The lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime in London – An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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Abstract

In England and Wales, Knife-enabled crime has pervaded the political, academic, and societal spheres since the early 2000s when he term ‘knife crime’ began to be employed (Williams & Squires, 2021). Over the years, knife-enabled crime in the UK has morphed into a racialised and genderised category of criminal activity with strong associations made between the crime and Black young boys and men. Contemporary discourse within academic research, as well as in government reports, have suggested determinants that may lead an individual toward knife-enabled crime. What seems to be lacking in the exploration of this phenomenon is the voice of the enactors and an understanding of their lived experiences. There appears to be an omission of the enactors’ perceptions, views and narratives in the majority of existing literature.

This research seeks to explore the lived experience of Black men in London who have been involved in knife-enabled crime. The participants in this research are Black men, with one self-identifying as dual heritage. All four participants had used a knife to physically harm or hurt another person. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was adopted as the methodology. The analysis yielded four major themes emerged and 10 subthemes, which were: ‘Starting the journey into knife-enabled crime’, ‘engaging in knife-enabled crime: It’s like in a war’, ‘life after using the knife: I wanted change’, and ‘knife-enabled crime: Blackness and maleness**’**. The discussion contextualises these findings within contemporary discourses and recommendations are made for counselling psychologists and other clinicians in therapeutic practice. This research hopes to contribute new insights, knowledge and understanding of the

knife-enabled crime phenomenon informed by the unique lived experiences and perspectives of the enactors. The research also hopes to enhance current provision of therapeutic support offered to individuals with this experience, be it in public, private or third sectors.

Dedication

To my brother. How I wish you were here right now and at this very moment. Everyday same thoughts and same feelings.

To my friend Wangui. Hasn’t he done well? Are you not proud? Fabulous young man, so kind. Well done! This would be another celebration that I know you would be so ready to share with me. I miss you so dearly.

To my uncle. Baba Kiti. I miss you. I miss your energy, I miss your voice and most of all, seeing you and my father together.

To Leah. Such a short time. So much to remember. Thank you for the jollof rice! Thank you for the earrings. Thank you for the trust. Thank you for the absolutely kind words and teaching me that self-care trumps it all!

To the beautiful Isabella Wambui Kimani. Welcome, welcome, welcome to this world! It used to be huge when I was your age (not even one yet) but for you everything is at an arm's length. You will love it! Karibu sana!! Your parents have so been waiting for you:-)

Acknowledgments

My participants. Robert Bragg, Sephton Henry, Onyi Anyado and FG (you know who you are). Thank you. This research would not have been possible without you. Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me and to share you experiences. You changed me in a way that you will probably never know. I respect you.

Dr Claire Marshall. I got there in the end! Thank you for your patience! Thank you for your support! Thank you for teaching me, possibly inadvertently, how to take one step at a time, to breathe and to trust in my work.

My daughters. My children. My deepest loves. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you for being my biggest and loudest cheerleaders. You will absolutely never, ever know how much you mean to me. Thank you for asking about my studies from year one to today. Thank you for taking the time to read some of my work, even the driest of it all! Your support is not to be taken for granted. Ever. I love you. I love you. I love you. You are amazing young ladies! Never forget that.

Soren. You probably don’t know this, but I probably would have gone absolutely crazy completing this thesis if you were not there. Our daughter might have moved out! Thank you for walking Lacey! And of course, thank you for the porridge! Best in the world!

My amazing parents. What can I say but ashe! Ashe! Ashe! People say they have amazing parents but that's because they have not met you both. Your life journey has brough me where I am today. Can I also say thank you to my uncle Paashe for his sacrifices? Ashe paashe.

My siblings. Ha! Tumekuja mbali Sisi nani?? A gang of siblings who love and support each other! Na tulenge ju!!

My most patient friends! Thank you for your support and absolute patience. For checking how it is all going and, the dreaded question, when do I submit! It kept me going! For counting down with me!

My cohort! Fabulous people that I met! Walking together, taking every painful step together, laughing together and sometimes crying together! I shed some tears this year! Sorry CCG group. Dr Kamat remember the days of pomodoro timer! Thank you for walking with me especially the last few steps! Dr Butterfield (aka Dr B) for being a fab friend – the many "you got this" made me remember that yes I can do it. Dr Williams (yes, I said it) yours is hard to define but I know that you know what I mean. The super positive energy in my direction...

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Abbreviations

BPS: British Psychological Society

CRT: Critical Race Theory

GETs: Group Experiential Themes

IPA: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

KCPO: Knife crime prevention orders

PETs: Personal Experiential Themes

UEL: University of East London

Introduction

Knife-enabled crime appears to have come into prominence in England and Wales in the early part of 2008 when the media and public institutions began not only spotlighting it as a major public concern but also as a crime occurring predominantly in the London area involving young Black men (Squires, 2009). Much has been written since in various form of literatures including newspaper articles, grey literature such as research reports, policy documents and government reports.

However, what has emerged through the exploration of literature on knife-enabled crime is the apparent lack of research and publications that steps beyond the examination of the drivers of knife-enabled crime and into the exploration of the lived experiences of the enactors. Currently a vast majority of published papers appear to have relied on other works that did not include the voice of the enactors of knife-enabled crime. It is possible that this significant omission has played a role in the current battle in dealing with the rise in knife-enabled crime. As it stands, “the way in which ‘knife crime’ is understood ensures that it is responded to rather ineffectively and in ways which largely perpetuate and exacerbate the problem.” (Williams and Squires, 2021 p.3). This research aims to explore the lived experience of Black men living in London who have been involved in knife-enabled crime through the direct inclusion of the enactors via the use of semi-structured interviews.

The first chapter, the literature review, is composed of several sections including the search strategy, an examination of the current context in which knife-enabled crime is presented and the prevalence of the phenomenon focused on the London as knife-crime is reported to continue to rise in this region (Allen & Harding, 2021).

Several aspects of the phenomenon will then be considered including the racialisation of knife-enabled crime, the possible role that gender, image and reputation play as well as the presumed predisposing factors. In terms of critiquing the literature included in the study, this will be done throughout the presentation with a focus on critical race theory (CRT) framework employed due to the racial, ethnic, and cultural aspect of this study. CRT will focus on the counter-story aspect of the framework in that, without the narrative nor the voice of the enactors of knife-enabled crime, the hegemonic discourse has provided a narrative where possible external causative factors and deprivation theories reign. Transcultural theory will be explored in terms of this research's relevance to the field of counselling psychology as well as other psychotherapeutic or psychological approaches. This is especially relevant in view of the ethnicity of the participants vis-à-vis the current state of representation of and equality of access to mental health services for the Black community, and especially the men from this population.

The second chapter in the research is the methodology chapter. This begins by stating the research aims and introducing both the constructivist epistemological position adopted in this study as well as discuss the researcher's ontological stance. The research method employed in this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This chapter will provide information on the four participants who were all male with an age range of between 29 and 50 years and details on the semi-structured interview and its procedure is provided. An important aspect of IPA is reflexivity and this is presented in two forms; personal reflexivity and methodological reflexivity**.** Before concluding the chapter, the ethical considerations for conducting the research are presented as is the positioning of qualitative

research in terms of validity and quality assessments using Yardley (2008) assessment framework as well as exploring the concept of trustworthiness in qualitative research.

In the analysis chapter, research findings are presented and discussed. The chapter begins with an introduction to the findings and each major theme or Group Experiential Theme (GET) is then presented and analysed with extracts as examples of the themes employed to showcase each GET.

The final chapter in this study is the discussion chapter. It is here that the findings will be situated in line with existing literature. An evaluation of the study is presented employing Yardley (2008) assessment method to demonstrate validity of the study. Several aspects of the study are then presented successively, namely the limitations and strengths of the research as well as its clinical implication and finally the future research recommendations are offered before the conclusion is delivered.

A note on language

Knife-enabled crime

In this paper, the term knife-enabled crime will be employed throughout in preference to ‘knife crime’. The reason for this substitution is attributable to the racialisation of the latter term in London, with the focus falling primarily on young Black boys and men (Williams & Squires, 2021). The aim of employing the phrase ‘knife-enabled crime’, it is hoped that this phrase will diminish this racialised view of knife-enabled

crime and the focus of the research, learning and understanding the lived experience of the participants, will become apparent.

In terms of knife-crime definition, there is currently “no Home Office definition of knife crime” (Williams & Squires, 2021; HASC, 2009). However, the Leicester police website defines knife-enabled crime as “a crime that involves a knife.” (Leicester Police Service, n.d.). In this, in order to differentiate other forms of knife-enabled crime to the one where an individual has physically harmed another, I will employ the term knife-enabled crime throughout as reference to the latter. When it is other forms of knife-enabled crime, this will be made clear.

Defining Race, culture and ethnicity

Several acronyms and terminologies have emerged over the years (Moodley and Lee, 2020) in the hope and aim of replacing the socially constructed and firmly rooted description of ‘Black’ including BAME, People of Colour (PoC) and Afro-Caribbean. In this research, Black is used and ‘preferred’ as a placeholder for a time where race will play less of a role in determining type of interrelationships to occur between and among those who ‘do not look alike’. ‘Black’ is also employed as three of the participants self-identified as Black while one self-identified as dual heritage. In this study, Black is capitalised, unless presented within a citation, as it is used in reference to the participants race or ethnicity.

Throughout the study, the words, race, ethnicity, and culture are employed. For clarity's sake, Professor Sumon Fernando's (1991) descriptions, tabulated below, will be employed.

Fernando (1991): Race, culture and ethnicity

	Characterised by	Determined by	Perceived by
Race	Physical appearance	Genetic ancestry	Permanent (genetic/biological)
Culture	Behaviour attitudes	Upbringing choice	Changeable (assimilation, acculturation)
Ethnicity	Sense of belonging Group identity	Social pressures Psychological need	Partially changeable

Clinical relevance of the research

In the strategic framework, (BPS, 2021), the BPS announced that its vision is 'To promote inclusivity and diversity and to be the voice of contemporary evidence-based psychology that improves lives and changes humanity for the greater good.' (BPS, 2021 p.4). This research project focuses on bringing forward the voices of a group of people who are often marginalised in society, in this research, Black men and one who self-identifies as dual heritage. In the process of writing this study a dearth of research involving Black men involved in knife-enabled crime was found to exist. As a result, it is hoped that this study will engender further and more in-depth exploration and understanding of the lived experiences of those involved in serious

knife-related offences. It is also hoped that this research, will play a role in correcting the lens through which the participant of knife-enabled crime is viewed and treated by those who write about them, work with them and engage with them at any level including youth workers, social workers, doctors, prison wardens and psychologists.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

The chapter explores existing literature on knife-enabled crime. It begins by stating the research strategy employed in locating published works for use in this study before examining the prevalence of knife-enabled crime in the London area, a region found to experience the third highest rate of knife-enabled crime in England and Wales according to the Metropolitan Police Service second to the West Midlands (Allen & Harding, 2021). This research focused on the London region as knife-crime continues to increase in the city (ONS, 2020) despite the various solutions put forward by the government (College of Policing, 2021; Home Office, 2018). Some of the suggested risk-factors in the engagement of knife-enabled crime are then explored. This is done by first examining the community and societal factors, followed by an exploration of risk-factors believed to contribute to this phenomenon at an individual level. Critical race theory framework is employed as a criticality tool

of the current literature and in particular at the absence of the voices and participation of enactors of knife enabled crime research works and other literature aimed at understanding of the phenomenon and the possible effects this absence might entail. Transcultural theory and therapy will be incorporated in this chapter in conjunction with the relevance of this study to the field of counselling psychology.

1.1 Literature Review Search Strategy

Two main databases employed in the search for relevant journal articles and books the university library's electronic databases as well as Google Scholar. The university databases included Wiley Online Library, British Journal of Psychiatry, PsycArticles and Psychinfo, EBSCO, Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Central, Sage Journals, Science Direct, Taylor & Francis and APA PsycNet. Once articles and books were displayed and were found to not have the full text online, another search was further conducted either on Google Scholar or on the broader internet. The main keywords used in searches on the databases were: knife crime, knife-enabled crime, knife crime London, knife crime and the Black community, stabbings in London, race and knife crime, I stabbed someone, charities working with knife crime, knife crime and gangs, perpetrators of knife crime, knife crime statistics and knife crime statistics London.

Most of the current literature looks to understand the extrinsic causes of knife-enabled crime. It is for this reason that the literature reviewed for this study

addresses the suggested causative factors much more so than exploring the lived experiences of the enactors from a phenomenological position.

According to Grant & Booth, (2009), there exist several literature review methodologies. In this research, a combination of what they term ‘critical review’ and ‘literature review’ was employed. The former being described as where “the writer has extensively researched literature and critically evaluated its quality” (Grant & Booth, 2009 p.94) while the latter is where published materials “provide examination of recent or current literature” (Grant & Booth, 2009 p.94). These two methodologies were employed as they most closely represented the formula employed in the search for relevant literature in terms of the inclusion and exclusion of specific works. In line with the Search, Appraisal, Synthesis and Analysis (SALSA) framework (Grant & Booth, (2009), these two literature review methodologies do not require a formal quality assessment. However, there was an informal quality assessment that involved an inclusion and exclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria comprised of systemic reviews, research papers, journal articles, government reports, book chapters or sections that focused on knife-enabled crime in the UK. Excluded articles included those papers that approached the subject from a medical stance as they tended to be more focused on the survivors and victims of knife-enabled crime.

