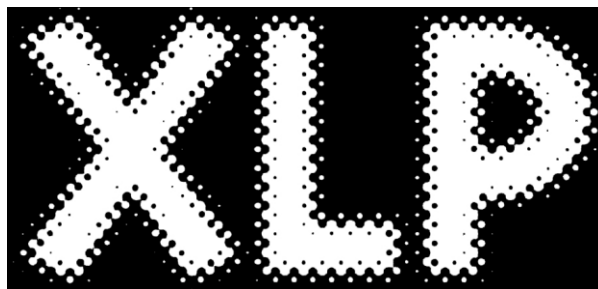




Girls and Gangs



About the Centre for Social Justice

The Centre for Social Justice (CSJ) is an independent think-tank, established to put social justice at the heart of British politics.

Moved by shocking levels of disadvantage across the nation, it studies the root causes of Britain's acute social problems in partnership with its Alliance of over 350 grassroots charities and people affected by poverty. This enables the CSJ to find and promote evidence-based, experience-led solutions to change lives and transform communities.

The CSJ believes that the surest way to reverse social breakdown – and the poverty it creates – is to build resilience within individuals, families and the innovative organisations able to help them.

The Centre for Social Justice's Criminal Justice Programme

Social justice and criminal justice go hand in hand. Not only does crime disproportionately affect poorer communities, but those who have committed crime are also far more likely to suffer from the causes of social breakdown such as drug abuse, poor literacy rates and worklessness.

Moreover, criminal sentences – whether prison or its alternatives – provide a unique opportunity to intervene in the often chaotic lives of those involved in criminal activity. By creating a just society where crime rates are low and the public feel confident about their safety, community cohesion and pride in local neighbourhoods can flourish.

For these reasons, in early 2013 the CSJ launched a Criminal Justice Programme to find public policy solutions to entrenched criminal justice problems. The Programme will build on our previous reports on police, prison reform, and youth gangs, such as *Locked-up Potential*, *A Force to be Reckoned With*, *Rules of Engagement: Changing the heart of youth justice*, *Dying to Belong: An in-depth review of street gangs in Britain*, and *Time to Wake Up: Tackling gangs one year after the riots*.

If you want to contribute to the Programme or have an interest in supporting our work we would be delighted to hear from you. Please contact Edward Boyd, the Deputy Policy Director of the CSJ at edward.boyd@centreforsocialjustice.org.uk.

Introduction to XLP

XLP is an urban youth charity working to create positive futures for young people living in inner-London and make a serious and sustainable impact on poverty and educational failure. The overall aim of their work is to see young people living in inner-London making wise life choices and positively contributing to their families, communities and society.

XLP stands for "The eXcel Project" a charity at the cutting edge of urban youth work in London, started by Patrick Regan in Peckham, South London, in 1996 after a stabbing in a school playground. Today XLP serves young people in schools and communities across seven inner-London boroughs (Southwark, Lewisham, Greenwich, Newham, Tower Hamlets, Islington and Camden), working with over 1,800 young people each week on a one-to-one and small group basis, and engaging with over 12,000 young people per year. They operate a range of prevention, diversion and intervention programmes such as schools work, after-school clubs, mentoring, arts and sports, and summer camps.

Acknowledgements

The CSJ and XLP would like to thank the many individuals and organisations that have generously taken time to contribute evidence to this report. Without them this report would not have been possible. We spoke to many girls and young women who are or have been gang-associated and more than 30 organisations working to tackle gang problems. Whilst some voluntary organisations gave their evidence anonymously, there are a number we would like to thank publically. They are:

Abianda, BelEve UK, Catch 22, Centre for Mental Health, Changing Lives, Growing Against Gangs & Violence, Jags Foundation, Kids Company, Liminality Group, Manchester Active Voices, The New Rush Hall Group, Nia Ending Violence, Oasis Trust, Pecan, Redthread, Safe n' Sound, Safer London Foundation, St Giles Trust, Terriers, The MsUnderstood Partnership, and Vee's Place.

We would also like to thank all those who took time to reply to our Freedom of Information requests, and the following individuals for their invaluable input: Polly Courtney, Selena Grey, Karl Lokko, Helen Lyons, Natalie Ojevah, Professor Jenny Pearce, and Rachel Shand.

Lastly, special thanks go to Aston Stockdale for his hard work to make this report a reality and Hannah Bourazza, Simon Marchant, and Aiasha Khalid for their crucial work that laid the foundation for this report.

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Introduction

Gang violence continues to blight too many communities. As the CSJ has shown in two recent reports,¹ gangs thrive when neighbourhoods are plagued by low employment, high family breakdown, addiction and poor educational achievement. The riots in August 2011 also highlighted the problem, with at least one in five of those arrested in London known to be part of a gang.² This was recognised by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, The Rt Hon Theresa May MP:

‘One thing that the riots in August did do was to bring home to the entire country just how serious a problem gang and youth violence has now become.’³

The Government’s response to this, the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme*, was heavily influenced by the CSJ’s in-depth review of street gangs in the UK, *Dying to Belong* (2009). A year after the riots, however, we felt that the Government’s gang policy was drifting. Our report, *Time to Wake Up* (2012), showed that a long-term vision or commitment to tackling this complex issue was lacking.

This short paper again calls on the Government to present a coherent, far-sighted programme to tackle the UK’s gang problem. In doing so it highlights the plight of girls and young women associated with gangs,⁴ who are often marginalised in discussion of these issues.

What roles do girls play in gangs?

The Children’s Commissioner identified a number of different roles girls take up within gangs:

- **Gangster girls:** young women who adopt male personas within gangs;
- **Female family members** of gang members;
- **Wifeys/girlfriends:** young women in a recognised relationship with gang-involved males;
- **Baby-mothers:** young women who have children with gang-involved males;
- **Links:** young women who are associated through ‘casual’ sex with one or more members of the gang.

¹ Centre for Social Justice, *Dying to Belong: An in-depth review of Street Gangs in Britain*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2009 and Centre for Social Justice, *Time to Wake Up: Tackling gangs one year after the riots*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012

² Department for Communities and Local Government, *Government Response to the Riots, Communities and Victims Panel’s final report*, London: Department for Communities and Local Government, 2013, p12

³ HM Government, *Ending gang and youth violence: a cross-government report including further evidence and good practise case studies*, London: HM Government, 2011, p3

⁴ Whilst the primary focus of this paper is on girls (i.e. those under the age of 18) some of the stories and data used in this paper were of young women over the age 18

The CSJ has heard how girls often get involved in gangs through relationships with male gang members. They have told us how attractive the 'bad boy' image can be, and how they are drawn in by the excitement, financial benefits and sense of belonging and protection gangs can provide. We have also heard that family breakdown, domestic violence in the home, a lack of positive role models and low self-esteem can push girls into the arms of gang members. However we still know too little about how many girls are involved in gangs, the extent of the problems they face, or how best we can tackle this issue.

The CSJ and the urban youth and community charity, XLP, have conducted this short research paper in order to shed further light on this important topic, and to help policy makers understand the myriad of problems that these girls face. In conducting this research we engaged with a wide range of individuals and organisations involved in gangs from across the UK, drawing on the expertise of the CSJ's 350-strong Alliance of poverty-fighting charities. We spoke to many girls and young women who are or have been gang-associated and more than 30 organisations working to tackle gang problems.

The stories we have heard shocked us, and reveal a parallel world that too few policy makers understand. In listening to girls' stories we have heard, amongst other things, about the toll gang life is taking on their education, and their families, friends and communities; the horror of sexual exploitation; and of an increase in criminal activity. Yet we also found several things that can be done to help girls exit gang association, namely: mapping the problem; taking advantage of specific 'windows of opportunity' to access girls; providing effective mentoring; ensuring an appropriate police response; and making sure gang-affected schools are open to support.

This is far from an exhaustive list of issues – these are only the subjects that most often arose in the conversations we held with girls, charities and services. There is much more that can, and needs to be said, on this topic that is outside the scope of this short paper. Yet we hope that this research gives policy makers and community leaders an insight into a world that has been long-neglected, and empowers them to help support girls to exit gang association.

