study argues that juvenile offending at the DYCC is not just a local aberration but rather a symptom of a national crisis of belonging. These themes are discussed below in relation to existing research and theoretical perspectives.

5.2.1 Theme 1: Lack of Positive Role Models and Family Instability.

In theory, participant Sjava's account of sexual assault involves a presentation of negative stimuli rather than just a family issue (Agnew, 2022). According to GST, when pro-social coping skills are lacking, this strain generated a baseline of anger that requires an emotional release through deviance. The study finds the fragmentation of the family system as a significant contributor to adolescent criminality. According to the tales, the lack of a primary caregiver or stable father figure frequently leads to serious emotional and physical

neglect, leaving a developmental void. According to General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2022), a dysfunctional family setting or the death of a parent are examples of the removal of positive stimuli. The juvenile becomes extremely vulnerable psychosocially as a result of this absence, which goes beyond simply leaving them unsupervised. Although the importance of parental absence has been quantitatively shown by Farrington et al. (2021), this study offers the human dimension, demonstrating that a home can be broken even when parents are physically present but emotionally distant. Although whether the structure of the family (e.g., single-parent homes) or the process of parenting (e.g., quality of attachment) is the main cause of offending is the subject of a substantial scientific debate. Strong social ties and excellent supervision can reduce the dangers of a single-parent system, according to modern researchers like Sampson and Laub (1993), despite structural theorists like Moynihan (1965) usually arguing that the lack of a father is the primary cause. The latter process viewpoint is supported by my findings at the DYCC; for example, participants like Thaka had both parents' present but nevertheless committed crimes as a result of emotional neglect. This shows that emotional abandonment is a more powerful strain than physical absence and challenges the oversimplified structural idea that nuclear families are intrinsically protective.

According to Ward et al. (2022), parent-child interaction quality is a stronger indicator of delinquency than mere cohabitation. Sjava's story of domestic abuse and Thaka's sense of desertion lend credence to this. These findings show that the main risk factor that predisposing young people to seek validation in criminal subcultures is the absence of prosocial mentorship in early environments (Badenhorst, 2021; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020). Additionally, a larger socioeconomic issue in South Africa that is frequently caused by past migrant labour patterns and structural family fragmentation is reflected in the high frequency of father-absent families in the participant narratives. According to Badenhorst (2021), there

is an increased danger of supervision exhaustion when a juvenile grows up in a multigenerational home when the main provider is an elderly pensioner, as was the situation with Zenze. This implies that, even when grandparents are present, they may not have the financial or physical resources to offer the strict supervision needed to deal with high-crime areas. Because they lack a pro-social model of maturity, the juvenile is more likely to imitate the prominent but criminal strongman personalities in their community.

From a psychological perspective, the internalised feelings of rejection experienced by participants like Thaka and Sjava cause a significant emotional instability. According to Ward et al. (2022), emotional neglect serves as a negative stimulus in the context of the General Strain Theory, leading to long-term frustration and a lowered feeling of self-worth in young people. The psychological barrier to committing a crime is considerably reduced when a young person feels useless or outcast in their own family. According to the findings, the youngster uses delinquency as a maladaptive means of regaining a sense of agency or power that they are denied in a home environment. The "*So what?*" of these results suggests that Family-Based Interventions (FBI) must be incorporated into rehabilitative interventions in addition to individual counselling. In particular, these interventions ought to go beyond conventional talk therapy and incorporate mediated reconciliation sessions between the adolescent and their primary caregivers as well as restorative family conferences. The DCS would facilitate "structured family contact" in which therapists assist the family in addressing the "original strain" of abandonment or neglect. The DCS can mend the bond rupture before the juvenile is released, guaranteeing a more stable and encouraging environment for reintegration, by teaching caregivers in parenting techniques and include them in the juvenile's rehabilitation plan (Ward, 2023). The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) shall give priority to reintegration programs that strengthen these familial ties if the family

structure is the main location of the original strain. If the void left by absentee parents is not filled, the juvenile will be released into the same lack of guidance that caused their original incarceration (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Muntingh, 2021).

5.2.2 Theme 2: Influence and Impact of Gang Culture

The results imply that delinquent peer networks act as a substitute social structure when the family unit fails. Juveniles gain a sense of identity and status from this shift that they do not have in their home situations. According to the theory, joining a gang is a “coping mechanism” for the stress of being socially excluded. The participants' intention to deliberately create a “feared” persona is consistent with Social Learning Theory, which Agnew incorporates into his framework: young people imitate the actions of those who seem “successful” in their local environment (Agnew, 2022; Siegel, 2020). Sgoloza 's wants to be “well known” and Zakewu 's observation of pals wearing “branded clothes” illustrate a cognitive association process that associates criminality with financial success. This is an important finding: the normalisation of a criminal lifestyle in high-risk neighbourhoods makes delinquency seem like a logical, if detrimental, path to financial gain and reputation (Ward et al., 2022). Delinquency is frequently a learned social habit rather than an innate personality trait, according to the normalisation of criminal lifestyles in the participants' surroundings. According to Siegel (2020), young people experience a “cognitive shift” in which the material benefits of crime exceed the moral costs in settings where criminals are the most prominent examples of economic success.