1.2 The current context of knife-enabled crime

This research aims to explore the lived experience of Black men living in London who have been involved in knife-enabled crime. During the literature search, a

paucity in research and articles involving enactors of knife-enabled crime as active participants was revealed. Within the current literature, there appears to be several possible risk factors and causes of knife-enabled crime that have been documented which seem not to have changed much over the last decades **(**Harding, 2020). The most often cited individual factors include gender, age and ethnicity with Black males aged between 10 to 24 years as the most likely enactors of knife-enabled crime (Haylock et al., 2020; (Falkner, 2021) although it appears that this is dependent on geographical locations**.** Research by Bailey et al., (2020) for instance, which was conducted in the Thames Valley region, found that there was a victim-offender overlap, and that White males aged between 16 – 34 years were more likely to be the victims, offender or victim-offenders. Knife-enabled crime is said to be most prevalent in the metropolitan areas of England and Wales with London experiencing the highest rate of this activity (ONS, 2020).

In the London area the recent Policy Exchange report (Falkner, 2021) stated that: "black people are five times more likely to be stabbed than white people in London, and... young black men are 24 times as likely to die in this way than their white peers." (p.5). The same report, as well as Harding (2020) speaks about what could be regarded as novel motivators of engagement in knife-enabled crime namely drill music[1], social media, video gaming and the rise of county lines[2] in the realm of drug dealing. In the matter of drill music, the assertion of its role in the perpetuation of knife-enabled crime is disputed by Schwarze & Fatsis, (2022), "Such prejudicial

[1] Drill music is a type of rap music that originated from Chicago but the UK version has adopted its own "impatient tempo and cryptic lyrical lexicon" (Thapar, 2021)

[2] County lines refers to operational networks where young people, sometimes children, are exploited by older drug dealers to travel across the country and sell drugs in rural or coastal towns (Thapar, 2021)

assumptions about the role of drill in inciting violence are largely unfounded, but nevertheless inform criminal justice policy that leads to unjust and discriminatory outcomes" (p.463). The authors continue by stating that this criminalisation of Black cultural expression serves as a reminder of stereotypical associations between 'blackness' and criminality" (p.464). Indeed, rap music, from which drill music originates is and was often associated with violence (Stickle & Tewksbury, 2015, Geliebter et al., 2014). Previous motivators, possibly for the past 10 years, focused mainly on but not exclusively on fear, protection, gang association and reputation (Lemos & Crane, 2004, Sethi et al., 2010; Harding, 2020**)** The question of there being a correlation between knife-enabled crime and gang affiliation continues to pervade the study of knife-related offenses. Harding (2020) and McVie (2010) hold the view that the correlation does exist while Bailey et al., (2020) and Muncie, (2009) are of the view that this link is not to be found.

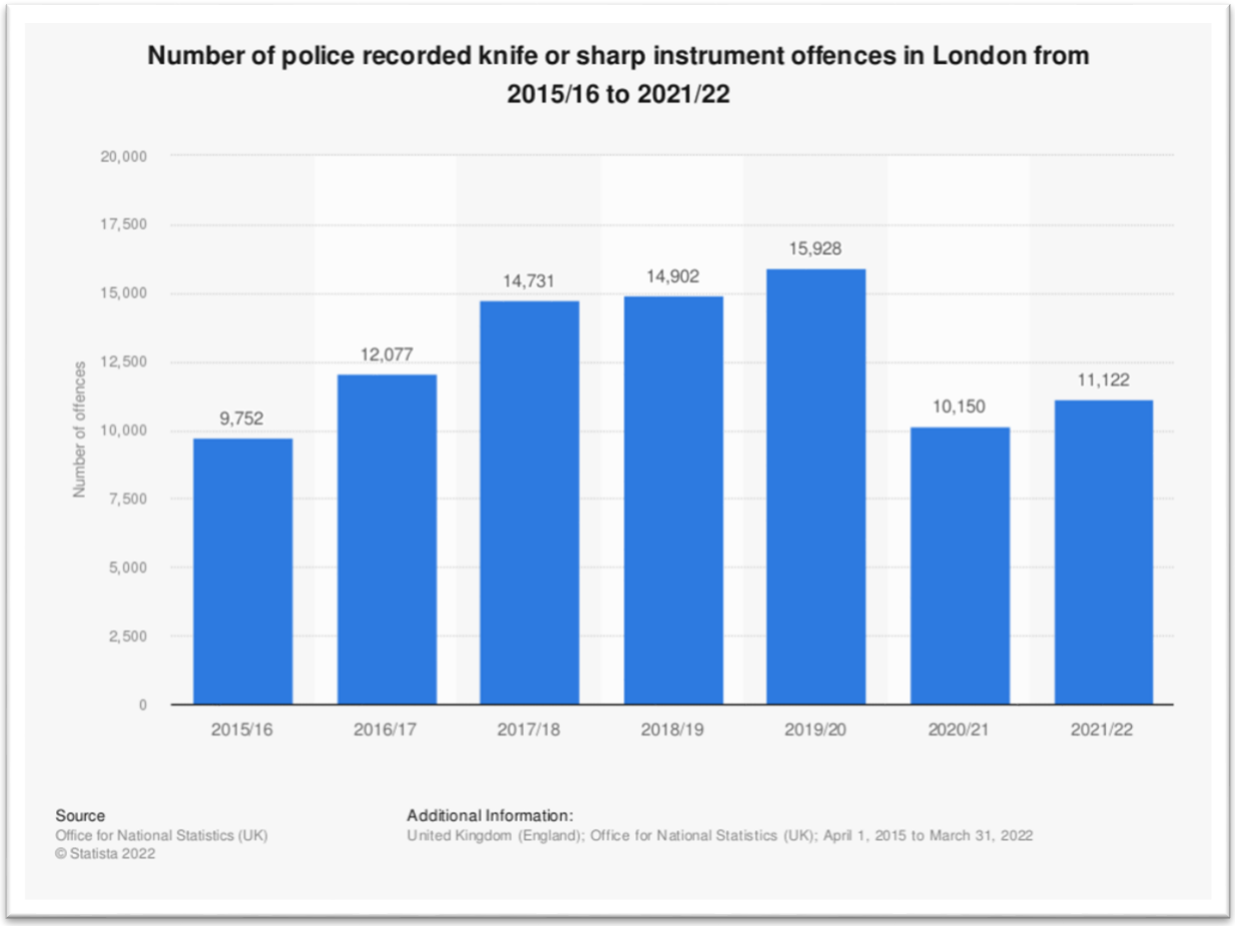
The role of the media in the reporting of knife-related offences has often been criticised as overdramatising the situation (Bailey et al., 2020; Williams & Squires, 2021; Traynor, 2016). That there is a serious concern about the growth of knife-related offences is not denied. However, what raises concern on the part of the media and it's reporting of the phenomenon is what is not addressed (Wood, 2010). Today, knife-enabled crime is viewed as a serious problem propagated by a particular group of armed "violently nihilist, feral" (Wood, 2010 p.97) mainly Black and minority ethnic teens however, what the part of the story that remains unheard is the bigger picture, the context in which the enactors of knife-enabled crime find exist. ext." (Williams & Squires, 2021, p.3). It is this 'bigger picture', that this research aims to explore by enlisting the help of enactors of knife-enabled crime. The next section

explores further the prevalence of knife-enabled crime, with a focus on London.

1.3 Prevalence of knife-enabled crime in London

At the time of writing this paper, a report by Policy Exchange (Falkner, 2021) reported that knife-enabled crimes occurred at a rate of 44 times each day in London between 2019-2020. The Office for National Statistics (2022) reported a 10% increase in England and Wales of all knife-enabled offences including violent and sexual offences where knives were used in the year ending 2022 compared to the previous year. This 10% increase, however, remains lower than pre-coronavirus pandemic levels in the year ending 2021. According to figure 1 below, between 2021 and 2022, there have been approximately 11,122 knife-related offences in London compared with 10,150 in 2020/2021 (Clark, 2022a**).** Being a major city, London, like other metropolises, faces higher than average rates of crime and knife-related offences compared to smaller cities in the UK (O'Leary, 2018). In England and Wales, 35% of all knife-related crimes in 2018 occurred in London (O'Leary & Reland, 2019).

Figure 1: Number of police recorded knife or sharp instrument offences in London

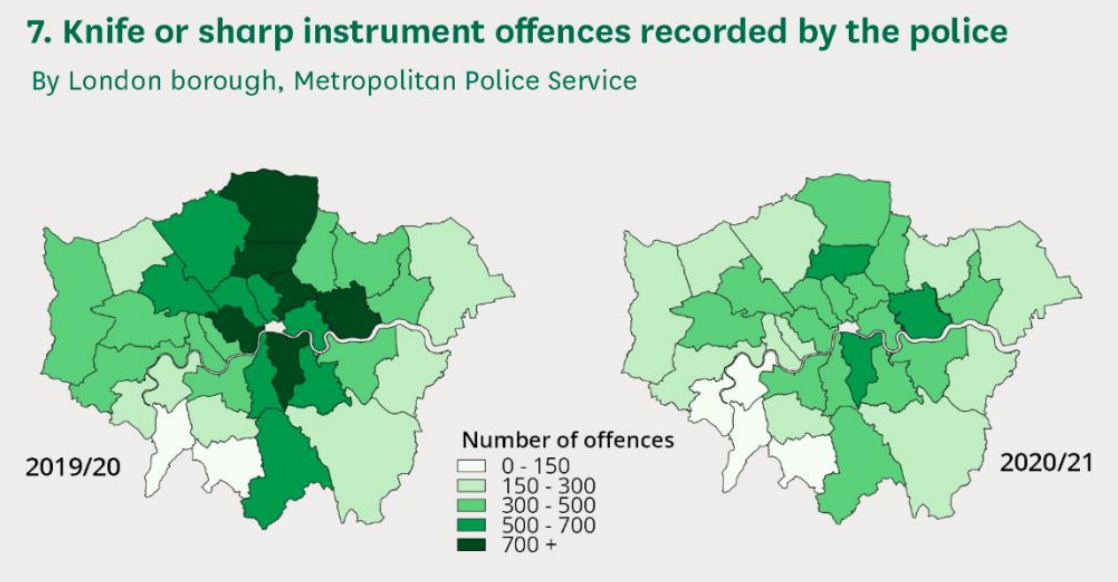


(Clark, 2022b)

As the maps and table below indicate, in line with the rest of England and Wales, knife-enabled crime in the capital decreased by approximately by 35% from 15,601 in 2019/20 to 10,363 to 2020/21. It is important to note that the numbers provided indicate the total number of offences as opposed to rates per population (Allen & Harding, 2021). The London borough of Newham recorded the highest number of knife or sharp instrument-related offences in London with 551, while the highest number of injuries from knife-enabled crime was recorded in the London boroughs of Lambeth and Southward, both with 167. The borough to have recorded the sharpest

decrease (-63%) is Westminster, which saw figures fall from 1,134 in 2019-2020 to 423 in 2020-2021. On the other hand, Waltham Forest saw a 7% decrease, the lowest proportional decrease recorded. The borough with the lowest rate of knife-enabled crime was Kingston upon Thames with 74 in 2021-20 down from 143 in 2019-20 (Allen & Harding, 2021)

Figure 2: Map of Knife or sharp instrument offences by London Boroughs



Source: Metropolitan Police Service, Crime statistics 2020/21, Accessed: 23 July 2021

(Allen & Harding, 2021)

Table 1: Number of knife-enabled offences by London boroughs

Knife Crime 2020/21	
London Borough	**Offences**
Newham	551
Haringey	518
Southwark	516
Hackney	496
Enfield	471
Tower-Hamlets	469
Lewisham	466
Croydon	464
Lambeth	454
Islington	424
Westminster	423
Brent	416
Ealing	378
Wandsworth	344
Waltham Forest	342
Greenwich	330
Barking & Dagenham	314

Camden	314
Barnet	299
Hounslow	278
Hammersmith	240
Redbridge	234
Hillingdon	217
Kensington	216
Bromley	203
Harrow	193
Merton	190
Havering	157
Bexley	155
Sutton	129
Richmond	88
Kingston upon Thames	74
Total	**10,363**

Source: Metropolitan Police Service, Crime statistics 2020/21 (Allen & Harding, 2021)

1.4 Knife-enabled crime and the criminal justice system

The Offensive Weapons Act was introduced in 2019 initially to deal firearm and corrosive products offences and later to address the matter of knife-enabled crime

(Malthouse, 2020). This added section came in the form of Knife crime prevention orders (KCPOs) (Home Office, 2021b). The aim of the KCPO is to help tackle knife-enabled crime by working and involving young people at-risk of engaging in this crime (Malthouse, 2020). A KCPO may be made by the court and where the individual is between 12 and 18 years of age, and an application is made to the Youth Court (Home Office, 2021b). KCPOs are not intended to be viewed as punishment but as deterrents from further involvement in knife-related offences through the requirement that the intended recipient undertake certain activities including educational courses, life skills programmes, drug rehabilitation programmes and relationship counselling (Home Office, 2021b). KCPOs can entail a custodial sentence of between six and two years and/or a fine. All conviction orders require the involvement of Youth Offending Teams located in the young person's area of residence. Where the recipient is an adult, the application is made through the magistrate's court (Home Office, 2021b).