Chapter One: Gang life for girls

To truly understand the problems for girls in gangs it is best to start with their experiences. The data on girls and young women is unreliable and too little is known about the reality of gang life for them. It has been estimated that '12,500 girls and young women are closely involved in gangs'⁵ yet these figures are crude at best. Despite recent good work exposing the level of sexual exploitation that girls in gangs face,⁶ we still know too little about how gang life affects their education; families, friends and communities; or their propensity for criminality. It is only by listening to the girls themselves that we can start to understand the problems they have faced. This chapter sets out the stories of four girls: 'Girl X', Carly, Lauren and Danielle. The stories were accessed through voluntary organisations working with the girls, and have been written from the girl's perspectives.

1.1 Case studies of girls in gangs

All names have been changed to protect the girls' identity.

Case study one: Girl X's story

An outreach key worker describes her professional experience of previously working with a young girl. The worker gives her anecdotal evidence to assist highlighting awareness and preventing this kind of abuse happening to other young people:

The young girl grew up living with her father and three younger siblings on a housing estate in the UK. When the girl was 11 years-old she started dating a 14 year-old boy she met at school and who was in a gang. He often tried to persuade this girl to have sexual intercourse with him, and by the age of 12 she agreed.

Soon afterwards the girl found out that he had filmed them having sexual intercourse on his laptop. At this point the girl described to her worker that this boy's attitude towards her changed dramatically and he became aggressive and cold. The boy threatened to show her father the footage and post it on various social networking sites for all of their friends to see. The idea of this happening terrified the young girl and she begged him not to do it. He agreed not to share the footage, on one condition: that she must always be available to both him and any other gang member for sex. She was horrified, but was so scared about what her family and friends would think of her if

⁵ Pearce, J.J. and Pitts, J.M., *Youth gangs, sexual violence and sexual exploitation: a scoping exercise* The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2011, p19

⁶ For example see Beckett, H. et al, *It's wrong... but you get used to it: a qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England*, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2013 and Pearce, J.J. and Pitts, J.M., *Youth gangs, sexual violence and sexual exploitation: a scoping exercise* The Office of the Children's Commissioner for England, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2011

they saw the video so she agreed to his terms.

From this moment on the 12 year-old girl's life descended into one of regular abuse and sexual exploitation. She was raped on a weekly basis, and many of these crimes were filmed and played back to her by her rapists.

On one occasion she was forced to give oral sex to around 20 gang members as they stood around her in a circle and beat her. She became so desperate; she would have done anything to make it stop.

The gang then offered her a way out: if she found new girls for them, they would stop raping and abusing her. Again she agreed.

The gang asked her to make friends with girls her age or younger. Once she had made friends with other girls, she would invite them round to her flat where roughly 20 gang members would be waiting. Each time they would rape the new girl, and film the encounter to entrap the new girls.

She was often physically forced to watch the other girls she had befriended being raped.

Despite introducing the gang to new girls, she was still raped on occasion, though less frequently. In order to protect herself she stopped wearing make-up, cut her hair short and wore unflattering baggy clothes. This had its desired affect and increasingly the boys no longer saw her as desirable.

When she was 14 years-old she was placed into care. Her social worker called in a voluntary organisation to support her. They helped move her out of the area and away from the gang.

Case study two: Carly's story

Carly told us her story in her own words:

'When I was about 15, I was beaten up by a younger girl and feared going back to school because of bullying. Soon afterwards, I met a 20 year-old who was in a gang. He had money, a car and he said that he was going to protect me, that no one was going to touch me and that if I needed anything he would give it to me. Instead of going to school I began to just sit at his house with his friends smoking weed, becoming exposed to gang violence and becoming sexually active.

'My body and mind was breaking down. From the innocence that I had, my life was self-destructing day by day. He became so controlling, he had control of where I went, who I spoke to. Whatever he said, I did. He

started hitting me but when he did, he would say sorry and bought me things to make it up to me. Two years later, I was getting punched so hard that one time I was knocked out.

'At 17, I fell pregnant and at this point I realised that I was scared, that I didn't want to be with him and I didn't want to raise a baby with him. I woke up to who was in my life. The midwife asked me who the father was and when I told them they knew who he was because he was under the Mental Health Act with bipolar. The social services came in and that's how I got out.

'... [A girl hoping to exit gang-association] will need a mentor because she needs to speak to somebody, to build up a relationship with someone she trusts. Young people are immature souls, if they have been broken in any way then they have to be fixed back. Housing was crucial because if I never got out of that area, even if I didn't see him, I would have seen his friends and the friends think they've got control over you. It can be a very very dangerous situation when you're trying to get that person out of your life but I got my escape.'

Case study three: Danielle's story

From a young age Danielle spent a lot of time with the boys on her estate, initially just hanging around and playing football. But by the age of 11, what had started as loitering turned into anti-social behaviour and criminal damage, such as breaking windows. She also started to regularly get into fights at school.

By the time she was 15 years-old, Danielle was part of a gang. She was not in a relationship with any of them and they treated her in a similar manner to other male gang members. She craved the acceptance of others in the gang and took great pride in her involvement. Yet it came with obligations. Whenever anyone in her gang had issues with another girl, they would call on Danielle to fight them. Danielle developed a fierce reputation for fighting and often defeated girls several years older than her. On one occasion, when she was 17 years-old, she was called to help a friend who was in an altercation with another girl. She agreed to help, borrowed a firearm from a fellow gang member and made her way down to the conflict. The situation was resolved without her discharging the weapon.

Around this time she also started selling cannabis and was entrusted by her gang to hold firearms. On one occasion a gun went missing in her household. Her fellow gang members held her and her younger brother responsible. She bargained with the group and settled the matter by agreeing to sell drugs free of charge until she had paid off the cost of the gun.

When Danielle reached the age of 19 she was introduced by her cousin to some of his friends. They

were a positive influence on her life. She found them an inspiration and they influenced her to leave gang life behind. However this transformation was short lived and when a financial crisis hit she fell back into selling drugs with the gang to make money.

She had another wake-up call a year later when she was called upon by the gang to make a drug transaction. As she waited for the customer to arrive, two cars pulled up next to her and a group of guys from a rival gang jumped out and threatened to take her life if she did not give them the drugs. She complied and they got back into the car and drove off. This made her feel extremely vulnerable for the first time in many years and she resolved to never sell drugs again. She has now exited gang life and has stopped selling drugs.

Case study four: Lauren's story

Lauren and Craig first got together when she was 15 years-old. He was the most popular boy in school and was part of a gang. Being Craig's girlfriend meant people looked up to her, treated her with respect and did not bully her.

At least once a month Craig borrowed a car from an older boy in his gang and would meet Lauren at her school gates. Other pupils soon heard about who was picking her up in nice cars. Suddenly, all her peers were keen to win her favour. She liked the attention.

On one occasion, when Lauren left class to go to the bathroom, some boys super-glued her pen to her book as a prank. On her return she sat down and tried to pick up the pen. As the book came up with the pen, the whole class roared with laughter. She ran out, embarrassed. At the end of that day the two boys who had pulled the prank came and frantically apologised to her and they gave her money to pay for another pen and exercise book. As they walked off she overheard them say Craig's nickname, and she became aware that they apologised because she was Craig's girlfriend. It made her feel empowered and significant. She never had another prank pulled on her at school.

When she turned 18 years-old, Craig asked Lauren if he could leave a shoebox in her room. She agreed and did not initially look in the box because she felt more comfortable not knowing what was inside. Craig would regularly come and take things out of the box and put other things in. On occasion Lauren's curiosity got the better of her and she looked inside to see drugs, money and – on two occasions – a gun. Yet she was never particularly afraid, and instead felt thrilled.

As she grew older, Lauren spent more time in local bars and at raves where she regularly got into conflicts. During one conflict a man threw his drink in her face. She immediately stormed out of the

bar and called Craig. He came round with some members of his gang and stabbed the man and one of his friends repeatedly. It was not a fatal stabbing but news quickly spread round about what had happened. She liked the attention it brought her. After this event friends asked her if she was afraid of Craig, but she was not. Instead, being with Craig made her feel safe and protected.