The impact of gang culture highlights a major conflict in criminology between socialization and selection. While the socialization hypothesis (Thornberry et al., 1993) contends that the gang itself changes the individual, the selection hypothesis (Gottfredson &

Hirschi, 1990) contends that people with poor self-control seek out delinquent peers. My research points to a more complex interactionist viewpoint. Sgoloza and other subjects showed an initial selection based on a desire for status, but the Durban gang environment's socialization effectively normalized violence as a means of survival. This casts doubt on the strict division between these two viewpoints and implies that gang membership in South African slums is frequently a practical "forced choice" rather than a straightforward personality flaw.

Empirical proof of this change can be found in Singa's obsession with *izinkwari* (township style) and Zakewu's yearning for branded apparel. This suggests that for these young people, crime is a desperate attempt to obtain status and fortune through the only available methods rather than a rebellion against society's ideals. Additionally, the function of peer pressure as a social learning catalyst cannot be emphasised. According to Agnew (2022), peer groups frequently mitigate the stress of marginalisation by offering justifications for offending behaviour. Peer association provided a surrogate family in the stories of Sgoloza and Mqondisi, where respect was a commodity obtained via violence. According to Van Raemdonck (2018) and Ward et al. (2022), gang subcultures serve as alternative government systems in Durban, offering social hierarchy and safety that the family and the state have been unable to give. This conclusion suggests that aspirational realignment should be the main emphasis of gang prevention initiatives. For practitioners, the "*So what*"? is that merely informing young people that crime is wrong won't help if the gang's social standing is the only thing that gives them dignity. To successfully break the connection between criminality and social success, interventions must offer alternative, pro-social routes to status, such as leadership in athletics or professional brilliance (Badenhorst, 2021; Muntingh, 2021).

5.2.3 Theme 3: Economic Despair

The current study demonstrates how people are forced to make rational, but illegal, judgments in order to survive due to socioeconomic despair. Systemic poverty and “survival crime”, as demonstrated by Sjava and Mqondisi ’s testimonies, are closely linked by the statistics. This demonstrates the significance of "environmental conditions" in the GST framework, where a state of anomie or despair results from the inability to accomplish goals through legal methods (employment/education) (Badenhorst, 2021; StatsSA, 2023).

Criminality is often viewed as a last-resort reaction to desperation rather than a random aberration when pro-social avenues are barred, which is supported by the stories of Efesu and Ntokozo. For instance, Ntokozo's account describes a young person who met the societal requirement of completing their education (Matric), but despite submitting numerous resumes, they were confronted with the "dead end" of ongoing unemployment. In a similar vein, Efesu only resorted to kidnapping and theft after losing a respectable job owing to health issues and having no alternative lawful means of subsistence. These first-hand accounts show that in order to change the cost-benefit analysis of crime, structural inequities must be addressed in addition to individual interventions (Muntingh, 2021).

Regarding the connection between poverty and crime, there is still disagreement among academics. While strain theorists (Agnew, 2022) see crime as an emotional response to desperation, rational choice theorists (Cornish & Clarke, 1986) contend that criminals do a cost-benefit analysis. The Rational Choice model is challenged by my findings. For individuals such as Zenze and Sjava, their offense was an instinctive, survival-based response to hunger and the "removal of positive stimuli" (the death of a provider), rather than a "calculated" pursuit of gain. According to this analysis of the literature, the "intensity" of the strain

outweighs the "rationality" of the perpetrator in situations of great systemic poverty. This supports Ward's (2023) claim that juvenile criminality in South Africa is frequently "expressive" of societal suffering rather than just "instrumental" for financial gain. According to the research, many young people at the DYCC experience severe systemic obstacles when they go from school to the workforce. The "aspirational strain" noted by Agnew (2022) is exemplified by the experiences of Ntokozo and Efesu, who submitted multiple resumes without success after matriculation. A juvenile's disillusionment often results in a rejection of legal norms when they satisfy the social necessity of graduating from school but are nevertheless faced with the "dead end" of unemployment. This implies that the "youth unemployment crisis" in South Africa is a major criminogenic factor rather than just an economic problem.