With all its 'good intentions', the KCPO has been criticised for creating a new form of 'othering' in that the "preventative hybrids generate a self-fulfilling category of 'difficult' subjects, while simultaneously denying them the procedural protections normally afforded to the responsible subject of classical criminal law." (Hendry, 2021, p.1). Modood & Thompson, (2022, p.782) define this process of othering as one where ''a dominant group imposes an identity on a subordinate group''. By creating this new preventative category within the current Offensive Weapons Act 2019, Hendry (2021) argues that there's an implication that there exists a threatening and criminal other in existence who needs separate laws to "the responsible, the rational/virtuous" (p.1) other, a view which has gone on to contribute to the over-

policing of non-White communities. She goes on to describe the ‘‘difficult other’’ in relation to knife-related offences as “predominantly Black children in urban environments who carry knives.” (Hendry, 2021, p.2). This form of othering may not only feed into the public consciousness the myth of ‘black criminality’ but also the hyper-criminalization of Black and other non-White communities (Williams & Clarke, 2018).

In terms of the criminal justice system (CJS), non-White groups appear to be over-represented in England and Wales, a concern raised by Linda Logan, chair of the Magistrates Association’s Youth Court Committee in relation to the introduction of KCPOs (Magistrates Association, 2020; Full fact, 2019; Ministry of Justice, 2021). Between 2010 to 2020 there was an increase from 20% to 33% in the arrests of youth belonging to the group Black and minority ethnic (Squires, 2021). Since 2019 however the rate has increased more rapidly, which could possibly be linked to the introduction of KCPOs.

1.5 The racialisation of knife-enabled crime

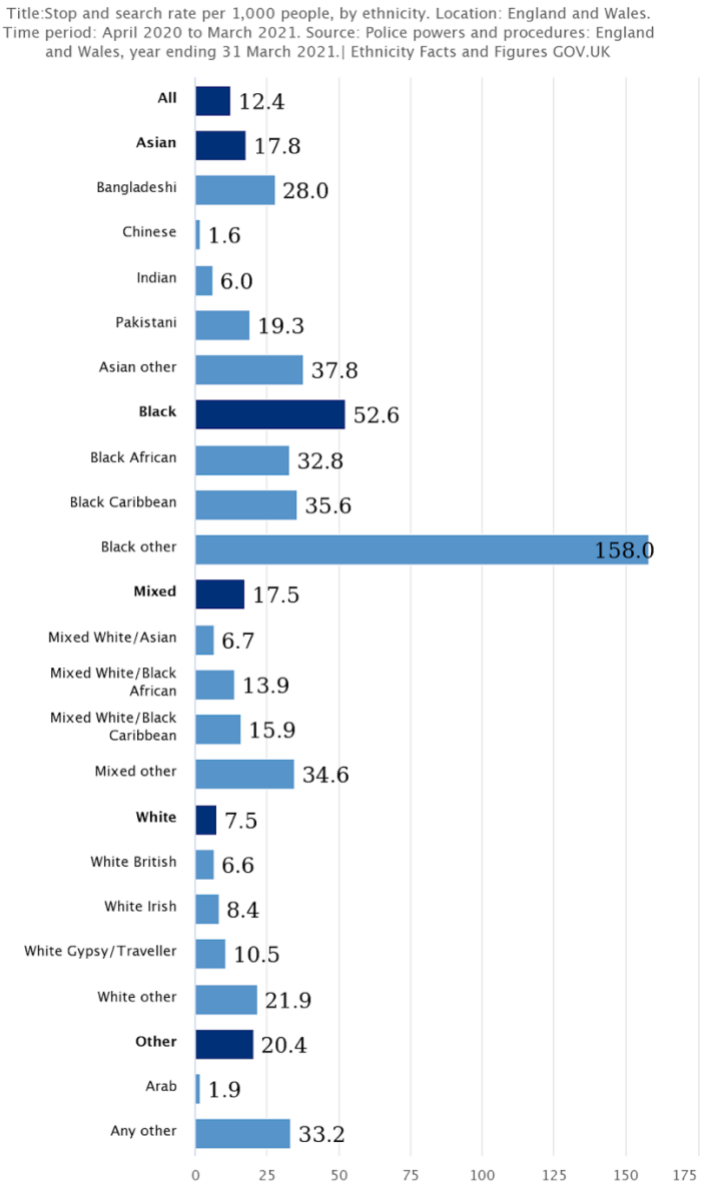
> ‘But prejudice is even more insidious…as, layered upon this ‘criminology of the other’ (Garland 1996), is the ‘myth of black criminality’ (Gilroy 1982). Without needing to be told, without needing proof, the public already believes that in the context of knife crime the offenders are young Black men, benefit dependent, and involved in drugs, other anti-social behaviour, and low-level criminality ...’ (Hendry, 2021 p.6)

The term ‘knife crime’ is often identified with Black boys and men even though many knife-related offences occur between adults of any ethnicity in domestic situations (Phillips et al., 2022; Williams & Squires, 2021; Akala, 2019). Although several decades apart in terms of studies, William & Squires (2021) drew on Stuart Hall and his colleagues’ book ‘Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the state and law and order’ (1978) in their dissection and understanding of the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime. They compared it to the social construction and racialisation of ‘muggings’ in the 1970s. Indeed, both crimes appear to have permeated society’s everyday language as a result of political and social campaigns that saw the term ‘mugging’, like knife crime, become associated with Black youths. Activities that included the spotlighting and amplification of crimes committed by young Black men which in time, positioned the act of ‘mugging’ as a Black issue and confirm that 'crime, in the form of street disorder and robbery was gradually identified as an expression of black culture’, (Gilroy, 1987: 109). Following the magnification of the crimes committed by young Black men and boys there emerged a second phase to the positioning of ‘muggings’ to the same group. This phase involved several agencies including media reports on ‘muggings’, court cases, public campaigns and calculated police operations such as increased use of stop-and-search as well as official Home Office enquiries on ‘muggings’. These all culminated in the production of statistics that would inform the public and others just how concerning ‘mugging’ had become (Williams & Squires, 2021). According to Williams & Squires (2021), this constructional analysis by Hall et al., (1978) has provided us with a map of what and how knife-enabled crime has evolved into a crime associated with young Black men and boys.

> “Our argument here is that the labelling of ‘knife crime’, misleadingly and erroneously understood as an overwhelmingly black crime, has come to perform almost exactly the same function as mugging almost fifty years ago…” (Williams & Squires, 2021, p.18).

Racial profiling has been a blight in the relationships between the police and Black and Asian communities for decades and has been closely tied to stop and search practices **(**Fekete, 2012). Racial profiling is “the act of suspecting or targeting a person of a certain race on the basis of observed or assumed characteristics or behavior of a racial or ethnic group, rather than on individual suspicion”, (Laurencin & Walker, 2020, p.1). This practice has been blamed for the erosion of community-police relations, with trust in law enforcement, as a power to protect, being the greatest casualty (Delsol, 2015). In the UK, racial profiling has been brought to the front by the implementation and use of stop and search by the police. The disproportionality between the use of stop and search between the White population and that of Black and Asian individuals remains high (Thapar, 2021; Delsol, 2015), as can be seen below.

Figure 3**: Stop and search rate in England and Wales**



The figures in figure 3 above from gov.uk (2022) show the rate of stop and search operations from April 2020 to March 2021. Over the time period presented there were 52.6 searches for every 1,000 Black people compared to 7.5 for every 1,000 for white people. As someone who speaks of his experiences of stop and search since childhood, Akala stated:

> *"…racialised stop and search is not really about fighting crime…What racialised stop and search is about, in London at least, is letting young black boys and men know their place in British society, letting them know who holds the power… It is about social engineering and about the conditioning of expectations, about getting black people used to the fact that they are not real and full citizens, so they should learn to not expect the privileges that would usually accrue from such a status. Racialised stop and search is also a legacy of more direct and brutal forms of policing the black body in the UK, from back in the days before political correctness. (Akala, 2018 p.78)*

In terms of psychological effects, the experience of racial profiling and stop and search can cause an individual to suffer from stress related disorders including post-traumatic stress disorder and to hold a view of the police as hostile, untrustworthy and as a force which abuses its powers (Delsol & Shiner, 2015), a view shared by the American Psychological Association (2001 as cited in Delsol & Shiner, 2015) and by a study conducted in England by Stopwatch and the Open Society Justice Initiative (2013). Indeed Laurencin & Walker, (2020) consider the practice and experience of stop and search and racial profiling as a health public health matter that affect individuals as well as whole communities. The paper authored by the Open Society Justice Initiative (2013), includes the lived experiences of individuals who have experienced stop and search several times in their lives, some over 30 times. Some of the words expressed included "shock', manhandled", "felt dirty", "I've been basically touched everywhere that you can imagine...places that you're not supposed to be touched", "you feel a lot of fear inside", "they have stripped my son of

his soul and his dreams. They made him feel worthless and “people always see black first before they see anything else.” (p. 5 – 13).

The usefulness of stop and search has been investigated and documents by various researchers and writers (Thapar, 2021; Delsol & Shiner, 2015). As a tool, it is said to yield results such as prevent crimes including burglaries and car thefts from occurring. The measurements of the benefits of stop and search appear to rest solely on three variables namely the number of arrests made, the rate at which the activity was intelligence-led and the type of offences targeted (Delsol & Shiner, 2015). What has resulted is findings that indicate that the costs to this practice, including the erosion of community-police relations, greatly outweigh the benefits (Delsol & Shiner, 2015).

1.6 Knife-enabled crime masculinity, image, and reputation

Traynor’s (2016) qualitative study involved participants who had self-disclosed as knife-carriers. He interviewed 23 participants with the aim of exploring what had led them to start carrying knives. Traynor’s research focused on the concept of ‘street life’, which is defined as ‘a place in which young people, often in groups, draw on street codes as a response to the extant violence and a ‘security gap’ in their neighbourhoods’ (p.5) and how this code is associated with masculine hegemony (Traynor, 2016; King & Swain, 2022; King, 2020). This concept refers to issues of gender roles, especially in terms of men’s oppression of women (Connell &

Messerschmidt, 2005). However, Traynor, (2016), applied this concept to the role of masculinity as a possible causative factor of knife-enabled crime.

> "If violence is used to reaffirm gender roles throughout society, this takes on greater significance in the absence of other sources of security and self-esteem. Some young people growing up in deprived circumstances experience a 'loss of cohesion' (Ray, 2011; 78) which damages their ability to maintain and project self-esteem. For young men especially, this creates a sense of weakness and lack of control for which violence can provide both an outlet for frustration and a means of attaining respect and status that is otherwise denied them. This results in the adoption or internalisation of a dangerous and hyper-masculine identity and leads to risk taking and ordeals as modes of self-assertion and compensation." (Traynor, 2016, p.78).

This construction of 'hyper-masculinity' is one that has been addressed in the exploration of knife-related offences (Sethi et al., 2010; Palasinski, 2013). According to Palasinski (2013), 'crime serves as a "resource" when legitimate avenues by which their gender can be constructed are denied' (p.72). Practicing masculinity has often been associated with 'respect' and social status (King, 2020; Palasinski, 2013; Traynor, 2016). This term 'respect' is firmly tied to an individual's capacity and readiness to commit violence and an intolerance towards what might appear as 'disrespect (Traynor, 2016; King, 2020; Harding, 2020). According to Palasinski (2013), young men who carried or used a knife, did so for the purpose of catalysing an impression of hyper-masculinity that demands respect and authority over others.

However, according to King & Swain, (2022), this outward demonstration of hegemonic masculinity and demand for respect was at times accompanied by a veiled sense of vulnerability that stemmed from engaging in a life replete with danger and physical insecurity. King, (2022), suggested that this need to practice hyper-masculinity coupled with a sense of vulnerability contributes to some young men's decision on whether to engage in knife-enabled crime or not.

This construction of hyper-masculine identity in relation to Black men, has, itself suffered some criticism. Marriot (2000 as cited in Glynn, 2015) for instance stated that the cornerstone of hyper-masculinity is based on a racist construct that has been imposed on Black men while Hooks (2003a as cited in Glynn, 2015) views the notion of hyper-masculinity from a different angle. She finds that this is a self-identification construct that emanates from Black men themselves as they view their ability to persevere and survive the hardships experiences as a hyper-masculine trait. Considering the image that some hold of the Black man or indeed the Black body as it stands, as an aggressive being, it is possible that this view of a hyper-masculine Black man is an exaggeration of the intention a Black man has exaggerated when referring to a man who only has himself to rely on in a world that is built without him positively in mind.