Craig has since been arrested and imprisoned for three years after being caught committing a serious criminal offence. Whilst in prison he ordered a friend to access his 'stash' and release £5,000 to give to her. Lauren is still in love with Craig and is looking forward to his release.

1.2 Common problems for girls in gangs

Unfortunately, these stories are far from unique. Instead they highlight problems that are common to many girls and young women involved in gang life. When interviewing for this research brief we heard how being part of a gang is undermining girls' educational attainment, impacting on their families, friends and communities, increasing the risk of sexual exploitation, and leading some girls to get involved in criminality. We explore how these themes are affecting lives below.

Education and Schools

'We can't compete with the attraction of fast cars, sex and drugs.' Anonymous
headteacher in evidence to the CSJ

Gaining a good education is one of the surest routes girls have out of the chaos of gang life, yet their involvement is preventing them from achieving their academic potential and destroying their chances for a better life. The case studies above showed that girls' education can be affected by their involvement in gangs. Carly told us that *'instead of going to school I began to just sit at his house with his gang-associated friends smoking weed, becoming exposed to gang violence and becoming sexually active,'* and Danielle's fighting disrupted her studies.

This pattern of gang involvement undermining educational attainment is reflected in national studies. One recently showed that *'young women in gangs were over three times more likely to be underperforming at school than other women entering the YJS [Youth Justice System].'*⁷

Gang life is a distraction from education. One former gang-associated girl told the CSJ that *'because of all the madness'* of gang involvement a girl is *'going to lose her concentration.'* This view was reflected by teachers. Dr D'Abbro, Head of the New Rush Hall School, told the CSJ:

⁷ Khan, L. et al., *A need to belong: what leads girls to join gangs*, London: Centre for Mental Health, 2013, p14

'I'm quite confident that many girl gang members wouldn't see education as a life chance and therefore their allegiance would be much more to gangs than it would be to coming to school.'

He went on to explain the process of girls becoming associated with gangs:

'Over the space of a holiday or a couple of weeks, you can see somebody who suddenly dips down... they're on to get five A-Cs and then it just goes bang and when you look what happened it was just that they got involved in gangs.'*

This process that John witnessed was also recognised by others. Another headteacher gave us this case study below.

Watching a girl join a gang: a headteacher's perspective

'Kate was a 16 year-old girl who was a motivated, high achieving student. She didn't have a problem with attendance and achieved several A grades at GCSE. Then she became involved with a gang. We tried all we could to keep her on board with education. For example, we gave her a business mentor who was a solicitor as the girl had held aspirations to become a lawyer, we took her on trips to university to give her a picture of what life there could be like, we met with her mum (her father was not around), and made several social care referrals.

'None of this worked. We arranged for her to complete her application for 6th form but she never turned up, and her attendance at school has plummeted. She is now coming into school later and later with the gang – often arriving at lunch time – sometimes clearly under the influence of legal highs or cannabis. Her mum initially encouraged her to do well at school, but resented any contact with other authorities. She now appears to have given up completely trying to get her into school at all.

'All we have been able to do is send work home in the hope that she may complete some, but we don't hold out much hope. She should be achieving top grades in 6th form and going onto university – she has the potential – but she is unlikely to achieve anything in her education this year or in the years to come.'

Guns, drugs and other criminality

'If the gang trust her then, yes - the likelihood of her safe housing firearms is high.' Karl Lokko, former gang member

In the case studies we heard how Lauren and Danielle both held guns and drugs for their gang. These experiences are not uncommon and many of those giving evidence to the CSJ confirmed that

this is often part of gang life for girls. The reasons why girls and young women hold guns and drugs include 'love', threats, through force and general association. Camila Batmanghelidjh, CEO of Kids Company, told the CSJ:

'We've got evidence where little girls are being dressed in school uniform and the drugs are stashed in their vagina and they're made to sit in the front of the car. And it looks like Daddy is taking his daughter to school but actually they are carrying drugs. Girls are being used from a very young age, as young as 8 or 9.'

Selena Gray, a journalist who grew up in a gang affected hot-spot explained to the CSJ that *'for a girl to be asked to hold/hide firearms or drugs for a gang member she likes or is dating is no big deal. It's kind of a privilege to be asked, it shows you've got his trust. No one really talked about the horrible consequences.'*

The *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme*, which was set up in 2011, has identified 33 local areas, spread across eight police force areas, which need action to tackle gang problems.⁸ Two of these police forces – the Metropolitan Police and Merseyside Police – cover two-thirds of these areas, with the overwhelming majority being in London.

The two police forces' gangs units – *Matrix* in Merseyside Police and *Trident* in Metropolitan Police – have charged 98 females with firearms offences alone between January 2008 and March 2013 (20 in Merseyside and 78 in London).⁹ On average, girls charged with firearms offences were aged 23 in London and 27 in Merseyside.¹⁰ Previous CSJ research found that gang members were typically aged between 12 and 25.¹¹ That those girls charged with offences have higher than average ages, suggests younger female offenders are not getting picked up.

In London 56 per cent of those charged of Trident Firearms Offences since 2004 have been for possession of a firearm, and 45 per cent have been charged on just four boroughs,¹² including 20 in Lambeth alone. To date no charges have occurred on Kensington & Chelsea, Camden, Hammersmith & Fulham, Harrow, Bexley, Richmond and Sutton boroughs.

There are signs of a spike in women charged with firearms offences in London last year. The Metropolitan Police have only been able to provide us with data on the first 70 days of 2013, in which time seven girls had already been charged. If this trend continued, 36 women will have been

⁸ The eight police force areas are: Derbyshire, Greater Manchester, Merseyside, Metropolitan Police, Nottinghamshire, South Yorkshire, West Midlands, and West Yorkshire

⁹ This information was provided to the CSJ by Merseyside Police and the Metropolitan Police Force

¹⁰ Please note that the average age of the girls charged with firearms offences covers different time periods for each police force. For the Metropolitan Police the age is an average of all charges from January 2004 to March 2013; whereas for Merseyside Police it covers from December 2007 to December 2013

¹¹ Centre for Social Justice, *Dying to belong*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2009

¹² These boroughs are Lambeth, Waltham Forest, Southwark, and Haringey

charged in 2013, representing a 180 per cent increase in women who were charged of Trident Firearms Offences in 2012.

Given the hidden nature of girls in gangs, the police do not know all of those involved in criminality. As a result wider female juvenile (under the age of 18) crime trends are worth considering.

In line with wider patterns, there has been an overall decrease in the number of female juveniles who are arrested, however this has masked concerning increases in some specific areas, most notably arrests for drug offences.¹³

Between 2004/5 and 2011/12 there was a 32 per cent increase (from 53 to 70) in the number of female juveniles arrested for drug offences by Merseyside Police and a 23 per cent increase (from 204 to 250) by the Metropolitan Police.

Over the same time period, Merseyside Police also arrested 178 per cent more female juveniles for burglary (from 23 to 64), 84 per cent more for criminal damage (from 38 to 70), and 79 per cent more for robbery (from 14 to 25).

Both the Metropolitan Police and Merseyside Police recognise the importance of tackling this issue. Commander Stephen Rodhouse, the Metropolitan Police's Head of Gangs and Organised Crime told the CSJ:

'We recognise that girls are sometimes drawn into gangs as offenders as well as victims of sexual exploitation. We remain committed to reducing the violence caused by gang members and their associates regardless of their gender.'

Detective Chief Superintendent, Paul Richardson, Head of Merseyside's Major Serious and Organised Crime Investigations said:

'The role of the female in the 'gang' is complex and multi-faceted. They can be the leader, the facilitator or the supporter. Merseyside Police are working with a strong partnership focus to fully understand the problem and develop effective responses across the whole spectrum of the issue.'

Voluntary organisations we spoke to also noted their concern of girls committing crime. Patrick Regan, founder and CEO of XLP told us:

'The biggest issue with girls and gangs is that we simply don't know the full extent of what is going on. Everything seems to be indicating that we are only looking at the tip of the iceberg and the current

¹³ These statistics are based on data kindly provided by the Home Office and *Statistics on women and the criminal justice system 2009-10*, London: Ministry of Justice, 2012

data fails to reflect the majority of the girls' involvement. At XLP we are seeing more and more girls dragged into this world of exploitation, criminal activity and hopelessness and we cannot delay acting any longer.'