Additionally, the narratives in which participants contrasted their perceived lack of resources with those of others clearly illustrate the idea of relative deprivation. According to Efesu, not being able to support basic home necessities in a consumer-driven society causes shame-based strain. Nearly 60% of South African youth live in households without a reliable source of income, according to StatsSA (2023) data, which is consistent with the participants' reports of making means to eat. This suggests that in a setting characterised by persistent scarcity, delinquency is frequently a logical survival tactic. This hopelessness implies that vocational education in correctional facilities should closely align with the needs of the real world. The "So What?" of Theme 3 is that the logical choice for survival upon release will continue to be robbery or theft until the DCS can offer adolescents high-demand skills (such as coding, plumbing, or mechanical engineering). If the structural reality of poverty does not change, treating individual pathology is insufficient (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

Zenze's hunger after his father passed away serves as an example of both the removal of positive stimuli and the inability to achieve goals. According to GST, this diminishes the juvenile's interest in conformity by creating a chronic strain, which makes the "rational choice" to loot a car a theoretically predictable response to external pressure.

5.2.4 Theme 4: System Failures

The issue of systemic failures is the last point of convergence. This study shows that juveniles' pre-existing vulnerabilities are made worse by institutional carelessness in the legal system and social welfare programs. Mechanisms intended to protect juveniles often turn into instruments of trauma when they put punitive responses ahead of de-escalation, as Siegel (2020) points out. There is a significant gap between the idealistic objective of restorative justice and the actual situation of a reactive system, as seen by Phila's report of security using excessive force and the police failing to stop Sjava's abuse. Vulnerable people become repeat offenders due to these structural inadequacies. To address the underlying causes of juveniles' misbehaviour in South Africa, policies that emphasise proactive, preventative intervention over punitive, reactive measures are therefore required (Badenhorst, 2021; DCS, 2023). The participants' impression of the state as an additional source of trauma rather than as a protector is a crucial finding in this study. Sjava's account of being disregarded by the police and Phila's account of being beaten by security personnel both demonstrate institutional betrayal. The youngster learns that violence is the only practical means of resolving conflicts when official agencies of protection do not step in to stop bullying or domestic abuse. This implies that by neglecting to provide rehabilitative options at the initial point of contact, the criminal justice system frequently unintentionally trains young people into violent lives.

Additionally, a referral gap results from the community's lack of easily accessible social services, leaving educators and caregivers without a competent way to report at-risk behaviour. According to Muntingh (2021), diversion programs are frequently unavailable in the very places where they are most needed because the South African Child Justice Act is usually underfunded at the municipal level. According to the research, juveniles like Zenze and Phila reached a tipping point because they lacked a social worker or counsellor to help them manage their psychological or domestic issues before they turned into serious crimes. For policymakers, the *"So what"?* is that South Africa's juvenile justice system is still overly reactive. The government must direct funds toward School-Based Support Teams (SBST) and community policing that prioritise victim protection ahead of punitive enforcement in order to lower the number of people in the DYCC. These results imply that institutional flaws actively promote the development of a major criminal from a vulnerable youngster rather than merely allowing crime to occur (DCS, 2023; Ward et al., 2022).

5.2.5 Going Beyond Verification: The Durban Context's Special Contribution

Although the results of this study support the general conclusions of Ward et al. (2022), and Badenhorst (2021) about the influence of poverty and peer pressure, it goes beyond mere confirmation by emphasizing two distinct aspects of the Durban street-culture trajectory. First, General Strain Theory is refined in a subtle way by the particular expression of status frustration through *izinkwari* (township style). It implies that the "strain" in the Durban metropolitan region is not just the lack of necessities but rather a highly localized, media-driven identity strain where robberies are primarily motivated by the incapacity to engage in certain consumerist rituals (expensive township branding). Second, the study highlights a component of institutional betrayal that is frequently disregarded in more general South African research: participants felt hunted or ignored at pivotal moments (like Sjava's

police report), in addition to being neglected by the state. This implies that the failure of formal processes in KZN actively generates the rage that feeds violent desensitization rather than merely leaving a hole. This research adds a deeper layer of contextual etiology by identifying these particular local catalysts, shifting the conversation from general risk factors to targeted, intervention-ready local insights.

5.3 Theoretical Implications, Methodological Implications and Practical Implications

The findings have implications for correctional policy, prevention strategies, and rehabilitation programmes.

First, interventions should prioritise trauma-informed approaches. Many participants experienced unresolved grief, abuse, and emotional instability. Psychological support services within correctional facilities should be strengthened.

Second, family-based interventions should be integrated into rehabilitation programmes. Strengthening caregiver relationships may reduce recidivism and improve reintegration outcomes.

Third, socioeconomic interventions, including skills development and employment readiness programmes, are critical. Addressing unemployment among young people may reduce economically motivated offences.

Fourth, multi-sector collaboration between DCS, DSD, educational institutions, and community organisations is necessary to address systematic contributors to juvenile offending.