1.7 Knife-enabled crime and possible predisposing factors

The research method employed in this study is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. This is a qualitative research method, the main aim of which is to explore

the lived experiences of individuals, and how they make sense of the world they live in and/or of a particular phenomenon (Shinebourne, 2011). A search for literature on knife-enabled crime found a wide range of academic articles, white paper reports and grey literature that focused mainly on the causes of knife-enabled crime. It is for this reason that most of the literature reviewed in this section leans more toward suggested cause-and-effect correlations than on the phenomenological exploration of the enactors' lived experiences. Phenomenological research on knife-enabled crime, although available (Roberts, 2021), remains scant. Despite, considerable discourse, debates and dissection of the phenomenon, there appears to be a dearth of research involving the direct participation of individuals who have used the knife to physically harm another (Phillips et al., 2022; Roberts, 2021). The majority of research reviewed that includes enactors focuses mainly on knife-carriers (Traynor, 2016). The scarcity of research exploring the lived experience of enactors of knife-enabled crime who have crossed the line beyond knife carrying and physically harmed another is the impetus for this research project. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the attainment of a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the enactors of knife-enabled crime and make recommendations for practitioners such as counselling psychologists as well as other psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers.

Following extensive research into the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime, it appears that a vast majority of studies are based on systematic reviews, the meta-analysis of literature on knife-enabled crime and publications commissioned by organisations such as The World Health Organisation (Harding, 2020; Haylock et al., 2020; Sethi et al., 2010; Traynor, 2016; Corvo & Williams, 2000; Silvestri et al., 2009;

Eades et al., 2007). There are a multitude of suggested causative factors in knife-related offences, which appear to reflect more on the state of a society or community than solely on an individual's lived experience **(**Phillips et al., 2022; Hitchcock, 2009). It has been argued that the enactment of aggression and violence by an individual is as a result of an intricately woven network of determinants that include idiosyncratic lived experiences, familial, social, cultural and environmental factors (Thapar, 2021; Haylock et al., 2020; Sethi et al., 2010; Brennan 2018; HM Government, 2018).

1.7.1 Police relations

One of the most frequently cited community factors said to contribute to knife-enabled crime and weapon-carrying is the adversarial relationship between the police and some communities within the UK (Stephen, 2009; Akala, 2018; Harding, 2020; Brennan, 2018; Traynor, 2016; Delsol & Shiner, 2015; Riggs and Palasinksi, 2011)**.**

> "In some cultures, they mark your entrance into adulthood with a spiritual quest, a physical challenge, a camping trip, a commune with the elders or with an exchange of long-held ancestral wisdom. In the inner cities of the UK, teenage boys racialised at black are instead introduced to the fact that the protection of the law does not apply to our bodies. There is no equality before the law." (Akala, 2019, p. 171)

This belief that the police service is not there to serve and protect the Black body, has been linked to knife carrying with some young people believing this to be the only way they can protect themselves (Traynor, 2016; Akala, 2018; Hirsch, 2018; Densley & Stevens, 2014). According to Skarlatidou et al. (2021) the lack of trust in the police appears to permeate other public services and government organisations resulting in “lower levels of public trust and confidence in institutions, governments and public services, with consequences for the willingness to engage, cooperate and participate which lies at the heart of democratic institutions” (Skarlatidou et al., 2021). This mistrust in the police is not reserved solely to their perceived absence within a community nor in the frequently discussed over-policing practices of the Black community (Williams & Squires, 2021). There appears to be a view that police presence is at times deemed by some people as a menacing, looming authority, that is solely there to defend the state as opposed to serving and protecting those communities which are usually considered disadvantaged and deprived (Akala, 2019).

1.7.2 Communities and knife-enabled crime

Haylock et al., (2020) carried out an extensive review of published and grey literature on both risk and protective factors that are likely to contribute to weapon-related crime among young people aged between 10 - 24 years in the UK. Their research revealed six studies that showed a possible correlation between deprivation within a community and knife-enabled crime. Additionally, the same research suggested that community deprivation can foster youth offending behaviour due to low social

cohesion, a view shared by Sethi et al., (2010). Densley & Stevens (2014) suggested that economic inequalities were contributory factors to knife-enabled crime and serious youth violence, a point raised in several other papers (Silvestri et al., 2009; Sethi et al., 2010; Traynor, 2016). However, Brennan (2018) found that the link between neighbourhood and violence 'is moderated by the perceived level of violence rather than more tangible factors such as economic deprivation' (p.14) and suggested that there were possibly several other factors that contributed to weapon-carrying besides the anatomy of a disadvantaged neighbourhood such as the existence and experiencing of a higher rate of family conflict and antisocial behaviour (Phillips et al., 2022).

1.7.3 Fear and protection

A study commissioned by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS, 2016), that explored gaps in knowledge about knife-carrying, suggested that fear and the need for protection are possible risk factors in the engagement in knife-enabled crime an view echoed by other authors and organisations (HM Government, 2018; Traynor, 2016; Hobson et al., 2022; Phillips et al., 2022). It appears that this need for protection can be triggered by a sense of vulnerability that the young man experiences due to environmental threats perceived or real. Holding this self-protection narrative can give rise to the concept of survival in a space that is deemed dangerous and unpredictable (Harding, 2020) which could in turn render the idea of knife-carrying a 'logical outcome of the risk assessment/mitigation routinely conducted by those operating within the social field.' (Harding, 2020). In such

environments or living circumstances, the knife therefore appears to become a necessary tool for protection and therefore survival especially in the case of ‘gang’ involvement (Harding, 2020).

1.7.4 Gangs and knife-enabled crime

The extent to which knife-enabled crime is related to gang activity remains contentious (Falkner, 2021; Traynor; 2016). Some research put forward gang affiliation as a direct link to the engagement of knife-enabled crime (HM Government, 2018; Densley et al., 2020; McNeill & Wheller, 2019) while others have argued that this direct association is negligible (Akala, 2018; Bailey et al., 2020; Muncie, 2009, Tribe et al., 2018). Others yet have put forward the notion that there is indeed a relationship however, the nature of it is more complex than presented (Traynor, 2016). McVie, (2010) for instance suggested that those involved in gangs may have had additional contributory factors including familial poverty and living in a high-crime community. In their paper, Tribe et al., (2018) reported Sir Bernard Hogan-Howe’s statement that 75% of knife-related injuries for those under 25 years were not gang related while Coid et al., (2021) study involving 5005 British men, aged 18–34 years residing in the London Borough of Hackney and Glasgow East found that there was a correlation between knife-carrying rates and level of gang activity. Traynor, (2016) stated, “Participation in gangs was found in part to be an attempt to integrate with peers and a search for security in a hostile environment.” (p.248).

Young et al., (2014) explored both sides of the discussion citing some articles that uphold the argument that it's the need to belong to a family of some sort that drives a young person to adopt a gang as a surrogate family. Young et al., (2014) state that there is indeed some truth to this, especially where the individual comes from a 'dysfunctional family', where there is substance misuse and poor parental supervision. However, experiencing familial discord is considered to be just part of the gang membership narrative. The lived experiences of some young people can include low academic achievement, association with antisocial peers and/or confronting institutional racism and oppression can lead to gang affiliation and ultimately to participation in serious youth violence (Young et al., 2014). As with other suggested predisposing factors, the meanings that the young people might attach to these experiences appear not to have been explored from a phenomenological perspective. This means that to date we can only make some inferences as to what factors might have contributed to the engagement in knife-enabled crime.

1.7.5 Knife-enabled crime and relationships: family and peers

Due to the lack of a better word, the word 'delinquent' and its variation 'delinquency' are employed in this section of the research. This is not a word that is favoured as it is considered a destructive label that once assigned, might determine an individual's life's trajectory through their own behaviour and/or through the treatment that they receive from those around them (Jones, 2008).

The life trajectory from childhood to participation in knife-enabled crime has been documented in various literatures, with a majority focusing on parenting attributes and exposure to violence (Phillips et al., 2022; Mwangangi, 2019; Eades et al., 2007; Falkner, 2021; Jones, 2008; Cassidy, 2011). Some literature suggested that exposure to violence from early childhood that continued into adolescence predisposed a young person to similar aggressive behaviours (Phillips et al., 2022). Holligan, (2014), suggested that there are several family-related factors that could contribute to a young person's participation in knife-enabled crime which include non-conducive home environments where relationship with parents was largely conflictual, parental violence and where parents were mostly absent. According to Phillips et al. (2022) the quality of the relationship between a parent and child can act as a contributing factor towards knife crime just as much as the relationship between the parents could. Good enough relationships with parents have been found in some cases to act as protective factors (Phillips et al., 2022).

Where parental separation has resulted in a single-parent household, it is possible that the family might encounter a financial deficit which might entail less parental supervision as the remaining parent is left to take on sole responsibility in parenting the child or children (Phillips et al., 2022). Gliga, (2009), suggested that poor parental supervision could be a significant factor in juvenile offending, including involvement in knife-enabled crime. In terms of family structure and situations, another factor that has often been suggested as a possible causative factor for juvenile delinquency, including engagement in knife-enabled crime, has been single-

parent households and especially where the father is the absent parent (Mwangangi, 2019; Roberts, 2021). The availability of family social capital, where the child has access to adequate parental supervision, support and acknowledegment has been found to be a possible deterrent to, or protective factor from, juvenile 'delinquency (Hoffmann et al., 2020; Sethi et al., 2010).

Indeed, several research papers suggest that the degree of family cohesion and parenting styles can in some cases contribute to criminality (Mwangangi, 2019). Gliga, (2009) and Mwangangi, (2019) both suggested that where parenting style is authoritarian and parents are emotionally unavailable, hostile or neglectful, some children can be more prone to engage in antisocial behaviour: "The suppression of free expression and an absence of love encourage children to revolt against their parents, to run away from families and consequently to enter a life of crime" (Mwangangi, 2019, p. 58).

In terms of peer association, several studies found that associating with peers involved in criminal activity greatly increased an individual's involvement in knife-enabled crime (Holligan, 2014; Traynor, 2016; Haylock et al., 2020; Gliga, 2009). That a young person looks to spending increased amounts of time with peers is considered a typical developmental phase, however, Maimon and Browning, (2012) suggest that where family structure is lacking coupled with living in a disadvantaged community the likelihood of engagement in knife-enabled crime is likely to increase (Maimon and Browning, 2012).

1.7.6 Adverse childhood experiences, mental health, substance misuse and knife-enabled crime

In his work with teenagers engaged in serious violence, Garbarino stated, ‘One of the things I learned from listening to these “lost boys” is the central role of trauma in their lives” (In Greenwald, 2002, p.xix). The type of traumatic experiences that he was referring to ranged from violence inflicted on them as children, to living in neighbourhoods that simulate “war zones” (in Greenwald, 2002, p.xxii). Over the years, several studies have postulated that the more risk elements a child has been exposed to the more likely they are to participate in serious youth violence (Felitti et al.,1998; Phillips et al., 2022). Some of these factors included sexual and physical abuse, neglect, parental addiction and domestic abuse in the home (Mwangangi, 2019; Phillips et al., 2022; Sethi et al., 2010).

In their study of adverse childhood experiences (ACE), Felitti et al., (1998) defined household dysfunction as one where there was “exposure to alcohol or other substance, mental illness, violence against the mother or stepmother and parental divorce or separation”. (p.5). The presence of physical abuse, for instance, increased the risk of weapon carrying by four times compared to those who had not suffered abuse, while in the case of sexual abuse, the rate is six times higher for males and four times higher for females (Sethi et al., 2010). Haylock et al., (2020) carried out an extensive systematic review of literature, with the aim of determining both risk and protective factors that contribute to weapon-related crime among young people aged between 10 - 24 years in the UK. They found that in seven of the studies, there was

a possible correlation between adverse childhood experiences and weapon-related crime.

Amongst all the possible predictors of knife-enabled crime, mental health appears to be the least researched. Where it has been addressed it has been described as a possible “causal pathway from ACE to violent behaviour as those suffering from trauma are more likely to experience poor mental health’ (Haylock, 2020, p.11). Some of the suggested mental health issues experienced as a result of early trauma include suicidal ideation, depression, alcohol and drug addiction (Rosenberg, 2011; Browne et al., 2022). Indeed, the use of illicit drugs, as a means of coping with mental health difficulties appears to be a significant risk factor in the involvement of knife-enabled crime (Browne et al., 2022).

1.8 Knife enabled crime and the education system

Oldfield et al., (2015) argued that it is within the school environment that an individual’s social interaction with peers and teaching staff learns, or not, prosocial behaviour, attitudes and values. Where participation and involvement in the education system is limited, antisocial and offending behaviour can result (Mwangangi, 2019). A research project conducted by Ofsted (2019) that included 29 London schools, colleges and pupil referral units, found that students who were permanently excluded from school and sent to Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) were twice as likely to carry a knife as those who were not excluded. The same research determined that pupils who had been victims of knife-enabled crime were twice as

likely to engage in knife-enabled crime as carriers than those who had not been victims.

According to recent national statistics from the Timson Review of School Exclusions (2019), pupils of Black Caribbean and mixed White and Black heritage students are respectively 3 and 2.5 times more likely to be permanently excluded than their White counterparts. Tillson & Oxley, (2020) found that children from low-income families and who were eligible for free school meals were four times more likely to be excluded from school while those with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are more likely to be excluded than children without SEND. In the same paper, Tilson & Oxley, (2020) stated that:

> "In 2009-10, if you were a Black African-Caribbean boy with special needs and eligible for free school meals you were 168 times more likely to be permanently excluded from a state-funded school than a White girl without special needs from a middle-class family" (Tillson & Oxley, 2020, p.?).