Whilst the total numbers of crimes the police are recording are relatively low, much of it seems to be hidden (we look at this in Chapter Two) and these increases should concern us. It is crucial that the police work with partners to fully understand the root causes of this criminality.

Sexual exploitation

'The gang asked her to make friends with girls her age or younger. Once she had made friends with other girls, she would invite them round to her flat where roughly 20 gang members would be waiting. Each time they would rape the new girl, and film the encounter to entrap the new girls. She was often physically forced to watch the other girls she had befriended being raped.' From case study one: Girl X's story

Sexual exploitation is being used as a tool in conflict between and sometimes within different groups of young people living in gang-affected neighbourhoods.

Professor Pearce, Director of The Bedfordshire University 'International Centre: researching Child Sexual Exploitation, Violence and Trafficking', which has recently been awarded the Queen's Anniversary Prize for applied research on child sexual exploitation, and Dr Helen Beckett, the Deputy Director, told the CSJ:

'Sexual exploitation and rape are sometimes used as 'weapons' for retaliation, humiliation and retribution in conflicts between young people living in gang affected neighbourhoods. The significant harm caused by these sexual attacks has been overlooked as the focus remains on physical violence, gun and knife crime.'

XLP has heard examples of how the initiation into gangs can involve raping someone, and how male gang members will even rape girls who belong to their own gang if they believe they have betrayed them in some way. For example Patrick Regan told the CSJ of a girl they had come across called Stacey:¹⁴

'Stacey wasn't involved in a gang but a friend of hers, Angie, started hanging out with one. Stacey told Angie she didn't think one of the guys in the gang was a very nice person and Angie reported that back to the guy in question. He rounded up three mates and together they waited for Stacey after school, grabbed her just a few feet from her own front door and threatened her with a knife. They

¹⁴ Names have been changed to protect the girls' identities

took her to a nearby block of flats and then raped her. Her ordeal didn't stop there. They rang more friends who came and joined the attack – nine of them in total, one as young as 12, all assaulting one girl for the crime of one offensive remark.'

Many of the boys in gangs will have both a girlfriend and a series of 'links' (girls who will have sex with them without commitment). Former gang member, Amy, described the situation from her perspective:

*'When you are as desperate as most of us are in that situation, you do anything to get what feels like love... The boys would treat us as their bitches, phone whoever they felt like f***ing, order them to come over, and most girls would drop everything and do whatever was wanted.'*¹⁵

XLP have also heard that when girls say yes to sex, male gang members will often ask if all his friends can have sex with her as well. This is known as a 'line up,' where one girl performs sexual acts on a group of men in turn. We were told of an instance of this in case study one:

'On one occasion she was forced to give oral sex to around 20 gang members as they stood around her in a circle and beat her. She became so desperate; she would have done anything to make it stop.'

The CSJ has heard how girls and young women are being used to sleep with boys as young as 10 to initiate them into gang life. Dr D'Abbro, Head of the New Rush Hall School, told us:

'It is something I have seen growing over the past few years, and something a couple of Pupil Referral Unit heads have told me, that female gang members in their late teens are being pressured to have sex with young boys in gangs, sometimes as young as 10, as part of the initiation process of those boys into the gang.'

These kinds of stories are increasingly told. Recent in-depth research has shown that 2,409 children and young people were known to be victims of Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) by gangs and groups between August 2010 and October 2011, with an estimated further 16,500 being at high risk of becoming victims of CSE between April 2010 and March 2011.¹⁶

A study by Bedfordshire University revealed some deeply concerning issues surrounding sexual exploitation in gangs.¹⁷ Of the 96 young people who had connections with gangs:

¹⁵ The Guardian, *Blood sisters*, 4 July 2008 [accessed via: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/2008/jul/04/women.ukcrime> (12/03/14)]

¹⁶ Berelowitz et al., *"If only someone had listened": Office of the Children's Commissioner's inquiry into child sexual exploitation in gangs groups final report*, London: Office of the Children's Commissioner, 2013, p7

¹⁷ Beckett, H. et al, *It's wrong... but you get used to it: a qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England*, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2013, p26

- Half identified examples of 'sex in exchange for (perceived) status or protection';
- 34 per cent identified examples of 'multiple perpetrator rape';
- 39 per cent identified examples of 'sex in exchange for other tangible goods'.

Moreover, girls and young women who are being sexually exploited in gangs are often isolated and bereft of any support from their peers or authority figures. Inspector Davis, the co-lead of Growing Against Gangs & Violence told us that *'peer support is sadly lacking and female victims of sexual exploitation or sexual violence are ostracized as other girls don't want to be linked to them for fear of being targeted themselves due to 'guilt by association'.*¹⁸ An example of this was reported to XLP by one girl who said she walked into a room at a party and saw a gang rape taking place. She could hear the girl crying, saw that her tights had been ripped and that she was bleeding, but she was too scared to do anything in case they came after her next. She closed the door and walked away.

Inspector Davis told the CSJ that girls also rarely seek help from adults in authority due to the 'no snitching' culture that prevails in schools, which means that *'the emotional impact on individual victims is severe as they have to deal in isolation, with horrific abuse that they perceive as 'normal'.*

Families, friends and communities

'If you're involved with a gang you're putting your whole family at risk. Especially if you've got younger sisters or younger brothers who are going school or are out in the community somewhere, they're at risk.' A girl currently in a gang, in evidence to the CSJ

It is not just the girls and young women themselves who suffer as a result of their gang involvement. The families, friends and communities of girls suffer too by nature of their association. Research has shown how families in particular are at risk of victimisation and feel under pressure to collude with gang activity.¹⁹

Those giving evidence to the CSJ identified a number of different ways they were impacted. Camila Batmanghelidjh, CEO of Kids Company, told us how family members can be put in jeopardy if girls have to give evidence in the trial of a gang member. She said that even if girls want to give evidence *'the worry is not just what happens to her, the worry is what potentially could happen to her relatives, they get threatened with petrol bombs through their mothers' doors and so on.'*

Former gang members also said that gangs target the family members of their rivals:

¹⁸ The programme delivers preventative education messages to schools in London. So far they have presented to over 50,000 students across 330 schools

¹⁹ Firmin, C., *Female voice in violence final report*, London: Race on the Agenda, 2010, pp34-46

'...She was walking in the park and there was a gang of boys and then that [rape] happened to her...that's cos of who her brother was. Cos's he's a top boy, they thought cos they can't get to him, cos I think he was in jail, they can't get to him, they'll get to her.'

*'If they're close to someone, well it depends how serious the beef is. If it's very serious they would attack your sister. Going out with the sister, that happens too – some try to do that.'*²⁰

Gang-association also affects girls' children. One former gang member told the CSJ:

'Sometimes the girls get themselves pregnant on purpose so that they can hold onto the boy. They see that if they have this baby, he [the male gang member] will finally be mine. And then you have boys who don't want anyone else to have that girl so they impregnate her.'

The CSJ heard how these children then suffer as a result of growing up in a gang-affected family. Abi Billingham, founder of Abianda, argued that whilst girls may be aware of the risks they face *'they don't necessarily understand the impact that's having on them and certainly not on their children.'* Marie Munn from Changing Lives told the CSJ:

'A young woman involved in a gang culture environment who then becomes pregnant may be resentful towards the child especially if she is trying to escape from that culture. This could manifest in how she behaves to that child and damage the mother/child relationship.'

Many of those we interviewed argued that the children of gang members often become trapped in a cycle of deprivation, where children grow up with the learnt behaviours of their parents and become normalised by them. As a result, many felt that there is a significant chance of children growing up and becoming gang members themselves.

²⁰ Beckett, H. et al, *It's wrong... but you get used to it: a qualitative study of gang-associated sexual violence towards, and exploitation of, young people in England*, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2013, p35

Chapter Two: Responding to girls in gangs

The problems that girls and young women in gangs face demand a full and thorough response. We need to prevent more girls from getting involved in gang life in the first place, minimise the damage they cause to themselves and others whilst they are in gangs, and ensure effective support is in place to help them exit. The CSJ will set out a detailed plan covering all these aspects as part of an in-depth gang study beginning later this year. However, this chapter suggests five initial areas where action would make a real difference. Each area was consistently raised to the CSJ by the gang experts we interviewed. They are:

- Effective mapping of the problem;
- Taking advantage of specific ‘windows of opportunity’ to access girls;
- Providing effective mentoring;
- Ensuring an appropriate police response;
- Making sure gang-affected schools are open to support.