5.3.1 Implications for the Department of Correctional Services (DCS)

The results have significant ramifications for the present rehabilitation strategy of the DCS. According to the study, an offence-focused strategy, in which programs are rigorously

classified according to the crime committed (such as the Robbery or Murder programs), could not be addressing the underlying criminogenic strains that caused the behaviour. The crime was only a sign of unresolved trauma for people like Phila and Sjava. This suggests that the DCS has to shift to a trauma-informed treatment approach, where the main goal of rehabilitation is to address the underlying psychological injury (Badenhorst, 2021; DCS, 2023). Additionally, the data indicates that rehabilitation may be aided or hindered by the institutional climate. Institutional betrayals a major obstacle to change, according to the participants' accounts of being punished or ignored by authorities. Juveniles are more likely to turn to gang subcultures for status and safety when incarcerated if they believe that the correctional setting is an extension of the systematic neglect they experienced in the community. This suggests that in order to ensure that correctional officials function as pro-social mentors rather than just custodial figures, the DCS must fund staff-sensitization training (Muntingh, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

The study also suggests that the one-size-fits-all approach to vocational training is inadequate. For juveniles like Ntokozo and Efesu, the lack of modern, high-demand skills led to post-matriculation despondency. This implies that the DCS should incorporate the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) into its curriculum. The financial burden noted by Agnew will continue to be a major factor in recidivism after release unless juveniles leave the institution with skills that provide a real competitive advantage in the South African job market (Badenhorst, 2021; StatsSA, 2023). Lastly, the data suggests that the Correctional centres is not where the DCS's job ends. According to the socioeconomic despair research, a juvenile's first six months after release are the most crucial. The structural reality of poverty is likely to undermine the psychosocial benefits acquired during incarceration in the absence of an organized aftercare framework that connects juveniles to jobs or additional education. This

suggests that a smooth transition policy between community-based social services and the DCS is necessary (Jantjies & Popovac, 2020; Muntingh, 2021).

5.3.2 Implications for Social Welfare and Policy

The Department of Social Development (DSD) and the execution of the child Justice Act 75 of 2008 will be significantly impacted by the study. The stories draw attention to the ongoing referral gap in underprivileged areas. Despite obvious signs of a family catastrophe after his father's death, the system didn't step in for young people like Zenze until after the crime. This suggests that early-warning systems that identify at-risk homes before a tipping point into delinquency is reached should be given priority in the reform of current social welfare programs, which are excessively reactive (Muntingh, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). Furthermore, the results suggest that the moral decline mentioned in South African media is actually a sign of deteriorating societal cohesiveness. The absence of good role models mentioned in Theme 1 implies that the community's customary safety nets have been undermined by financial difficulties. This suggests that social welfare policy should concentrate on community-building projects that rejuvenate pro-social mentorship programs for young men in urban townships rather than only individual grants (Badenhorst, 2021; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020). The analysis suggests that the Child Justice Act's diversion programmes are either underutilized or underfunded in the KZN region from the standpoint of legal policy. Many participants believed that their initial encounter with the law was solely punishing, hastening the development of their unlawful persona. In order to address low-level survival crimes without the trauma of formal incarceration, the state must decentralize social services and make Restorative Justice centres accessible in high-crime areas like KwaMashu and Inanda (Artz & Hoffman-Wanderer, 2017; UNODC, 2022).

Finally, the study suggests that financial literacy and youth entrepreneurship policies that focus on formerly jailed people are desperately needed. Participants who were unable to secure employment after being released expressed despondency, indicating that employability is insufficient in a stagnating economy. Policy must focus on developing micro-hubs where juveniles can use occupational skills in a sheltered environment, effectively providing a buffer against the immediate strain of poverty that Agnew highlights as a main motive for stealing and robbery (StatsSA, 2023; Ward et al., 2022).

5.3.3 Implications for Identity and Masculinity

The study has significant ramifications for our comprehension of how South African juvenile offenders exhibit hyper masculinity. Participants like Thaka and Sgoloza used aggression and notoriety as strategies to establish a masculine identity in the absence of secure father figures. This suggests that in the Durban setting, delinquency is frequently a display of manhood meant to restore dignity in a society that provides them with very little social or financial capital. This shows that practitioners must address gang culture as an identity-seeking behaviour rather than just a criminal choice (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

Additionally, the impact of relative deprivation through material comparison suggests that new psychological pressures have been brought about by contemporary commercial society. According to Singa's account of the Izinkwari style on the year 2019, media exposure and digital social learning have created a standard of success that is unachievable for the majority of township youth. This suggests that youth development programs should include a digital literacy and critical thinking component that helps juveniles deconstruct these media-driven definitions of success (Prinstein, 2022; Tenzin et al., 2023). The study also suggests that

the internalized feelings of rejection mentioned in Theme 1 are frequently the root causes of violent behaviour. The murder of an abuser might be seen as a desperate attempt to relieve stress and establish a dominant personality when a child is told they are useless or neglected, as in Sjava's story. This suggests that the neurobiological effects of long-term neglect, which hinder early childhood development of empathy and pro-social reasoning, should be given more consideration in criminological research (Agnew, 2022; Siegel, 2020).