Research has suggested that permanent exclusions can negatively affect pupil's learning outcomes as not only are they missing classroom learning time but are also likely to experience alienation and apathy toward their set academic goals which could lead to eventual dropping out of school (Valdebenito et al., 2019). MacDonald and Marsh, (2005) concluded that school disengagement was linked to 'street-corner society' as the young men in these studies risked becoming 'disconnected' from the

social capital needed to progress in society with a possible outcome of experiencing incarceration due to the participation in serious youth violence (McLoughlin, 2010; Clement et al., 2010; Tilson & Oxley, 2008). In one study, a propensity toward physical fighting and violence was found to be more pronounced in children and young people who had low academic achievement, poor school attendance and who disliked school (Sethi et al., 2010). Exploring the socio-emotional difficulties faced by excluded students, Brown (2007), stated that some excluded students reported the experience of being excluded as being let down by and distrustful of the very institution that they understood as being responsible for their education and academic success. However, according to Ashurst & Venn, (2014, p.158), the assumption that permanent school exclusions is a pathway to criminal activity completely neglects "the complexity of the issues which contribute to exclusion and youth crime." They reported that excluded children who went on to engage in criminal activity shared several factors, "class, poverty, chaotic families or no family at all..." (Ashurst & Venn, 2014, p. 160).

1.9 Mental health and Ethnicity

This section explores the issue of mental health and the Black community. As this research is focusing on the lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime, it would be remiss of the study not to explore the lived experience of mental health services and the Black population.

The fraught yet complex relationship between the Black community and mental health services has been explored in research over the past 60 years (Nazroo et al., 2019). Often discussed is the apparent prejudice and discrimination towards people of colour (Bansal et al., 2022; Keating & Robertson, 2004). People of colour are reported to be more likely to be diagnosed with severe mental disorders than the White British population (Nazroo et al., 2019). These findings are not reserved solely for the adult population. Ayodeji et al., (2021) found that there is an over-representation of children and young people in in-patient settings. This over-representation, is said to be caused by the pathways into child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), in that White children and young people (CYP) are more likely to be referred to CAMHS via primary care, such as GP services, while their Black counterparts are more likely to be referred by schools, social services and youth justice services (Ayodeji et al., 2021; Nazroo et al., 2019). This delay in referrals implies that Black CYP begin to access the services at a later stage and missing the opportunity for early intervention (Ayodeji et al., 2021)

In their study ‘Fear, black people and mental illness’, Keating & Robertson, (2004, p.440) found that there existed “circles of fear” in the interrelationship between Black people and MH services. This circle is fanned by the mistrust and fear of mental health services that exists in some Black communities and the staff in the services being in fearful of Black people and in particular young Black men. This view is echoed by Devonport et al., (2022) in their systematic review and meta-analysis of papers published in peer reviewed journals that focused on the experience of Black and dual-heritage populations’ experience within the MH services. The result of this

vicious circle is that those in the Black community receive poorer treatment that is "fueled by prejudice, misunderstandings, misconceptions and sometimes racism." (Keating & Robertson, 2004 p.1).

1.10 Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a legal academic framework that emerged in 1970s United States when a group of Black, Asian and Hispanic legal scholars sought to understand why there continued to exist significant institutional and systemic inequalities despite the work done by the Civil Rights Movement (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The focus of CRT is therefore racial matters and issues. It is important to acknowledge that employing CRT as a critically tool in this study create some tension which is located between CRT on the one hand and the phenomenological angle from which this research emanates. I do not have any preconceived hypothesis that I am looking to prove or disprove. I am letting the phenomenon present itself. While a CRT approach has an agenda which is racism. I reconcile that tension by saying that phenomena do not exist in a vacuum, and it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that we are talking about young Black boys who have been racialised and they have an experience that goes along with that. A phenomenological stance aide in the exploration of the phenomenon but I must reconcile it with the environment.

An important aspect of CRT is that looks to foreground the thoughts, narratives and experiences of people who are habitually ignored and undocumented by mainstream literature, institutions and policies (Moodley & Osazuwa, 2020; Charura & Lago,

2021). What has emerged from the search for literature on knife-enabled crime is the candid exclusion of the narratives, voices and participation of the enactors of knife-enabled crime who are mostly thought to be Black men. This form of exclusion is considered to depict cultural bias or indeed racial bias (Fernando, 2017). This omission is not one that exists solely in the study of knife-enabled crime, it is one that is said to be present and at the **"**core, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies are rooted in a legacy of racism, colonialism and white supremacy" (Corces-Zimmerman & Guida, 2019 p.95) which is concerning when race is believed to play a role in the shaping of an individual's thoughts, feelings and behaviour (De Witte, 2020).

> "Marginalised voices actually matter a great deal to all of us. They hold a hidden wealth of tacit and explicit knowledge. They are able to teach the profession of psychotherapy about the powerful combined experience of profound invalidation, alienation from society, stigmatisation and minimal self-compassion … the amplification of disenfranchised voices brings new understanding of the importance of compassion." (Lago, 2011).

As it stands, current predisposing factors some of which are mentioned in this study have been recounted from the perspective of what is considered the dominant group i.e. ethnically White authors, researchers and other professionals with almost none having engaged Black men as active participants in their research in a manner that would allow for their narrative, lived experience or stories to be heard. However, documenting the stories is only part of the journey towards inclusion for CRT asks

that the narratives, once obtained are used to make changes in the hegemonic narrative as well as towards social justice (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Lago, 2011). As knife-enabled crime continues to rise (ONS, 2022)**,** it is possible that a critical missing ingredient in changing and improving existing services is the understanding and knowledge of the contextual setting of the enactors' story and lived experiences. This lack in voices appears to have resulted in research within the field of counselling psychology to only pay "lip service" (Lago, 2011) to the discussion around the inclusion, exploration and examination of race and ethnicity.

An important principle of counselling psychology that supports CRT's framework for creating counter-narratives of marginalised people is the view that "human beings are complex and cannot be seen as separate from "familial, societal and cultural influences." (Swanepoel, 2013 p.3). To be able to attend to these different facets of the human being, it is possible that this can be achieved through the creation of spaces that allow for these narratives to emerge. Where change in knife-enabled crime is sought, it appears that the employment of CRT is vital in capturing the necessary narratives of the enactors lived experiences which hopefully bring in the counter-stories which will in turn being to or contribute towards a greater understanding and in depth knowledge of those whose voices and stories are silenced or ignored and oppressed by the dominant group leaving on the deprivation theories and stereotypes to endure.

> “Indeed, the lack of substantial research has ultimately resulted in a dearth of knowledge on many of the critical experiences of black and ethnic minority clients. At best, the consequences are misdiagnoses, poor treatment planning and high rates of premature termination. The lack of research and paucity of knowledge also creates a space where therapists tend to see all black and ethnic minority clients as homologous and offer them the same treatment irrespective of their gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and the other ‘Big 7’ multiple identities. in-depth therapeutic approaches with black and ethnic minority clients.” (Sutherland & Moodley, 2011)

It is possible that therapeutic work might indeed be negatively affected without the creation and hearing of the counter stories or counter-narratives. This is further discussed in the section that examines the relevance of this study to the profession of counselling psychology (section 1.12).

1.11 The lived experience of enactors of knife-enabled crime

The search for literature on the lived experience of enactors of knife-enabled crime found an absence of such research. Indeed, there appears to be a lack of qualitative and quantitative research on knife-enabled crime that has focused on enactors of knife-enabled crime where there has been a physical attack on another individual. Much of the existing literature comes from systematic reviews, government reports

grey literature and general studies of violence with an adjunct on knife-enabled crime (Bailey et al., 2020).

1.12 Relevance to counselling psychology

Counselling psychology is founded on humanistic values and principles in that it embraces a holistic perspective which means seeing people as individuals with their own subjective experiences each of which is valid and understanding that these experiences are informed by the person's contextual existence (Swanepoel, 2013). Counselling psychology maintains that a good enough therapeutic relationship is central to a successful outcome (Murphy, 2017). With these two facets of counselling psychology in mind it is seems right to raise the matter of importance of counter-narratives as well as that of working within a transcultural context.

McKenzie-Mavinga (2011) describes transcultural therapy as an approach where, "consideration is given to origins and belief systems that mirror and influence identity, personal experience, and the social impact of oppression, within the therapeutic relationship" (p.30, as cited in Charura & Lago, 2021 p.108). What is crucial to note is that to be able to work in this way means exploring the lived experience not solely that of the client but also include the lived experience both current and historical of their family and community (Nkansa-Dwamena, 2017).

> "Over the past two to three decades there has been the demand for practitioners to recognise the importance of ethnicity in patient practitioner

> interactions due to normalised migration and cross-cultural settling. Practitioners must therefore understand the complexities of ethnicity and culture, its role in the life of each patient and its potential impact on our understanding of and ability to treat patients effectively." (Hickling, 2012 p.1)

The above quote by Hickling (2012) raises two points. Firstly, as seen, current literature on knife-enabled crime is sparse and where it is available only a negligible number include the voices of the enactors. Should this exclusion persist, the question is raised as to how we get to understand and successfully work with and support enactors of knife-enabled crime without the attending to their contextual and environmental experiences? Where current therapeutic approaches are based on Eurocentric models[3] it is possible that that current mental health services will remain inaccessible to those groups or communities where the Eurocentric ways of life are extrinsic and unfamiliar to their own culture (D'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1989/2004; Hickling, 2012; Charura & Paul, 2014)). The need for practitioners to become culturally competent is today encouraged if not demanded (Hickling, 2012; West-Olatunji et al, 2017; Charura & Lago, 2021). Lee (2021) describes cross-cultural competencies as "a set of attitudes and behaviours indicative of the ability to establish, maintain and successfully conclude a counselling relationship with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds" (p.54).

[3] Models or therapeutic approaches which are influenced by European/western ideas, concepts and values (Charura & Paul, 2014)

The issue of accessibility and equality of is linked to the matter of social justice just as social justice is tied linked to mental health (Speight & Vera, 2008). The concept of social justice is in alignment with the principles of counselling psychology in terms ensuring that each individual person's presentation is considered within their own environmental existence and that this way of working is not only reflected within session work but should be present from assessment, within outreach work as well as when advocacy is practiced and required. Counselling psychologists committed to employing a transcultural approach need to subscribe to social justice as the foundational setting from which they approach their therapeutic work (Speight & Vera, 2008).

It is hoped this study will contribute to the world of counselling psychology through the enhancement of knowledge and understanding of the lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime. Indeed, despite the increase in multiculturalism and diversity in the UK, there continues to be a deficit in research that focuses on the intersectionality of race, culture and ethnicity in the field of psychotherapy (Charura & Lago, 2021).

1.13 Summary and Rationale

This chapter began by exploring the current context of knife-enabled crime as well as the prevalence and racialisation of the phenomenon. A review of the existing literature on knife-enabled crime ensued revealing a gap in the existing literature and research. This gap exists in the form of available literature that include the direct input of enactors of knife-enabled crime. An examination of the prevalence of knife-

enabled crime was explored with a specific focus on the London area. Factors believed to contribute to knife-enabled crime were presented as was the experience of people of colour in the mental health services and education system. CRT and transcultural theory were included as a means of demonstrating the importance of considering the effect of racism in current research and literature but also as a way of highlighting the importance of thinking and working transculturally. Finally, the relevance of this study to the field of counselling psychology was presented with significance of transcultural therapeutic practices presented.

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime. As previously mentioned, there exists a dearth in literature that explores this phenomenon and where it does exist, the voice of the enactors is lacking which might prevent a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Where published works exist, they have focused on the extrinsic causative factors at the expense of the internal world and constructed realities held by the enactors that may have been influenced by significant experiences in their lives. This research aims to present a counter-narrative with the assistance of the enactors to the existing hegemonic discourse. The next chapter looks at the research method employed in this study.

Chapter two

Methodology

The chapter begins by addressing the research aims before presenting the epistemological stance adopted in the study. The concepts of phenomenology and the chosen research method of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis are then examined. To conclude, the ethical issues will be explored followed by examination of the researcher reflexivity both methodological as well as personal. Finally, the chapter will introduce the concepts involved in the examination of validity and trustworthiness which are both measurement tools employed in qualitative research.

2.1 Research aims

The current research was conducted with the aim of gaining new insights into and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime. The research method employed was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a qualitative research method that looks to obtain the participants narratives of their lived experience.

2.2 Epistemological Considerations

According to Ponterotto (2005), the knowledge that is sought in a research project is what determines the eventual design of the project. This knowledge is found in the space between the participant, or the “knower” and the researcher or the “would-be knower” and it is this space that the theory of epistemology is concerned with (Ponterotto, 2005). Epistemology is a branch of philosophy that relates to the theory of knowledge; what qualifies as knowledge, sources of knowledge and the limits of knowledge (Given, 2008; DeRose, 2005). There exist several epistemological positions which might be regarded as appearing on a spectrum ranging from positivism to constructionism/interpretivism. Among some of the beliefs that the positivist epistemological position holds are that context is unimportant and it is possible to have a theory that can be generalised across settings (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). They also adhere to the belief that there exists one identifiable truth that can sought, observed and quantified (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Tuli, 2010; Ponterotto, 2005; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Positivists are interested in explaining a given occurrence by employing a scientific approach that combines systematic and practical methods of inquiry that are likely to result in a prediction of cause and effect (Tuli, 2010; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Here, the assumption is that we gain knowledge via the accumulation of facts, with each new piece of information being stored in its rightful place and that behaviour is caused by certain determinants such as specific experiences and interactions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Ponterotto, 2005).