2.1 Mapping the Problem

‘At a meeting I was at recently with the police and local council youth and mental health services, these young girls were called ‘the invisible ones’. Those from the statutory sector pointed out that unless a criminal offence or a child protection event was reported, then ‘the system’ cannot readily engage. The young girls will not report the abuse and so will remain trapped in their world.’ Patrick Regan, CEO of XLP

We currently know too little about how many girls and young women are involved in gangs, which gangs and gang members they are associated with, and the roles each of them take up within gang life. The only estimate of the number of gang-associated girls and young women we currently have – that ‘12,500 girls and young women are closely involved in gangs’²¹ – is at best a rough approximation and is too simplistic for any practical purposes.

A better understanding of this is vital. It will ensure that girls and young women who were previously hidden from sight can get the support they need, enable a more effective targeting of resources at the most vulnerable, and provide the police with better intelligence on which girls are getting involved in criminality and why.

²¹ Pearce, J.J. and Pitts, J.M., *Youth gangs, sexual violence and sexual exploitation: a scoping exercise* The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2011, p19

Our knowledge of gang-associated girls and young women is far less developed than that for gang-associated boys mainly because the signs of their involvement are harder to spot. The police and other authorities often become aware of male gang members through their involvement in criminal activity. Female association is predominantly driven by their relationships with gang members, which is difficult to identify. Where girls are involved in criminal activity they are also often less subject to suspicion and so are subsequently less apparent. Jacki Murphy from Changing Lives explained to the CSJ how these girls often escape the attention of the authorities:

'If girls are not obviously involved in criminal activity, then there is no police involvement. If they are not in the social care system, then there is very little support. Concerned families are often reluctant to contact social care – if you have a 13 year-old engaging in risky behaviour, parents are worried of the impact of approaching social care, and what may happen.'

To identify whether girls or young women are gang-associated a number of small signs often need to be pieced together. The CSJ were told that common signs are admission to hospital with broken teeth, truancy from school, marked changes in behaviour, and signs of drug use. Therefore mapping needs to be multi-agency, joining the dots provided by the signs picked up by a variety of statutory and voluntary services.

Work is underway to improve our picture of girls and young women associated with gangs. We were told how the MsUnderstood Partnership is currently reviewing cases of peer-on-peer exploitation and abuse within gang-associated networks and other peer groups in London. This process will assist the Metropolitan Police Service, the Mayor's Office of Policing and Crime, and the London Safeguarding Children Board, to learn what has been effective in identifying and responding to cases of peer-on-peer exploitation. They will then be using the data from the study to develop a framework for identifying and responding to peer-on-peer abuse and exploitation.

In the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence: Annual Report* (December 2013) the Home Office announced that Greater Manchester Police (GMP) have been '*leading work to identify and map gang-associated women and girls against identified gang nominals*' and that '*this good practice will be shared with other force areas and local authorities, in the form of a practical guide to how to go about this exercise, and what to do with the information once you have it.*'²²

Yet despite this, the CSJ has learnt from GMP that there is a long way to go before a practical guide will be available for others to learn from. So far the only action that has taken place was holding a day-long workshop in October 2012 that collated existing knowledge from GMP's gangs unit – The

²² HM Government, *Ending gang and youth violence: Annual report 2013*, London: HM Government, 2013, p33

Xcalibre Task Force – and three days of a researcher’s time. This showed there to be at least 92 females associated to South Manchester street gangs. When there is capacity GMP are looking to widen the work to include information from other statutory and voluntary partners who are working with gangs, but this has yet to begin. A completion date for the work has yet to be agreed with the Home Office.

Recommendations:

- **Home Office and Greater Manchester Police commit to finishing the mapping exercise of gang-associated women and girls, and produce a practical guide for other police forces and local authorities to use by the end of 2014/15.**
- **In each of the 33 priority areas identified in the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme*, the relevant police force implements the mapping process by 2015/16.**

2.2 Windows of Opportunity

There are some specific, time-limited windows of opportunity when a gang-associated girl becomes more easy to identify and more likely to accept support. These windows include: expulsion from school; the imprisonment of girls’ gang member boyfriends; the birth of a child; a visit to a sexual health clinic; and admission to accident and emergency (A&E) departments. The two windows that our interviewees raised to us most frequently were admission to A&E departments and the arrest of a male gang member. We explore these two areas as possible windows for intervention in girls’ lives below.

Accident and emergency departments

When gang-associated girls visit an (A&E) department, there is an opportunity to link them with the support they need to exit. If their visit is a result of violence or abuse at the hands of gang members, then this can make them more motivated to seek support as the sharp reality of gang life has been made painfully real.

This window of opportunity has already been seized upon by King’s College Hospital and St Thomas’ Hospital to support young people – including gang members – suffering from repeat violence. Both of them have partnered with voluntary organisations (Redthread and the Oasis Trust respectively) that provide the support to the young people that need it. There has been evaluation of the work in St Thomas’ Hospital which found that *‘there is a significant clinical improvement in markers of aggression*

and confrontational behaviours and associated lifestyle risks. This shows promise for reducing readmission to the ED [Emergency Department] in the long term through the reduction of involvement in violent incidents, a trend which is visible in the current sample.²³ Studies in North America have also shown that this approach is effective at reducing both reoffending and re-injury rates.²⁴

King's College Hospital started working with Redthread in 2006 after realising that many of those they treated for violence were coming back time and time again. By bringing in Redthread to come alongside such patients and offer them support they hoped to break this cycle of violence. The team is made up of three full-time staff, who work with approximately 150 young people over the short to medium term a year. They do not currently have the capacity to work with all those who are referred to them by the hospital (they had 742 referrals last year, 251 of whom were girls) but work closely in partnership with the statutory and voluntary sector partners to signpost and refer all young people to services in their own communities. In both schemes, there are two important parts to making the partnership and referral system work: doctors and nurses need to be adequately trained; and the youth workers need to be embedded in the hospital.

Training doctors and nurses

When a vulnerable girl arrives at A&E, professionals need to be sufficiently trained to identify signs of gang-association. Dr Emer Sutherland of King's College Hospital explained that as a result of training at King's College Hospital, *'you'll find the nurse from their nursing assessment contacting the youth worker to come and start talking to a young person whilst they're waiting to see the doctor. Many of our doctors are [also] excellent at picking up some quite subtle things.'*

At King's College Hospital they found the extra training on adolescence, signs of violence and sexual exploitation to be a crucial addition to the existing training that the hospital provided for two reasons. First, it raises awareness of the signs that can indicate vulnerability. Second, the training brings in the youth work team to make people aware of their referral pathway and to highlight the particular needs of adolescents (we were told that traditional NHS training does not have a strong focus on this population).

²³ Ilan Clarke et al., *Evaluation of Guy's and St Thomas' youth violence intervention project*, London: Middlesex University, 2013, p75

²⁴ For example see:

Cheng, T.L. et al., 'Effectiveness of a mentor-implemented, violence prevention intervention for assault-injured youths presenting to the emergency department: results of a randomized trial', *Pediatrics*, 122(5), 2008, pp938-946

Snider, C. and Jacques, L., 'Youth violence secondary prevention initiatives in emergency departments: a systematic review', *Canadian Journal of Medicine*, 11(2), 2008, pp161-168;

Zun, L.S., Downey, LV, and Rosen J., 'The effectiveness of an ED-based violence prevention program', *American Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 24(1), 2006, pp8-13

The CSJ identified 38 hospitals that could be expected to play a part in tackling gang problems within the Home Office's 33 priority areas for tackling gangs.²⁵ Through a Freedom of Information request we found that only a quarter (27 per cent) of the hospitals could point to any sort of training provided for staff on how to spot the signs of gang association.²⁶ This asks serious questions about whether those hospitals are doing enough to tackle gang problems in their area.