5.4 Recommendations of the Study

5.4.1 Recommendations for the Department of Correctional Services (DCS)

Factor-Based Rehabilitation: The DCS should switch from offence-based to factor-based therapies. A Family Reconnection Program should be a part of rehabilitation since Theme 1 recognized the absence of role models as a major motivator. In order to mend attachment ruptures prior to release, this would entail facilitated therapy sessions between young offenders and their primary caregivers. **Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) Training:** The DCS should create Sector-Linked Skills Hubs to alleviate the socioeconomic despair mentioned in Theme 3. Juveniles should be trained in high-demand Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) skills including sophisticated mechanical repair, coding, and renewable energy maintenance rather than general labour. The blocked opportunities mentioned by participants such as Ntokozo and Efesu are directly addressed by this. **Trauma-Informed Staff Training:** It is advised that all correctional officials obtain Trauma-Informed Certification in order to lessen the Institutional Betrayal noted in Theme 4. In order to prevent the correctional setting from reflecting the systematic neglect that juveniles experience in the community, this training should concentrate on changing the staff's role from being solely custodial to pro-social mentorship.

5.4.2 Recommendations for Communities and Schools

School-Based Safe Havens: The Department of Basic Education should set up after-school "Safe Havens" in high-risk communities like Inanda and KwaMashu to counter the allure of gang subcultures (Theme 2). Sports and organized mentoring should be offered by these facilities to give juveniles a different way to feel like they belong. Early-Warning Referral Mechanisms: Schools should establish a Child Justice Liaison position in light of the systemic flaws mentioned in Theme 4. This person would be in charge of spotting at-risk behaviours (such those brought on by bullying or domestic loss) and making quick recommendations to social welfare before the juvenile reaches a criminal tipping point.

5.4.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Longitudinal Desistance Studies: In order to pinpoint the precise psychological and social elements that contribute to successful desistance (stopping crime) in the South African setting, future studies should track a group of young people who have been released from DYCC. Digital Peer Dynamics: To further understand the contemporary development of Theme 2, an examination of the role of social media in gang recruitment and status frustration among township adolescents is required. Neuro-Criminological Research: Particularly in the context of KwaZulu-Natal's socioeconomic environment, research on the neurobiological consequences of early childhood trauma and long-term poverty on impulse control is advised.

5.5 This Study and General Strain Theory

Assessing the General Strain Theory (GST) of Agnew (1992, 2022) in the unique sociocultural context of a South African juvenile detention center was one of the main goals of this qualitative investigation. This section demonstrates how the participant narratives

both support and expand the theoretical framework by synthesizing the empirical data from Chapter 4 with the fundamental principles of GST. By demonstrating the internal emotional mechanisms such as anger, shame, and rejection that bridge the gap between social tension and criminal behaviour, the qualitative data adds a dimension of experiential complexity to the theory. A layer of experiential richness is added to the qualitative data gathered at the Durban Youth Correctional Centre by applying Agnew's (2022) General Strain Theory (GST), which verifies the fundamental principles of the framework. This study shows a clear interplay among factors, with the components forming a causal chain rather than treating the six determinants of delinquency as separate variables. The narratives imply that psychological states of internalized rejection or anger are directly caused by chronic strains more especially, the loss of positive role models (removal of positive stimuli) and exposure to domestic abuse (display of negative stimuli). This internal mental aspect makes the young person susceptible to the impact of negative social factors such as gang subcultures, especially when the formal support systems of school or the job market (occupational circumstances) is thought to be failing.

The hypothesis does a good job of explaining how relative hardship a powerful motivator for offending activity in South Africa is. According to the research, young people like Singa and Zakewu were under pressure to meet material status goals set by their peer groups rather than just to survive biologically. According to Agnew's paradigm, young people are much more inclined to use innovative but illegal methods to deal with this status-based stress when they lack pro-social coping mechanisms like financial literacy or mentorship. According to the study, delinquency at the DYCC is often a deliberate reaction to the ongoing obstruction of legal avenues for social and economic growth (Badenhorst, 2021; Ward et al., 2022). The study also identifies a crucial point at which the juvenile's internal cognitive

association process and the home conditions converge. The results show that the breakdown of the family structure significantly changes the juvenile's perception of success, rather than only leading to a lack of supervision. The juvenile imitates these characteristics as a coping mechanism for their domestic isolation in settings where hyper-masculinity and criminal reputation are the only obvious sources of esteem. This supports Agnew's (2022) claim that the main motivators for a young person to engage in antisocial behaviour to control their surroundings are the emotional fallout from stress, such as rage and resentment.