While the positivists adhere to this dualist and objectivist outlook, constructivist theorists, maintain that there exist multiple ways of seeing the world and that these views are subjective and constructed through social interaction (Kivunja & Kuyini,

2017). For the epistemic constructivist therefore, the principal aim of their research is to understand as opposed to explain. It is through social interaction that we gain the knowledge that we hold about a particular experience and this knowledge, this reality that we create for ourselves, will differ from person to person (Schwandt, 1994 as cited in Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129)**.** The constructivist epistemological position, unlike with the positivist, context is critical and needs to be considered in the pursuance of knowledge (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Finally, as Kivunja & Kuyini (2017) stated, "This approach makes every effort to 'get into the head of the subjects being studied so to speak, and to understand and interpret what the subject is thinking or the meaning s/he [sic] is making of the context." (kivunja & Kuyini, 2017 p.33). It is the constructivist epistemological position that was employed in this research as it sought to understand the interpretations and meanings the participants attached to significant moments in their lives. Opting to take the constructivist epistemological position meant that the most logical research method to employ was Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis which is founded on the concept of phenomenology.

A second philosophical positioning that a researcher can adopt is ontology which refers to the nature of reality and being (Ponterotto, 2005). Ontology exists on spectrum spanning from realism to relativist with critical realism demarcating a centre point. An important question that orientates a researcher's ontological positioning is whether reality is inherently objective or subjective? The realist response would be that there exists one reality or one truth that is measurable (Braun & Clarke, 2013) while for the relativist there exists several constructed realities or truths which are subjective and influenced by an individual's experiences

and social interactions (Braun & Clarke, 2013, Ponterotto, 2005; Pessu, 2019). For the critical realist, the world exists regardless of our awareness of it (Pilgrim, 2019).

The ontological stance that I adopted for this study is relativist. This ontological position is congruent with my epistemological positioning of constructivist as well as in line with my professional identity as a counselling psychology on the grounds that every being is influenced by their environment (Swanepoel, 2013). This position is particularly pertinent to this study in view of its racial aspect and the experiences that Black people, including myself, experience in an environment where we are not only the minority but where the racism is normal and not aberrant" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013 p.40). However, important to note that where Black people may experience racism in their everyday lives, this does not preclude the idiosyncratic nature of those experiences and hence the existence of several or many realities and truths in line with the relativist nature of the adopted ontology and epistemological positioning.

2.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method. It emerged as a stand-alone research method in the mid-1990s that was based on the premise that our behaviour is determined by the meanings we attach to significant life experiences (Shinebourne, 2011; Smith et al., 2009). IPA's framework is based

on three theoretical underpinnings: hermeneutics, phenomenology and idiography (Shinebourne, 2011). This research project is idiographic, in that it is concerned with the and subjective and contextualised lived experiences of each research participant as opposed to seeking to assert broad generalisations on the essence of the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

Phenomenology is a research method whose principal focus is the study of human experience “as it occurs and on its own terms, rather than according to predefined theoretical categories” (Smith & Nizza, 2022, p.7). There exists several research methods and techniques that fall under the term phenomenology (Finlay, 2009). Two of those methods will be explored in this section, namely descriptive and interpretative phenomenological analysis. Descriptive phenomenology as it is the forerunner of interpretative phenomenology which in turn is the methodology employed in this research project.

Descriptive phenomenology is associated with Edmund Husserl who is often cited as the founder of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2022). It considers human consciousness as an object that can be studied in a systematic and scientific manner (Lopez & Willis, 2004). It maintains that to gain a true understanding of one’s perception of an event or experience, the researcher needs to bracket any presuppositions held. Givens (2008) describes bracketing as, “a scientific process where a researcher suspends or holds in abeyance his or her presuppositions, biases, assumptions, theories, or previous experiences to see and describe the essence of a specific phenomenon.” (p.63).

Heidegger, a former student of Husserl, and founder of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) made a significant contribution to Husserl's phenomenology by suggesting that it was not entirely possible to 'bracket' one's thoughts, feelings, assumptions or beliefs (Smith et al., 2009). The knowledge we hold is, in his view, is constructed because of our participation and interactions with others in our environment, therefore context is central to Heidegger's understanding of what it means to be human. He argued that to achieve an in-depth understanding of our lived experiences we need to move beyond the descriptive phenomenology and employ interpretative techniques because, as humans, we tend to attach meanings to our interactional experiences. To this extent, far from being passive participants in life's trajectory, people are seen as active agents in the creation and construction of their being (Shinebourne, 2011).

According to McConnell-Henry et al., (2009), Heidegger rejected the idea of bracketing as in his view it was the same foreknowledge and assumptions we held about a phenomenon which Husserl was asking to be bracketed, that strengthened and bolstered interpretation. This process of interpretation is known as hermeneutics which is the second theoretical underpinning of IPA research methodology and is what differentiates Husserl's descriptive phenomenology from Heidegger's interpretative phenomenology. Indeed, in Heidegger's phenomenology, hermeneutics does not rest solely on the participant's shoulders. In listening to and analysing the participants' narrative of their lived experience, the researcher also interprets the participants own interpretation of their experience a process which is

termed double hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). The researcher therefore attempts to experience the world of the participant through interpretation and meaning making (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, Smith & Osborn, 2015). In idiography, which is the third theoretical orientation in IPA research method, the focus is on the detailed analysis of individual cases after which universal observations can be made about groups (Smith & Osborn, 2015; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

2.4 Rationale for the chosen methodology

IPA was chosen for its congruency with the chosen epistemological position of constructivism. According to Ponterotto (2005), it is a researcher's epistemological position that determines the direction in which the research will go; what knowledge is the researcher looking to obtain, how are they going to gather this information and what will count as relevant data? Before opting to employ IPA as the research method, Narrative Analysis and Thematic Analysis were considered as they bear common characteristics with IPA.

2.4.1 Narrative Analysis (NA)

Narrative Analysis, like IPA is a qualitative research method whose primary data comes from the stories that people tell about themselves (Smith et al., 2022). According to Mattingly and Garro (2001, p.1), "narrative mediates between an inner

world of thought-feeling and an outer world of observable actions and states of affairs."

There exist fundamental similarities between NA and IPA. Both methodologies, for instance, are grounded in hermeneutics and focus on the participant's meaning making of events or moment in their lived experience (Wertz & Al, 2011). In addition, both methods maintain the significance of context including that of the researcher who is seen as capable of influencing the research being undertaken (Wertz & Al, 2011). Similar to IPA, data employed in NA can be varied. These can come in the form of interviews, diaries and audio as well as visual materials (Taylor et al., 2015). In terms of epistemic position, the elected for this research was constructivism, a position that is also compatible with NA. Constructivism in NA focuses on people's lives and "how a sense of social order is created through talk and interaction." (Esin, 2011).

Despite the similarities, the preference for IPA lies in the focus of the study. IPA looks at understanding and exploring the details of how a participant makes sense of or interprets their experience of a particular phenomenon. NA on the other hand, focuses on the story structure, that is, any interpretation made is done so by analysing how the participant conveys their narrative (Smith et al., 2022). "Narrative analysis takes as its object of investigation the story itself." (Kohler Riessman, 1993, p.1).

2.4.2 Thematic Analysis

Similar to IPA and NA, thematic analysis (TA) is a qualitative research method that collects data from various sources including semi-structured interviews (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Davies & Hughes, 2014). Unlike IPA, thematic analysis does not prescribe to particular epistemological or ontological frameworks nor does it uphold specific methods of data collection. “it’s really ‘just a method’ (Braun & Clarke, 2013 p.177). An often-mentioned strength of TA is its flexibility in that it is a research method that can be used to research almost any type of question (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Nowell et al., 2017). It is a useful method for foregrounding the participants similarities and differences as well as yielding new and unpredicted findings (Nowell et al., 2017).

Similar to IPA, TA can employ narratives of participants’ lived experiences as the main source of research data with the aim of understanding their thoughts and emotions (Clarke & Braun, 2016). However, unlike TA, IPA’s principal aim is not to identify patterns within and across the data but to explore the subjective lived experiences of the participants. It is an entirely inductive process whereas TA can be both inductive and deductive (Braun & Clarke, 2020). This difference is one of the motivations to opt for IPA as opposed to TA. An Important aspect in this research was to attain as much information from the participants and attending to this without preexisting ideas and presumptions. Another justification the election of IPA as opposed to TA was the significance of hearing and focusing on the idiographic and idiosyncratic voices of the participants. TA tends to focus on the identification of

patterns which could result in the generalisation of people's experiences and loss of the participants' singular and unique voices and narratives (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

2.5 Participants

2.5.1 Sample

Four enactors of knife-enabled crime aged between 29 to 50+ were interviewed for this research. In accordance with the participant criteria, they all self-identified as Black men who resided in London at the time of their engagement with knife-enabled crime. In accordance with the IPA research method, the sample selected is small, due to the subjective and idiographic nature of the study. Participants were selected purposively to fit in with the homogenous criteria required in IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

With regards to recruitment, the search began by seeking organisations that worked with men who had or were involved in knife-enabled crime. Contact was made with the managers or the lead of the service via email which contained information about the research, who was conducting it and the purpose of it (appendix 3). Responses were followed by a phone call that allowed the person in charge to make further enquiries about the research. Once a participant came forward, an introductory meeting was set through the organisation. Subsequent to the meeting, a consent form (appendix 5) and Participant Information Sheet (PIS – appendix 4) were sent

and an interview date set. All participants were contacted through organisations as opposed to through the Criminal Justice System (CJS), as this meant that they had potentially served their time and were now free to speak about their lived experience without fear of possible negative repercussions. This meant that their stories would be less likely to be compromised than those people affiliated with the CJS. The precise last use of the knife by the participants is unclear however it appears to range between 9 years ago to over two decades.

Table 2: Research Participants

Name of participant	Ethnicity (self-identified)	Age first enacted the knife-enabled crime	Age at time of research
RB	Black	12	29
FG	Dual heritage	32	50+
SH	Black	13	25 - 30
OA	Black African	Early twenties	35+

2.5.2 The interview

Before the interview began, the participant was thanked for his assistance and for signing the consent form. They were asked if they had any additional questions

regarding the interview process and or the consent form. The participants were reminded that they would receive a debrief letter (appendix 8) post interview which would contain details of people and organisations, they can contact should they feel distressed. In addition, they were reminded that they can terminate or pause the interview at any time should they feel the need to. Three participants asked not to be anonymised, a wish that was respected as per the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021). Once the interviews were terminated, the participants were asked how they were within themselves and were reminded them that should they feel distressed, they could use the contacts on the debrief letter as support. The debrief letter was sent as agreed along with a follow-up email, thanking the participant for their assistance in this research. It is important to note that by the time the interviews took place, there had been at least two to three meetings occur between the researcher and each participant individually where each party had the opportunity to not only ask question but also to get to know the other person. These meetings assisted the debrief sessions post-interviews in that not only were the two parties not complete strangers but the participants were already quite familiar with the process that the interview would take as well as what was available post interview.

2.5.3 Materials and interviews

Conducting an IPA study requires that the researcher employ semi-structured one-to-one interviews to gather data from the participants (Willig, 2013). The questions were not only open-ended but also structured in a manner that allowed the

researcher to enter the world of the participant and enable him to reflect on the meanings that they attached to significant moments in their lives around the phenomenon being studied (Willig, 2013). During the interview, (schedule appendix 7) prompts were included only where necessary, such as for clarification or to gather more detailed information from the participant (Smith et al., 2009). According to Braun & Clarke (2013**),** semi-structured interviews are the most frequently used form of data collection in qualitative research. Semi-structured questions with an individual provides the researcher with an arena in which they can further explore the participant's responses using additional questions or prompts while remaining focused on the phenomenon under investigation **(**Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

The interviews lasted between 26 minutes to 90 minutes and were held and recorded on Microsoft Teams. Although virtual interviews were regarded as sub-standard compared to face-to-face interviews, they are today, along with telephone and email interviews considered to be stand-alone types of interviews with their own advantages and disadvantages (Braun & Clarke, 2013). According to Janghorban et al., (2014), conducting interviews over Skype for instance, provides both researcher and participants an opportunity to meet where time and location would usually create challenges. The recordings obtained from my interviews were stored in my password protected University OneDrive Microsoft account. Transcripts of all recordings were then manually produced. A full interview schedule can be found in Appendix 7.

2.6 Procedure

Smith et al.’s (1995) step-by-step transcript analysis was employed in the examination of each participant's interview script. The transcript analysis was carried one transcript at a time and did not begin to process or analyse another, until each transcript had been completed.

In the first step, time was spent reading and re-reading a transcript several times over, first while simultaneously reading the transcript then solely reading them individually without the audio. The aim of this exercise was to ensure that all had been done to immerse self in the text and in the world of the participant.

The next stage was the noting stage where, while reading the transcript, notes were made on the right-hand side of the text (appendix 11), any statements or comments that were important in terms of semantics and language use. These comments were exploratory and allowed for a deeper understanding of each participants understanding their lived experiences.