Embedding youth workers in hospitals

Both St Thomas' Hospital and King's College Hospital chose to work with youth workers embedded within their hospitals. There were a number of advantages to this. By giving youth workers a physical base in the hospital it enabled them to respond much quicker. For example, they often engaged with young people whilst they were waiting to be seen by a doctor. Rachel Fletcher of Oasis Trust – the voluntary organisation embedded in St Thomas' Hospital – explained to the CSJ that *'if we don't manage to contact them until a few weeks after the incident then they're much more likely to decline support because they've settled back into the rhythm of things again.'* Of the ward visits to a young person made by Redthread between December 2010 and May 2011, 71 per cent accepted the visit and 52 per cent had repeat visits. However, when the youth worker was not in the hospital and therefore had to rely on calling the young person, only 39 per cent answered the phone.

Having youth workers embedded in the hospital also enables them to be security cleared and brought into the confidentiality agreements of the hospital. This gives them access to critical information that enables better support of the girls. Working so closely with the hospital has also fostered a strong relationship between the voluntary organisations and the hospital staff. Hospital

²⁵ We excluded hospitals whose specialism meant they were not dealing with young people, or for whom training staff on spotting gang-association was either impractical or highly unlikely to make any difference to gang problems in their area

²⁶ The Freedom of Information requests were submitted in January 2014. Of the 38 hospitals, we received replies from 28 of the hospitals. The 28 hospitals who replied are: Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals NHS Trust, Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust, Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Birmingham Women's NHS Foundation Trust, Central Manchester University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Croydon Health Services NHS Trust, Heart Of England NHS Foundation Trust, Homerton University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Liverpool Women's NHS Foundation Trust, Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust, Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, St George's Healthcare NHS Trust, St Helens and Knowsley Hospitals NHS Trust, The Royal Wolverhampton NHS Trust, The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and University Hospital Of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust. The 10 hospitals we were unable to get a reply from are: Barts Health NHS Trust, Bradford Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Derby Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust, Kingston Hospital NHS Trust, Lewisham NHS Trust, North West London Hospitals NHS Trust, Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust, Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust, and University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust

staff noted that they feel confident to signpost to the voluntary organisations because they know them well.

Unlike statutory partners, voluntary organisations also do not have to meet a minimum risk threshold before offering support to the girls. Dr Sutherland explained to us that:

‘Having a referral route through our in-house youth workers means that our doctors and nurses can be less challenging in their interactions with a young person. Redthread requires a lower level of disclosure to be the threshold for referral because they don’t need them to tell them enough to make it social service threshold. They just need a hint and then they can take it forward in a much more youth friendly environment on the girl’s own terms.’

There are specific reasons why it is an advantage for the embedded organisation to be from the voluntary rather than statutory sector. The CSJ has been told that girls are far less likely to trust, and open up to, statutory services. Dr Sutherland told us that *‘at user groups we have been told by some young people that they feel that hospital staff are “in league with the Feds”.’*

There is much that other hospitals in gang-affected areas can learn from these examples. The success that King’s College and St Thomas’ Hospitals have achieved by identifying and providing support for young people, including gang-associated girls, should be an inspiration and a spur to action for other hospitals in gang-affected areas. In our recommendations we call on all hospitals in gang-affected areas with major trauma units to initiate similar schemes as a starting point. Yet this should not dissuade other hospitals in these areas from starting similar schemes (it is worth noting that St Thomas’ Hospital, for example, does not have a major trauma unit).

Police arrest of male gang members

When the police arrest male gang members the focus is, quite rightly, on ensuring that they have arrested the right person, have enough evidence to convict, and make the arrest in a way that minimises any potential harm to the public, the person being arrested or themselves. Whilst it would be wrong to undermine any of these elements of a successful operation, there is the opportunity to do more to help support the girlfriends of gang members who are arrested and sent to prison.

This is a potential opportunity to support girls to exit gang life, as it can make girls more vulnerable to attack as her boyfriend is no longer around to protect her, and because it makes girls more aware of the serious consequences of criminality. This was recognised by many of the girls we spoke to, with one commenting that *‘when her boyfriend goes to prison, members of other gangs might come after her.’*

Other gang-associated girls told the CSJ that that this *'would be a good chance to break away'* and if she left *'she could go have a better life – unless there were kids involved.'*

This window of opportunity was also recognised by the police. For instance police officers from the Trilogy (working with gangs) and Sapphire (working with violence against women) units of the Metropolitan Police reported to XLP that a significant majority of the young women who come to them are only willing to identify themselves as girlfriends of gang members after a crisis event has occurred, such as when the police arrest their boyfriend.

This will not be a window for every girl. Gang-associated girls told us that *'girls may enjoy going to prison to visit their boyfriend and reporting back to the streets.'* Others suggested that if a girl loved her boyfriend she would likely stay with him and remain involved in gang life, as Lauren did in our case study in Chapter One.

It is also important not to underestimate the level of control that male gang members can exert from prison. This control can prevent girls from ending a relationship and gang association. In one report, young men being held in a Young Offenders Institution were interviewed and explained the nature of the surveillance that can often exist from prison:

'If she goes to one of her friends' school, I like tell him to keep an eye on her or I'll just sometimes follow her.'

*She's being watched like a hawk. Anywhere she's gone, I know she's been there.'*²⁷

Yet the fact that it will not be a window of opportunity for all girls does not undermine the fact it is a useful window for some and should be used more effectively.

Any intervention to support girls just prior to the arrest of male gang members is likely to jeopardise the police operation by signalling an impending arrest, but there is considerable opportunity to intervene after the event. However this relies on a better picture of which girls are associated with which male gang members. With this in place the police can let the appropriate voluntary organisation know which girls might be looking for support and how they can get hold of them. This would enable the voluntary organisation to make contact with the girls to see if they could be supported to exit gang life.

²⁷ Wood et al., *'Standing on my own two feet': Disadvantaged Teenagers, Intimate Partner Violence, and Coercive Control*, NSPCC, 2011, p39

Recommendations:

- **Police and Crime Commissioners should work with the voluntary sector to ensure that the girlfriends of imprisoned gang members receive an offer of support to exit gang life.**
- **All hospitals with major trauma units situated in one of the 33 gang-affected areas identified by the Home Office's *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme* should:²⁸**
 - **Train staff to be able to spot signs of gang association;**
 - **Embed a voluntary organisation's youth workers in their hospital.**

2.3 Effective Mentoring

'Girls are the experts of their lives. They survive their lives on a day to day basis and they, more than anyone, will know the problems they face and absolutely should be part of trying to find the solutions. We always start with the question, "What's going to be useful for you."' Abi Billingham, founder of Abianda in evidence to the CSJ

'A long-term mentor in the lives of gang-associated young women, who can develop a trusting relationship over an extended period, is likely a critical success factor to any potential solution.' Patrick Regan, founder and CEO of XLP

Mentoring is an activity that can not only help girls leave gang life, but also help identify any other needs they have. This dual role makes it extremely important to ensure it is carried out in the right way.

Young people who receive mentoring often have complex backgrounds and lives, and are recipients of other interventions to support them. As a result it can be difficult to identify precisely what effect good mentoring has on a young person. Despite this there is evidence that it can make a positive difference, especially when combined with other forms of support.²⁹ There is significant evidence

²⁸ The NHS acute trusts that contain major trauma centres are: Aintree University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Barts Health NHS Trust, Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Central Manchester University Hospitals, University Hospital Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust, Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Royal Liverpool and Broadgreen University Hospitals NHS Trust, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, Sheffield Children's NHS Foundation Trust, Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, St George's Healthcare NHS Trust, University Hospital Of South Manchester NHS Foundation Trust.

²⁹ Shiner et al., *Mentoring disaffected young people: an evaluation of mentoring plus*, York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2004

that mentoring can be effective for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.³⁰ Since inception XLP's mentoring programme has coordinated the mentoring of 188 young people (85 of whom were girls) who were excluded from school or on the verge of exclusion. 12 months after engaging, 70 per cent of the young people were in education.

To ensure that girls receive mentoring that is effective and appropriate there are some basic principles that need to be upheld. It needs to be tailored and relational; mentors need to be well trained and supported; and there needs to be adequate referral routes to other services.