Criticism of the Theory: Cultural Differences

Although the General Strain Theory offers a strong general framework, it is unable to adequately account for the cultural peculiarities of the juvenile justice system in South Africa. For instance, the theory finds it difficult to explain the normalisation of customs like *ukuthwala* or cleansing rituals, which are seen as cultural obligations rather than strains in some societies. According to Muntingh (2021) and Ward et al. (2022), this suggests that GST is insufficient without an African-centric cultural lens that acknowledges how customs can serve as a safeguard or, when misconstrued, serve as a trigger for legal disputes that the conventional GST model is unable to anticipate. In summary, this qualitative study demonstrates that although all is not well with a strictly Western theoretical approach, General Strain Theory integration is still a useful tool for comprehending adolescent crime in Durban. The study goes beyond a descriptive list of risk variables to a more in-depth examination of the "So What"? underlying the crime by illustrating the causal relationship between environmental stressors and psychological reactions. The results imply that future theoretical frameworks for South African youth must reconcile the intricate, often contradictory cultural requirements of the township setting with the psychological pressure

experienced by each individual. Developing solutions that are both culturally appropriate and conceptually sound requires this synthesis (Badenhorst, 2021; Jantjies & Popovac, 2020).

5.6 Study Limitations

To preserve academic rigour and contextualise the results, the limitations of this study must be addressed.

Scope (Generalisability): Only fifteen male inmates from a single correctional facility (Durban YCC) made up the tiny, deliberate sample used in this qualitative study. Instead of providing statistical generalisability to the larger community of juvenile offenders throughout South Africa, the results are intended to provide depth and insight.

Self-Report Bias Potential: Recall bias and social desirability bias are inherent limitations because the data are reliant on participants' self-reported memories and accounts of prior occurrences. Participants may have a propensity to underreport their own agency or overattribute their offences to other forces (such as poverty or peer pressure).

Researcher Positionality (Context): The researcher's position as a DCS employee may have contributed to bias, even though a neutral interview technique and continuous reflexivity were used. It's possible that this positionality unintentionally affected how participants framed their stories in an institutional context.

Gender Scope: It is impossible to infer that the results and the identified causal pathways apply to female offenders because the study only covered male criminals. The study's narrow focus on local occurrences means its conclusions may apply only to that region, which is one of its limitations.

Benefit from diversionary programmes and preventative measures aimed at reducing juvenile criminality. One of the study's weaknesses is that its conclusions may apply only to that area due to its restricted focus on local occurrences.

5.7 Chapter summary

This study aimed to look beneath the surface of juvenile crime statistics and hear the actual experiences of young men who are detained. The results have unequivocally demonstrated that, rather than being a straightforward decision, the road to a correctional centre cell is a complicated one that is fuelled by a combination of social pressure, systemic negligence, and family disintegration. This research has gone beyond abstract statistics by giving the offenders a voice and illuminating the individual experiences that underlie the crimes young men searching for dads, a sense of belonging, respect, and a viable future in a world that seemed to offer them none. The study's primary contribution is its integration of these components, showing how psychological harm received at home creates a weakness that the criminal underworld is all too ready to exploit, particularly in a society where legal opportunities seem unreachable. In order to address the social brokenness that encourages juvenile criminality in our homes and communities, this work serves as an urgent call for a paradigm shift in juvenile justice, away from a narrow focus on punishing the offender and toward a more preventative, compassionate, and holistic approach.

5.8 Critical reflections

5.8.1 Personal reflections

It proved extremely difficult but enlightening to conduct this research in the Durban Youth Correctional Centre, a system to which the researcher is professionally connected. The complexity of participant narratives, especially the degree of emotional abuse and neglect (as in Sjava's case), prompted the researcher to continuously and humbly reevaluate preconceived notions, notwithstanding the researcher's initial institutional understanding of crime. Maintaining empathic neutrality making sure that the emotional weight of the participants' tales did not skew the analysis but instead enhanced the interpretation was the main personal challenge. In order to prevent the researcher's insider status from causing either premature acceptance or unduly critical scrutiny of the systemic problems reported by the participants, this method required strict self-reflexivity.