Stage three saw the appearance of experiential statements which were noted on the left-hand side of the text (appendix 11). The aim here was to search for ways in which the initial notes interrelate or connect to form a particular theme resulting in emergent themes (Smith et al., 1995). Some of the initial notes formed clear patterns with little need to refer to the transcript itself, while at other times, there was need to re-visit the transcript in search of an example statement or remark from the participant that would correlate with the new theme. It was at this step that the

hermeneutical process, and in particular double hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009), was most evident, as the engagement with the text and search for emergent themes required for interpretations of the participants own interpretations of their experiences to be made of the significant moments in their lives.

The fourth stage of the transcript analysis was in the creation of the Personal Experiential Themes (PETs). In this process, the emergent themes were parcelled together into groups that consisted of themes that seemed to complement each other. This process began by randomly listing each of the emergent themes on separate post-it notes then spreading them on a wall in no particular order. The themes that seemed to cohere were then pooled together to create a master theme or a Personal Experiential Theme (PET). In step five the transcript was revisited so as to locate example statements or phrases that would represent the PETs clearly noting their location with the transcript (appendix 12).

Once having completed the above stages with the first transcript, the same process was repeated with each of the remaining transcripts. This process allowed for bracketing to occur (Smith et al., 1995) a process that is fundamental to IPA as it allows for new themes to emerge. In the final stage, PETs from the transcripts, were listed on a new page and surveyed in search of connections (appendix 14). This exercise resulted in the relabelling of some themes, the merging of others and the discarding of others. The remaining themes produced the Group Experiential Themes (GETs), which were then tabulated, (see appendix 13 for example of father GET) and employed to provide the data that was used in the write up of the

subsequent chapter (Smith et al., 2009).

2.7 Reflexivity

The aim of IPA is to gain an in-depth understanding into the lived experience and sense-making of the research participants who are impacted by a particular phenomenon (Goldspink & Engward, 2018). This process of interpretation and sense-making by the participant is replicated by the researcher as they too, aim to interpret and make sense of the data provided by the participant (Goldspink & Engward, 2018). As these processes of interpretation and sense-making are crucial components of IPA, it is then essential that the researcher attends to the data provided having reflected and acknowledged any underlying presuppositions, biases and opinions that are likely to impact the analytical process (Smith & Nizza, 2022). This process of reflexivity is defined by Goldspink & Engward, (2018) as “an attitude, a deliberate mechanism to bring forward a thoughtful, considered, and conscious attentiveness of researchers in relation to their presence in research practice.” (p.3). The aim of reflexivity and gaining this awareness is not to reject them but to employ them so as to achieve a “more intense insight...and shape our understandings” (Finlay, 2002, p.89).

Practicing reflexivity has been a significant part of my training as counselling psychologist. For the counselling psychologist researcher, reflexivity is closely linked to the notion of subjectivity in that our perspectives are influenced by various factors including context, values and beliefs (Kasket, 2011). Indeed, subjectivity is a central

tenet of counselling psychology. As Swanepoel puts it, “Everyone has their own individual subjective experience of the world and others in it.” (Swanepoel, 2013, p.3). Understanding this link between reflexivity and subjectivity greatly influenced how I conducted my research and how I viewed my participants. I found that I was more aware of my prior knowledge, views and feelings around knife-enabled crime and that I was able to keep these in abeyance and intentionally focus on each my participants as separate individuals and with an open mind. I believe that conducting my research with reflexivity brought me in line with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography which allowed me to obtain the rich and informative interviews and knowledge that I did.

In this section of the research project, I will focus on two aspects of my reflexive journey. I will begin by speaking on methodological reflexivity before addressing my personal experience of the interview process.

2.7.1 Methodological reflexivity

During my search for literature on knife-enabled crime, I was exposed to various forms of coverage including academic papers and white paper reports that repeatedly stated and described the likely determinants of knife-enabled crime. This information inevitably resulted in the creation of part of my knowledge of knife-enabled crime prior to conducting the interviews with the participants. I was also aware that some of this information focused on young Black boys and men in the London area which often depicted them in an unbalanced light. I understood that as

part of my qualitative research process, I needed to be aware of my existing thoughts, biases and assumptions about the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime as well as the spotlighted enactors.

My reflexivity took two main forms. Firstly, I discussed my views and opinions with my supervisor, one academic Gary Younge, Andrez Harriot of The Liminality Group and Ciaran Thapar, author of Cut Short: Youth violence, loss and hope in the city (2021). Secondly, from the start of the training, we were encouraged to keep a reflective journal as it would contribute to the quality and validity of this research (Vicary et al., 2016). Reflecting on my entries from year one to present day, I find moments when my opinions, assumptions and interpretations changed or were challenged. Indeed, keeping this reflexive journal contributed significantly to my ability to remain open, curious and present during the participant interviews. I believe it was possible to achieve this because I was not only able to remain reflective during the interviews and therefore bracket any assumptions that would emerge but also because I was more aware and informed of my thoughts, beliefs and feelings towards knife-enabled crime.

2.7.2 Personal reflexivity

Understanding the lived experience of individuals involved in serious violence has always been a subject I have been interested in. Bessel van der Kolk (2014) sums it up well when he asks, “How do you turn a new-born baby with all its promise and

infinite capacities into a thirty-year-old homeless drunk?" I wanted to understand what would cause a child to grow into an adult or young person who would willingly cause grievous bodily harm to another and sometimes repeatedly so. Gaining a place on the doctoral program provided me with such an opportunity. I was now able to explore a phenomenon that was current, that was affecting a community that resembled my own and that had, as far as I am aware, not included the voices of those directly involved in it.

The doctorate training introduced several new processes that I found to be helpful in my position as a qualitative researcher. Firstly, as previously mentioned, the ability to reflect on my views, feelings and thoughts made me a more open and curious researcher. I was able to attend the interviews with as clean a slate as possible which allowed me to glean new insights and information from the participants. Secondly, although sometimes challenging, I was able to maintain my position as researcher and not venture into my role as psychologist. Closely related to the role of a counselling psychologist, is the ability to be able to attend to both the verbal and non-verbal communication as one would in a therapeutic setting. Achieving this meant that I was able to follow, at times, the participant's narrative, with appropriate cues and questions which in turn provided me with additional information.

I believe that my identity as a Black woman in her fifties interviewing men of the same ethnicity with two of whom were old enough to be my sons, may have impacted the research at some level. I say this because some participant during the interview, either checked if I understood certain terminology such as "having beef" or

“being a G” or they asked for permission to swear or excused themselves if they did. This may not have affected the narrative, but I wonder if another person, possibly who looked like them and/or had been through a similar experience might get different data.

2.8 Ethical considerations

The British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021) and The University of East London Code of Practice for Research Ethics (UEL, 2020) provide guidelines on the principles that govern research ethics. There are four principles that govern the BPS code of Human and Research Ethics namely, Respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups and communities, scientific integrity, social responsibility and maximising benefit and minimising harm. The first of these principles refers to the position of the researcher as ensuring that the autonomy and privacy of the participants is assured, namely, to obtain valid consent, retain confidentiality anonymity and fair treatment. In this research, each participant was provided with a consent form after the initial meeting and prior to the interview taking place. The consent form (Appendix 5) comprised of statements relating to confidentiality and anonymity among others. Participants were then asked to return the signed consent form via email. Three of the participants asked that they not be anonymised as talking about their involvement in knife-enabled crime to other organisations including schools and charities, was now their main source of living. These three participants had appeared on main news channels and in other forms of the media including newspapers such as The Independent and

The Guardian. According to The British Psychological Society (2021, p.7) principle 2.1, “Researchers will respect the privacy of individuals, and will normally ensure that individuals are not personally identifiable unless an individual so wishes, and then only with clear, unambiguous informed consent. Where a participant wishes to have their voice heard and their identity linked with this, researchers will endeavour to respect such a wish.” With this in mind, the three consent forms were amended by a strikethrough on any statements that confirmed anonymity (Appendix 6)**.** The fourth participant signed the original consent form with confidentiality, anonymity and privacy affirmed.

The BPS research guidelines also address the matter of risk that may impact participants in various types of research methods (BPS, 2021). There are two clauses here that are pertinent to this research; research that involves “potentially sensitive topics” which in this case the participants’ previous involvement in the legal justice system, their experience of violence as well as their ethnic status and research involving vulnerable groups which in this case, those that have “prior experience of psychological of physical harm or adversity in its broadest sense.” (BPS, 2021, p.9). Both these issues were addressed in the consent form (appendix 5) as well as in the debrief letter (appendix 8). With regards to the latter, ethical considerations require researchers “to protect their participants from any harm or loss’ (Willig, 2013 p.29) and this was the intention of the debrief letter, to ensure, as far as is possible, that the participant is supported post-interview. In this case, the letter provided the participant with information on what to do should they find themselves adversely affected by their involvement in the interview. It contained

telephone numbers of organisations to contact as well as my university email address and that of my Director of Studies.

Brinkman and Kvale (2017) go beyond basic ethical guidelines and suggest that it is not only the participants that need to be tended to and protected, the researchers themselves can also be triggered by the process and content of the interview. This impact on the part of the researcher can be observed from the start of the research process and can remain with the researcher beyond completion until the dissemination of the findings (Willig, 2013). Brinkman and Kvale (2017, as cited in Willig, 2013) believe that this interaction between participant and researcher plays a role in enhancing our understanding of our co-existence as humans. Indeed, ethical considerations are not only intrinsic to qualitative research methods, but they are also fundamental to constructivist epistemological positioning (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) which highlights the interaction between researcher and participant as fundamentally important to the research process itself.

2.9 Validity and quality of Qualitative Research

In the following sections, I will be presenting Yardley (2008) framework for the evaluation of the validity and quality of qualitative research projects. The framework is composed of four principles which were observed and employed throughout this research to ensure the maintenance of good quality and validity throughout the study. As a qualitative research method, the four principles are likely to apply. The

four principles are; sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, coherence and transparency and impact and importance.

2.9.1 Sensitivity to context

To practice sensitivity to context, Yardley (2008) put forward areas the researcher needs to consider and apply when conducting a qualitative research study namely, relevant theoretical and empirical literature, socio-cultural setting, participants' perspective, ethical issues and empirical data. In relation to the theoretical and empirical literature available on knife-enabled crime, I not only reviewed a wide range of literature including academic and grey literature, documentaries and past and present newspaper articles but I also arranged meetings with individuals at the heart of this phenomenon including Gary Younge of the Guardian's Beyond the Blade Project (The Guardian, 2018), Ciaran Thapar author of Cut Short; youth violence, loss and hope in the city (Thapar, 2021) and Andrez Harriot of The Liminality Group who works closely young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. I was aware that, before embarking on this research project, most of the information I held on knife-enabled crime originated primarily from the media. I did not have any personal experience of knife-enabled crime. All I had was an interest in exploring and understanding the lived experiences of the enactors and I wished to be as open and as aware as possible of my own assumptions and biases which could impact my interviews, analysis and interpretation of the participants narratives and perspectives. In terms of the terms of the socio-cultural, ethical and data issues. Due to the current COVID-19 restrictions, all interviews were conducted online and I was

aware that this unusual setting might not suit all potential participants. I ensured that I let them know in writing and verbally how their data and interviews will be stored prior to the interviews.

2.9.2 Commitment and rigour

Closely linked to sensitivity to data is the analytical treatment of the data collected. Yardley (2008) suggested that for commitment and rigour to be put into practice, the researcher needs to engage with the data in an intentional, skilful and competent manner both during the data collection and in the analysis of the data. Commitment and rigour demand that the researcher thoroughly considers each step of the process, from the thorough description of the phenomenon to be studies, to the selection of the sample and the detailed analysis of the data collected. The research method adopted for this study was IPA whose analytical procedure focuses on the in-depth analysis of each participant's interview transcript. In this study, each participant's narrative was thoroughly analysed and to in line with IPA's idiographic nature, this was done independently of the other participants' accounts. The phenomenon under investigation was the lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime in the London area. To this end, to maintain commitment and rigour, the sample was carefully selected (Yardley, 2008).

2.9.3 Coherence and Transparency

Yardley (2008, p.248) described coherency of a study as "the extent to which it makes sense as a constituent whole." To achieve this, the research methods used

and the theoretical background need to be compatible. Transparency refers to the level at which the study can demonstrate, describe and justify the steps taken in the research process (Yardley, 2008). To maintain coherence and transparency in this study, an attempt to ensure clarity and coherence were respected was made, in that the aims, method employed, theoretical approach and interpretation of data were compatible with one another. In terms of transparency, I described the various sections of the study and was particularly descriptive in the methodology section where the research process was carefully detailed and justifications and rationales provided for the research method adopted as well as the choice of epistemological position.

2.9.4 Impact and importance

The fourth and final principle in Yardley (2008) framework for the evaluation of the validity and quality of qualitative research projects is impact and importance. It is here that the potential impact of the study is evaluated. The impact and importance of a study could be theoretical or practical in that the findings or outcome are immediately useful to practitioners, the community or policy makers. Yardley (2008, p.250) states, “Ultimately, the key reason for taking all the steps suggested above to show that you research is valid is to that it can have an impact.” The aim of this research project was to enhance the understanding of the lived experience of Black men in the London area engaged in knife-enabled crime with the intention of advancing existing knowledge about this phenomenon.