Principle one: mentoring needs to be tailored and relational

Each gang-associated girl is unique. Whilst there are some common themes, girls become involved for a variety of reasons, take on different roles and experience different things within gang life. What will motivate them to exit will also vary. The mentoring they receive needs to reflect and respond to this.

Frequently we have been told that a bureaucratic, tick-box approach to mentoring is not effective. Interviewees told the CSJ that it does not allow for relationships to develop between the mentor and mentee.

Many of those who gave evidence to the CSJ argued that the relational element is especially critical when mentoring gang-associated girls and young women. This is because girls and young women often become involved in gangs through a relationship with a gang member, and need another (positive) relationship to replace this in order to leave. Angela Lawrence, the Director of Manchester Active Voices, told the CSJ that *'girls get involved emotionally in the relationship side of it. I've not come across any young women who have got involved in there with the intent to make money, to get there and do well.'*

Employing ex-gang members as mentors can be an effective way of creating an alternative, positive relationship. Because they have a similar background it is often easier for them to empathise with the girls' experiences and communicate to them in a way that gets through.

Mentors need time to form effective mentoring relationships, as girls rarely open up about their situation or trust their mentor straight away. Natalie Ojevah, who grew up surrounded by gangs in South East London and who recently won Young Achiever of the Year at the Stephen Lawrence Charitable Trust awards, told us:

³⁰ DuBois, D.L., Portillo N., et al., *How effective are mentoring programs for youth? A systematic assessment of evidence*, Psychological Science in the Public Interest, 2011, pp57-91

'For me, what turned my life around from everything I've been through was mentoring and just being able to talk to someone. With me it took about seven months for me to talk about anything. It's knowing that someone's going to be persistent and not give up on you when you do something wrong. Girls associated with gangs often don't have the best home situation so they might not have a permanent person to talk to and a teacher is not going to be there permanently... Short term mentoring won't work because a young person isn't going to talk about everything in three months. It's got to be gradual, they need time to see what you're about and there's got to be that trust foundation.'

The development of effective, long-term mentoring relationships can be undermined by short-term funding to those delivering mentoring services. The CSJ has heard that voluntary sector funding in this area is primarily short-term. This has led to situations where girls have built up enough trust to open up to their mentors, only for the relationship to be cut off because funding stopped.

Principle two: mentors need to be well trained and supported

Many girls in gangs have been subjected to deeply traumatic experiences. Being subjected to inappropriate or unprofessional mentoring has the potential to make the situation worse. It is therefore crucial that any prospective mentors must be well trained before engaging with gang-associated girls.

It is also important that mentors are well supported whilst they are mentoring girls who are associated with gangs, as they will often be dealing with difficult situations and disclosures.

Principle three: mentors need an adequate referral route to other services

For all the success it can generate, mentoring is limited in what it can achieve in girls' lives, and it is common for a mentor to find that girls who are trying to break their gang-associations will need further support that mentoring cannot provide. From our interviews of gang-associated girls, three of the principal needs that were commonly cited were someone to talk issues through with, a positive outlet to move onto such as education or employment, and re-housing.

Mentoring gives girls an opportunity to talk through the problems they are facing. However Marsha Powell, BelEve UK, explained to us how even this was sometimes not sufficient:

'On my programme what I identified is that we need a counsellor. They were unpacking things that I couldn't deal with. What you don't want to do is open up a can of worms if you can't pack it back... It's about making sure the right intervention supports the mentoring. At the end of the day, mentoring is good because it's about having a trusted friend, someone giving you independent advice and

support. However, mentoring isn't counselling. There needs to be an element of assessment and then we can decide what is needed in conjunction with the mentoring.'

For most, opportunities to develop their education or find a job are foundational to exiting gang life. This is because it is rarely enough simply to persuade someone to exit gang life, without replacing with something more constructive.

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) have an important role to play in this. Of the 33 priority areas identified by the Home Office's *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Strategy*, JCPs in 21 of the areas are known to have a Gangs Advisor.³¹ The CSJ would suggest that all JCPs in gang-affected areas have a Gangs Advisor. It is also important to ensure they are using their time effectively. We are aware of some advisors who are duplicating activities offered by others, such as by providing mentoring activities. Instead, it would make more sense to make the most of their expertise in getting people into jobs, by partnering with those who are already providing specialist mentoring services to girls (and boys) in gangs.

There are two main reasons that alternative housing is often needed to help exit girls from gangs. First, if girls have no safe house to return to, then despite all their efforts and intentions to exit their situation, they might have no choice but to stay with their gang member boyfriend. Second, it can be very risky for girls to leave a gang, especially if they live in the community where the gang operates. Rachel Fletcher of Oasis Trust told us of a situation where they *'had a young girl who had been dealing drugs for a gang but she wanted to stop. She came in to us (at St Thomas' hospital) because they had carved the gang name into her forehead and stomach.'*

Carly from our case study in Chapter One told us:

'Housing was crucial because if I never got out of that area, even if I didn't see him, I would have seen his friends and the friends think they've got control over you. It can be a very very dangerous situation when you're trying to get that person out of your life but I got my escape.'

The ability to collate scattered information about the girls and form a clear picture of their situation and the true extent of the dangers they are facing would be extremely useful in helping local authorities decide whether or not they should be prioritised for re-housing.

³¹ Data from the Department for Work and Pensions (accurate as of 17th March 2014)

Recommendation:

- **The Home Office, Police and Crime Commissioners and others who commission gang mentoring services ensure:**
 - **They are commissioning services that are personalised and relational, well trained and supported, and have strong referral routes to other services;**
 - **The funding provided reflects the operational needs to develop long-term mentoring relationships with gang members.**

2.4 The police response

As highlighted in Chapter One, gang-associated girls are sometimes committing serious crimes. In giving evidence to the CSJ three main reasons were raised as to why this was the case. We heard how it can often be difficult for girls to say no, that there is a lack of knowledge about the consequences, and that stop and search is used by the police in a way that may inadvertently be making girls targets for exploitation.

Difficult to say no

The CSJ has been told how girls are being pressured by male gang members into carrying drugs and guns.³² For instance we heard of one girl who picked up a gun for her boyfriend and did so driven by a mixture of fear of what he would do if she said no and emotional blackmail. Hannah Bourazza, a Mentoring Project Manager at XLP told the CSJ:

'I have known many girls who have ended up carrying weapons for their boyfriend solely because they were afraid of the consequences of saying no.'

Former gang member, Karl Lokko agreed that gangs put pressure girls to hold guns:

'Girl's have a very limited option to say no if they are asked to carry a gun. Peer pressure means girls will risk losing respect and affiliation with gang members if they say no.'

³² We considered this issue of 'coercive control' in more detail in our report on domestic abuse: (Centre for Social Justice, *Beyond violence: breaking cycles of domestic abuse*, London: Centre for Social Justice, 2012)

Marsha Powell told us how male gang members will tell girls things such as *'if you don't do what I say, you won't get money'* or that they will *'just get another girl to do it'* to persuade them to hold drugs and firearms.

Angela Lawrence told the CSJ that *'some of them are not aware that's how they're being utilised'* with many girls being tricked into committing criminal activity by male gang members. She also added that sometimes *'because of the extreme violence they're involved in they can't say no because they're already broken down.'*

Unknown consequences

Girls know too little about the consequences of getting caught carrying firearms and drugs.

Jennifer Blake, the CEO of Safe n' Sound, told us *'girls don't think of concerns until it is too late'* and that *'something needs to be done to make the females understand that this is wrong...'* A former gang involved girl agreed and told the CSJ that girls are not aware of the risks and simply see it as *'fun, and new.'*

This is an issue that the police are aware of. In 2009 the Metropolitan Police launched a campaign to warn girls who were carrying guns, following a significant increase in women charged with firearms offences.³³ The campaign, which was targeted at six priority London boroughs,³⁴ consisted of a number of radio, cinema and billboard adverts saying *'Hide his gun and you help commit the crime.'*³⁵ It is not clear whether the campaign was successful or not, however there was a drop in females charged with Trident Firearms Offences from 19 in 2009 to 14 in 2010 which suggests it may have had an impact.