5.8.2 Theoretical reflections

The study's empirical results showed that General Strain Theory (Agnew, 2022) applies to the South African context. The framework offered a way to categorize the various elements from peer pressure to parental dysfunction into a logical causal narrative. The results do, however, highlight an essential distinction: the causal interdependence of these parts is more important than their independent existence. The prerequisite for another (like the reliance on social sources for identity) is directly created by failure in one area (like home problems). The idea was especially helpful in clarifying the meaning of "Relative Deprivation" in the context of the Durban Township. The stories of participants like Singa and Zakewu demonstrated that the psychological stress of "comparing oneself to successful peers" was a more direct cause of robbery than physical hunger, despite the fact that GST frequently

concentrates on absolute poverty. This shows that in a modern, consumer-driven society, Agnew's "aspirational strain" is intensified by the digital visibility of riches. According to the study, the theory's strength is its capacity to link these macroeconomic forces to an individual's interior emotional condition, offering a rational explanation for why young people from comparatively supportive homes can nonetheless turn to crime in order to gain status.

Although the process of reflection also revealed areas in which the theory has to be localised. The historical and cultural peculiarities of the South African environment, such as the generational effects of migrant labour on father absence, are frequently undervalued by Standard General Strain Theory. The study discovered that this particular kind of domestic gap is a structural norm in many KZN communities, notwithstanding Agnew's identification of removal of positive stimuli as a generic strain. According to Badenhorst (2021) and Ward et al. (2022), future theoretical applications in South Africa must incorporate GST with a decolonial perspective that explains how the nation's distinct socio-political history has created a chronic condition of stress for black juveniles in urban slums.

5.8.3 Methodological reflections

The study's goal of going beyond a fundamental understanding of offending behaviour was achieved through the qualitative exploratory approach. The semi-structured interviews yielded the detailed narratives needed to construct the four themes. The limitations of self-report, however, are an important topic. Future factual basis would be strengthened by triangulation with institutional records or observational data (where morally acceptable). The experiential richness of the data was effectively managed through Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher went beyond a descriptive summary of the interviews by using the six-phase approach to uncover the hidden meanings underlying the participants'

behaviours, including the connection between carrying a knife and searching for respect. Theme 4 (Systemic Failures), which was not the main emphasis of the original study questions but turned out to be a crucial discovery for addressing the "Why?" of juvenile recidivism, emerged thanks to the flexibility of the qualitative technique.

The significance of linguistic reliability is the subject of a final methodological reflection. It was ensured that the participants' cultural idioms and nuances were not lost in translation by an outside transcriber by conducting the interviews in isiZulu and translating them myself. By maintaining the analysis rooted in the genuine voice of Durban youth, this choice increased the trustworthiness of the findings. The thick description offered enables other researchers in comparable high-risk correctional contexts to compare these results with their own localised observations, despite the small sample size (N=15) preventing statistical generalizability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hennink et al., 2020).

5.9 Conclusion

At the Durban Youth Correctional Centre, the dissertation successfully investigated several elements that lead to juvenile offending behaviour. It unambiguously indicates that juvenile criminality is a complicated societal issue originating from interwoven systemic, social, and psychological vulnerabilities. By combining the themes of a lack of positive role models, the influence of gang culture, socioeconomic despair, and systemic failures, the study offers a compelling, empirically supported narrative that links individual trauma to institutional failure. This work offers an important contextual application of General Strain Theory in the South African context, demonstrating a clear causal chain wherein the lack of familial protection results in a search for identity in the criminal underworld, particularly when poverty obstructs legitimate opportunities.

The findings constitute an urgent appeal for a fundamental transformation in South African social service and correctional policy toward a developmental intervention paradigm for at-risk youth that is trauma-informed and preventative. Reforming the institutional and societal environments that produce offenders is as crucial as reforming the offender. By identifying the systemic, psychosocial, and demographic factors that contribute to crime in Durban, the dissertation has effectively achieved its goals. The piece serves as evidence of the complexity of the South African juvenile experience, showing that crime is frequently the only “logical” result of a setting characterised by ongoing stress. The study concludes by stating that correcting the offender is a secondary duty, with correcting the environment that gives rise to them being the primary objective. If South Africa is to lower its juvenile incarcerated population, it must invest in the families, schools, and township economies that currently serve as the nurseries of delinquency. This research provides the evidence essential to launch that long-overdue shift (Badenhorst, 2021; Muntingh, 2021; Ward et al., 2022).

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Research title:

Contributors to Criminal behaviours amongst juveniles in the Durban Youth Correctional Centre: A Qualitative Exploratory Study

Researcher:

RADEBE THANDEKILE LOVENESS

Student number: 34779175

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname Radebe Thandekile Loveness

Researcher's signature *TL Radebe* Date 09 September 2024



APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Data collection tool(s) (including questionnaire/ interview guide/checklist)

Data collection tools:

- i. The aim of the research
- ii. The type of data that you will collect.
- iii. The methods and procedures and process the data collection.