Stop and Search

The issue of stop and search – in particular the way it is conducted, the frequency of its use, and whether it targets certain ethnic groups – is one that requires careful and detailed analyses to determine whether it is proportionate and effective at preventing crime and protecting communities. We have chosen to take a narrower view in this paper by reflecting just one key issue that has been raised. Namely, that the current approach of primarily stopping and searching males has created an incentive for females to be used to carry drugs and firearms, as there is a smaller relative risk of them getting caught.

³³ BBC, *Police warn girls on hiding guns*, 30 September 2009 [accessed via: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8281942.stm> (12/03/14)]

³⁴ These were: Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark

³⁵ BBC, *Police warn girls on hiding guns*, 30 September 2009 [accessed via: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8281942.stm> (12/03/14)]

Through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests the CSJ has discovered that relatively few women and girls are being stopped and searched in gang-affected areas. We FOI'd the eight police forces covering the gang-affected areas identified by the Government in their *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme* and received five responses. They showed us that of all those who were stopped-and-searched in 2011/12:

- Nine per cent were female in Derbyshire Police;
- Five per cent were female in Greater Manchester Police;
- Three per cent were female in Merseyside Police;
- Five per cent were female in West Midlands Police;
- Five per cent were female in West Yorkshire Police.³⁶

Whilst the Metropolitan Police was not able to respond to the FOI request, the CSJ has learnt that, in 2011/12, five per cent of those they stopped-and-searched were female.³⁷ Across these six gang-affected police forces, on average, just five per cent of those who were stopped-and-searched were female.

Concern about the imbalance of stop and search was raised with us by frontline charities, for instance Jennifer Blake, CEO of Safe n' Sound said:

'I've always said that they [the police] need to be searching girls, that girls need to be stopped and searched, I'm very for that because they're were the ones that are carrying. When you see a young girl pushing her buggy down the street you just see a young girl pushing her buggy down the street, but take that baby out the buggy or go through the buggy and you'll see what they're carrying. Girls are less likely to be stopped by police, hence the reason they're used as carriers.'

Whilst Abi Billingham debated whether the issue was solely with stop and search, she admitted that it is *'probably one of the contributing factors'* that lead to women carrying more drugs and firearms as the *'the males involved know how to play the game.'*

This finding reflects research on girls and gangs from North America that concluded:

³⁶ Please note that responses were not received from Nottinghamshire, West Yorkshire and the Metropolitan Police. Police recording procedures may also differ across police forces. The Freedom of Information request was made in January 2014. The data relates to all stop and searches under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 and section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994

³⁷ Please note that, unlike the data received from the Freedom of Information requests, this data includes searches under section 1 of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, section 23 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, section 60 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 47 of the Firearms Act 1968, and section 139 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988. We also received from the Metropolitan Police their figures for March 2013 to February 2014, which showed that six per cent of those they stopped-and-searched were female

‘Girls and young women are used to hide and transport drugs and weapons because they are less likely than boys to be caught.’³⁸

Some suggested that the biggest fear for girls carrying drugs or firearms was actually not the police but members of other gangs. One former gang-associated girl told the CSJ:

‘They’re probably more worried about who knows on the streets ... Everyone robs everyone, the fear more is of people knowing who the girl is and the possibility that they know she is holding things for him....’

The recognition that current stop and search policy may be incentivising girls and young women to hold firearms and drugs for male gang members did not lead all of those we interviewed to suggest that more girls should be stopped-and-searched. Indeed, one way of reducing the incentive for girls to carry is to stop and search fewer men. Furthermore, even those who advocated for more stop and search of girls and young women suggested that it needs reforming first. Jennifer Blake told the CSJ that *‘stop and search needs working on before they start stopping females.’*

Many of those we interviewed felt that stop and search was not working in its current form and needed reforming. Angela Lawrence told us that *‘the high number of stop and search has a detrimental effect on the psyche of young black people’* whilst Tracey Ford, founder of Jags Foundation, told us that *‘it causes fear of reprisals, hostility and the breakdown in relationships’* that undermine intelligence sharing with the police in some communities.

Recommendation:

- **Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary should revisit their review of Stop and Search Powers (2013)³⁹ to ensure that police force’s stop and search practices are not incentivising girls to carry firearms and drugs.**

³⁸ Cited by Pearce, J.J. and Pitts, J.M., *Youth gangs, sexual violence and sexual exploitation: a scoping exercise* The Office of the Children’s Commissioner for England, Luton: University of Bedfordshire, 2011, p9

³⁹ *Stop and Search Powers: Are the police using them effectively and fairly?*, London: Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, 2013

2.5 Schools and gangs

Schools have an important role to play in tackling gangs. Those working with gangs told the CSJ that schools can often become aware of problems before many others. The indicators of gang involvement cited were altercations on school premises, by a girl's friend alerting a member of staff to the issue, or by an obvious change in behaviour or attitude towards their education. Teachers are able to see changes because their role and the school environment enable them to observe girls' behaviour on a daily basis over a long period of time and to notice and monitor any changes.

There are however some limits to the role schools can play. The CSJ heard from Angela Lawrence how schools' existing responsibilities mean that *'all they can do is identify a girl's behaviour has changed and they need to bring in different agencies to try and support that child'* and from Tracey Ford that *'schools don't have sufficient allocated resources to help young people who they know are facing difficult non-educational issues.'* It is therefore important that there are effective partnerships between schools with gang problems, and their voluntary and statutory partners with the resources and expertise to help tackle the problem.

Given this, it is concerning that some giving evidence to the CSJ said that schools with gang problems often ignored them, and did not welcome support from partners to tackle them. Rob Owen, CEO of St Giles Trust, told the CSJ that *'the reason is very simple: some heads don't want their schools to be associated with the gang situation publically. It's not naivety, they know there's a problem but they don't want to admit it.'*

Similarly Lisa Bellis from the Safer London Foundation told the CSJ:

'Some of the schools [who are] resistant to engaging with us can often be the schools identified as having issues by our local borough contacts. These barriers can be for a variety of reasons, some don't want students missing lessons, others are fearful that having us delivering work in the school will see them labelled as having a gang/sexual violence issue.'

This view was also backed up by a former gang-associated girl who told us:

'A lot of schools are scared of the word "gangs" – they are even scared of the word "drugs." They don't want to believe that is going on in their premises. The schools need to open their eyes and bring more awareness into their schools.'

This fear of facing the truth is not a problem in every school. Some we spoke to are working very closely with partner agencies, openly addressing gang issues in their area. However an open

approach should not be the preserve of a few schools, and instead all schools with gang problems need to open themselves up for support.

Recommendation:

- **Police and Crime Commissioners in the eight police forces that cover the priority areas identified in the *Ending Gang and Youth Violence Programme* to ensure that those schools in their area that have a gang problem are receiving the necessary support to tackle it.**

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper should make for uncomfortable reading. It has brought to the fore the reality of gang life for girls and young women, which includes girls being used to sleep with 10 year-old boys to induct them into gangs, the carrying of firearms and drugs, sexual exploitation and girls harming their life chances by giving up on education from an early age.

Moreover, this reality has become obvious simply by scratching the surface of this issue, and one of the most concerning aspects of girls in gangs is how little we really know. We have no accurate estimate of how many girls are involved in gangs, where they are or how they got there. For this reason it is imperative that the Government acts with urgency to understand far better the scale and depth of the problems girls face.

A new understanding of the problem will enable us to respond more effectively. But there are also some things we can do now to help more girls exit gang life. The CSJ has been impressed with the innovative work of King's College Hospital and St Thomas' Hospital. Their work in partnering with voluntary organisations to ensure that vulnerable young people get offered the support they need when coming into A&E should be copied by other hospitals in gang-affected areas. Moreover, police forces should be thinking more innovatively too, and be ensuring that girlfriends of imprisoned male gang members are receiving the support they need to exit gang life. The police also need to ensure that the way they carry out stop and search is not inadvertently leading to more girls carrying drugs and guns, and schools need to welcome support to tackle any gang problems.

Doing nothing is not an option. Gang life is blighting the lives and future of too many girls. This short research paper should compel policy makers and community leaders to respond with new urgency.