Checklist

1. Is there congruence with the research methodology and;
 - i. indicated philosophical perspective.
 - ii. the research question or objectives
 - iii. the methods used to collect data.
 - iv. the representation and analysis of data
 - v. the interpretation of results
2. Any evidence of the researcher culturally or theoretically connected
3. Is the participants are correct represented?
4. Is there any evidence of ethical approval by an appropriate body?
5. Ethics for example, consent letter or trustworthiness
6. The golden thread leads into the conclusions of the research report for example from the analysis, or interpretation and the data?

Interview Guide

The interviews will be conducted for data collection. Semi structured interview will be used for researcher to ask series of questions that the participants will react to in their own words. Semi-structured interviews will be beneficial to this study as when collecting in-depth information on participants.

Interviewer's Guide

The purpose of the interview is to explore the contributing factors to criminal behaviour amongst juveniles in Durban Youth Centre.

The reason for this interview is to collect data for the researcher master's degree research report. It is also a process to find information for future researchers or advisers for guidance, readiness and/or to be assist the department of Correctional services in designing programmes that will target the root causes for juveniles to commit crime.



This will be a confidential interview where no information will be made available to third parties. The participants' names will not be mentioned in any circumstances and information will not be used without the consent of the interviewee. Each participant will have the opportunity to sign a consent of participant letter and each party will have a copy for own reference.

The interview will be in semi- structured format and will be guided by questions to respond. If a participant is not comfortable to answer some questions, they can indicate it to the researcher. If the interviewee is not able to continue, it will be possible to reschedule the appointment.

The interview can take up to 30 or 60 minutes per participant, depending on what kind of information available during the interviews.

The following socio-demographic information will be asked before commencing with the interview:

- Date of discussion
- Respondent code
- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Marital status
- Religion
- Employment
- Education

Interview guide:

I would like us to talk about your motives that led you to be involved in offensive activities. I'm also interested to know which factors that contributed to criminal behaviour. How did your background contribute to criminal behaviour?

Proposed questions or probes:

- What are the factors that led into you committing an offense?
- What are the demographic factors which contributed to offending behaviour
- Any political factors which contribute to you offending?
- What are the psychological factors that contribute to offending behaviour?
- What are the social factors which contributed to you offending?
- What are the cultural factors which contributed to you being incarcerated?
- How did you find yourself in the space of being identified as a person who is against the law?
- When did you start committing acts that can be categorised as unlawful?
- Where does most of juveniles or young persons find it conducive to commit criminal offenses?
- How was your life when you were growing up

General cues for probes

- Can you explain a bit more?
- Can you give me more details about what happened?
- Can you explain why?
- How did you feel about...?
- Did you understand?

Thank you for participating in the study!



APPENDIX C: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Confidentiality agreement: Master's and doctoral or independent study data collection (interviews or self-administered questionnaires) process

Confidentiality agreement as role player in the study data collection (interviews or self-administered questionnaires) process

I, as the undersigned role player in the master's and doctoral assessment process, agree to observe confidentiality on the names, any information about participants, and to guard against accidental disclosure of information. I will refrain from any practices that challenges the integrity of the research process.

Name	
Surname	
Role	

This agreement certifies that, in the execution of my duties as a role player in the study data collection (interviews or self-administered questionnaires) process:

1	I will treat all information contained confidential, and discussion with the strictest of confidence and will not reveal that information to any third party.	YES	NO
2	I will not use the information contained in the study for any reason other than for executing my assigned tasks.	YES	NO
3	I will take reasonable steps to ensure that all information that I receive relating to the study is securely stored.	YES	NO
4	I will notify the researcher of all POSSIBLE conflicts of interest, no matter how remote that may be, timeously. I understand that I may be required to recuse myself from decisions, relating to any conflicts of interest declared.	YES	NO
Signature		Date	

APPENDIX D: ADVERTISEMENT



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APPENDIX E: CREC APPROVAL



1. UNISA CREC-
Approval Letter (003)

APPENDIX F: DCS APPROVAL



Thandekile DCS-REC
Approval.pdf

APPENDIX G: LANGUAGE EDITOR DECLARATION



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EDITORS CERTIFICATE

20 February 2025

To Whom It May Concern

I, Gosiame Noge, a professional and experienced English language editor and proofreader registered with the Professional Editors' Guild, herewith confirm that I have conducted an English proofreading, language editing and technical editing on the (manuscript/proposal/(mini)dissertation/thesis/ report/book) by **THANDEKILE LOVENESS RADEBE** titled:

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YOUTH CORRECTIONAL CENTRE: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY STUDY***

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PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS WITH THE PROFESSIONAL EDITORS' GUIDE (PEG) AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN FREELANCERS'
ASSOCIATION (SAFREA)

APPENDIX H: TURN-IT-IN REPORT



Screenshot 1.png