2.10 Trustworthiness in Qualitative Research

In addition to Yardley's framework, there exists Lincoln & Guba's (1985) measure for the level of trustworthiness in qualitative research. Connelly, (2016) describes trustworthiness as "the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study" (p.1). In their book, *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, Guba and Lincoln (1989) put forward the argument that the current trustworthiness criteria such as reliability and internal and external validity are incongruous with the essence and standards of qualitative research (Porter, 2007). According to Guba and Lincoln (1989), internal and external validity are more appropriate for research conducted within the positivist paradigm while reliability is often a prerequisite for validity. As with Yardley's framework, Lincoln & Guba's (1985) framework outlined four measurement criteria; credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

Transferability refers to the extent to which research findings can be applicable in other contexts and settings (Connelly, 2016). However, achievement of this criteria can only be measured on a case-by-case basis as qualitative research can involve primarily the examination of idiosyncratic experiences and subjective meaning making (Tobin & Begley, 2004). Credibility is considered to be the most important criterion of the four and is said to correspond to internal validity in quantitative research methods (Morrow, 2005; Connelly, 2016). It addresses the possible compatibility between the participant's perspective and the researcher's presentation of them (Nowell et al., 2017 p.3). This could be done in various ways including prolonged engagement with participants, persistent observation and the use of peer

debriefing as a means of conducting an external check on the research process. In the case of dependability, the researchers are required to ensure that the process that they engage in is “logical, traceable, and clearly documented” (Nowell et al., 2017 p.3) and one way that dependability is measured or demonstrated is through audit trail (Koch, 1994), where there is a clear presentation of justifications made regarding theoretical and methodological decisions made. Confirmability is where the researcher can demonstrate that their findings and interpretations emanate from the data. Confirmability is reached when all three elements of the trustworthiness criteria are achieved i.e., credibility, transferability and dependability (Guba and Lincoln,1989).

Chapter Three

Analysis

3.1 Overview

This chapter presents four Group Experiential Themes (GETs) derived from interpretative phenomenological analysis conducted on the participant interview transcripts. The GETs aim to present an understanding of the participants’ lived experiences, beginning from early childhood to the time that this study was conducted.

3.2 Introduction to the Themes

The first GET, ‘Starting the journey into knife-enabled crime’ begins by describing in-depth the participants’ experiences within the home with a focus on the impact that their relationship with their fathers on them, and this includes fathers who were both present and absent. It then proceeds to explore the coping mechanisms that they employed during their early years to cope with their challenging home experiences. The GET also examines the meanings they attached to significant experiences and what effect this may have had on their approach to life beyond the home. The second GET, ‘Engaging in knife-enabled crime' looks at the participants’ progression from knife-carrying to the eventual use of the knife to physically harm another person. The third GET speaks to their journeys into a life of desistance and relays their current reflections on their past actions. The fourth and final GET addresses two aspects of the research question, race and masculinity, from the participants’ perspectives.

The table below outlines the emergent themes from the participants’ narratives.

Table: 3 Overview of Themes

Starting the journey into knife-enabled crime	**Engaging in knife-enabled crime: "It's like in a war"**	**Life after using the knife: "I wanted change"**	**Knife-enabled crime: Blackness and Maleness**
Home not so sweet home: where the life ruptures begin Absent fathers lost sons Finding a way out of the adversity found in the – out of the frying pan and into the fire	Carrying the knife: The shield, the armour Why I used the knife: "This is what I've got to do to survive"	Arriving at life's crossroads: "I wanted change" Engagement in knife-enabled crime: Understanding actions today	Race in the picture: "You Black this, you Black that!" Learning masculinity: Lesson in living

An approach to life informed by adverse family experiences			

The table below depicts the meanings of the symbols the reader will encounter in the participant interview extracts used below.

Table 4: Key for excerpts

Text … Text	Material omitted between participants' speeches
...text	Material omitted before cited extract
Text...text	Material omitted mid-speech

3.3 Group experiential theme 1 - Starting the journey into knife-enabled crime

This first Group Experiential Theme (GET) looks at the participants' childhood experiences and how these may have contributed to their eventual participation in knife-enabled crime. Although all four participants' spoke of challenging childhood experiences, the nature and occurrences of these differed from participant to participant.

There are four subthemes in this first GET. The first subtheme is ‘Home not so sweet home: Breakdown, maltreatment and dysfunction’. The second ‘Unavailable, unpredictable and violent fathers’ develops from the first subtheme and focuses mainly on the participants’ experiences with their fathers. Subtheme three, ‘Finding a way out of the adversity found in the home’ addresses the various ways that the participants coped with the difficult circumstances found within their homes. The final subtheme, ‘An approach to life informed by adverse family experiences’ funnels even further into the participants’ childhood experiences and considers how the intrafamilial violence, struggles and adversities may have constructed the participants’ view of and interaction with the world.

3.3.1 Subtheme 1a: Home not so sweet home: where the life ruptures begin

Home is the place where children learn who they are, where they begin to construct not only their identity but also get to create their relationship template which they will employ throughout their lives. Home determines how we interact with the world and those in it, and how we get to know who we are. Home is (or should be) a place where a child is surrounded by adults who are present, caring and containing. This is where a child feels safe to declare how they feel and what they want without fear of rejection or reprimand. A place that allows them to push boundaries safely and as demanded by their developmental stage. In terms of lifespan development, home is the first place a child finds themselves and the place where they feel they can return to if or when things fall apart.

This subtheme explores the lived experience of the participants, within their home environments. There exists a general expectation that home is where individuals receive nurturing and support in preparation for their future lives apart from their parents, guardians or carers. All participants described their early home environments as places where they experienced difficulties and challenges.

For the young RB, home appeared to have become a place where parental love and care was diverted to others invited to live in his home.

> “But things started to change because my parents...decided to open our family home and convert it into a rehab programme for drug addicts...There was always 5 of us in one room and in the 3 other bedrooms there was 7 people in each room that was suffering from drug addiction, depression and suicide...my perception as a kid growing up was that my parents didn’t love me, and they didn’t care about me because all their time was spent helping out drug addicts...” (RB: p.1-2)

RB’s description of the transformation that occurred within his home painted a picture of a place that seems to have swallowed him up and caused him to lose his place, his space within the home and seemingly too, in his parents’ minds. The mention of the number of people residing in the home could be an emphasis on how significant the transformation was for RB. Perhaps there emerged a sense of loss not only in terms of physical space but also in terms of his relationship with his

parents. It appears that for RB, home did not offer him a sanctuary but instead morphed into a sombrely unfamiliar environment in which he became invisible.

It appears that for SH home was a place where he learned that no one could be trusted to look after or shield him from harm.

> “My dad would beat me, my uncle would beat me. Violence had been a part of my life before I even [short pause] I came into violence, if that makes sense. … Violence was a part of this world and a part of my life before I knew it. I walked into it kind of thing.” (SH: p.15)

It appears that for SH home was a place where violence and punishment reigned. SH’s repetition of the phrase, “would beat me” and the word, “violence” could be an indication as to how rife this treatment of him was. By stating that violence was “a part of my life before I knew it. I walked into it...” SH might mean that, for him, home was never a safe place for him to exist in. That he speaks of receiving beatings from his dad and his uncle could mean that, home was a place where danger lurked around every corner with possibly no adults to protect him. There appeared to be powerlessness and solitariness for SH, in that violence was happening to him and he could neither escape it nor change it and had no one to turn to for security and protection.

For FG, who began using drugs at the age of 13/14 years, home appears to have been an environment that was turbulent, chaotic and unpredictable, possibly due to the prevalence of substance abuse.

> P: “I think she became trapped in the marriage. I used to think like why didn't she leave...And then she became an ena, ena, enabler.
>
> **I: In what way?**
>
> P: All around my dad's drinking, my drug taking, my brother’s drug taking...my mum was like an ostrich. … Sticking her head in the ground.” (FG: p: 7 – 8)

FG’s description of his parents' marriage draws an image of a child may have witnessed and been caught up in his parents’ unhappy. His apparent childhood wishful phantasy of his mother leaving the marriage could signify that he viewed his father as the possible aggressor and his mother as the victim who had learned how to appease his father so as to create as conducive a home environment as possible by becoming an enable to his and her sons’ addiction. FG’s excerpt demonstrates how rife substance abuse was in the home perhaps creating an environment that was unpredictable and unsafe.

Unlike RB, SH and FG, OA’s experience in his home appeared not to have contained violence, chaos or substance misuse.

> “...growing up in a single-parent family, we never sat down as a family. We never, you know, sat down together or went out together” (OA: p.6)

And:

> “Like I said, growing up, we never sat down together as a family, me, my mum and my sister, understand?” (OA: p.8).

In the excerpts above, OA described a home in which the inhabitants appear to share the same roof but live separate lives. The apparent lack of family cohesiveness seems to have left OA like the other participants, living in a home where adult attention and consistent accessibility were lacking. Perhaps the missing family time that he refers to left OA with a diminished sense of connection. In speaking about not spending time together as a family, OA might also have been referring to an accentuated longingness to be parented by the only remaining parent, his mother.

Home for all participants appeared to be a challenging environment that housed fears, a sense of separateness coupled with, for some participants, violence, beatings and chaos. Overall, home seemed to be presided over by parents who, for disparate reasons, were unable to hold their children’s needs in mind and therefore provide them with environments conducive to their essential developmental needs and wellbeing.

3.3.2 Subtheme 1b: Absent fathers lost sons

Often, in society, fathers are assumed to be the people who contribute to our learning and lessons of the world. They are people whose every word, every action constructs a part of us. We hope our fathers will be people whom we trust to love us, tend to us and prop us back up when we struggle. Sons can learn to be men and eventually fathers from their own fathers. Children are not known to hold inherent relationship templates and these are said to originate from the early interactions with their main caregivers, in most instances, their parents. Fathers are often considered to be pivotal in the emotional and cognitive development of their children and their presence not only encourages a positive and inquisitive navigation in the world but also feathers the development of good social relationships.

This subtheme continues exploring the adversity experienced by the participants within their homes by focusing on the father-son dyad. All participants appear to have experienced difficult and challenging relationships with their fathers, be it directly or indirectly. RB, SH and FG were all either witnesses to or survivors of their fathers' violent tendencies, while for OA, it was his father's departure from the family that was transiently mentioned during the interview. The physical maltreatment that was discharged onto RB, SH and FG by their fathers seemed to have occurred often and frequently. This theme is entitled absent fathers lost sons as it appears that all the participants experience a certain form of father absence in childhood. For OA, the absence came in the form of physical displacement while for the other

participants, the absence appeared to be, despite their physical presence, a lack of positive and nurturing paternal emotional, physical and psychological connection.

> “I developed a sense of hatred towards my father because of the way he was treating me and the way he made me feel … He would beat me. He would use a belt, the curtain rod, the hosepipe, broomsticks, just whatever to beat me...” (RB: p.5)

In this extract, it appears that RB’s “sense of hatred” for his father emanated from the treatment that he received from him, treatment that entailed beatings with the use of various implements. The description above conjures up images of an explosive and impulsive man who would reach for the closest contraption to use as a punishment tool. When RB speaks of “the way he made me feel” this might infer that the beating left him carrying feelings such as a sense of rejection for not being a good enough son worthy of guidance, love and affection.

Like RB, SH also experienced beatings at the hands of his father which also appear to have triggered strong emotions within him including, it seems, suppressed rage.

> “I’ll say this, my dad was beating me...I had pent-up things going on and whenever somebody came at me with aggression, it triggered what my dad does to me … So to me I felt degraded and unloved. I feel. I felt degraded and unloved” (SH: p: 5)

While RB felt “hatred” for his father, SH stated that the beatings left him feeling, “degraded and unloved”. The beatings appear to have been quite regular in occurrence so much so that they seem to have influenced the way he interacted with the world and those around him. When he speaks of having “pent-up things going on” SH might be referring to the absence of another adult to confide in leaving him alone to deal and manage feelings that arose, and were subsequently suppressed, from the beatings. At the end of the extract, when speaking of how the beatings made him feel, SH uses the present word “feel” before correcting himself and then employing the past tense to show that he possibly no longer feels “degraded and unloved”. That he first used the present tense, could signify that there are remnants of those feelings residing in him today and/or that he was reliving those moments and hence conjuring up those feelings during the interview.

FG’s extract reveals four important issues about his father: chronic alcohol abuse, mental health issues, and a tendency to be both unpredictable and violent.

> “I came from a very loving family, but there, there was some issues, especially or my dad erm...he was a chronic alcoholic, so he drank, a considerable amount and...he also had a mild schizophrenia, so he made his, his behaviour quite unpredictable at times which included violence…” (FG: p. 1)

FG's description of his father paints a picture of a man whose behaviour was dictated by addiction and a mental health condition. When FG begins by stating that he came from a very loving family, it is possible that he acknowledges that there were indeed some good times in his childhood, but these were few and possibly usually interrupted by his father's "unpredictable" behaviour "which included violence". FG appears to view his father-son dyadic relationship as confusing, complex and inconsistent.

In as much as OA did not specifically articulate the emotional consequences of his father's departure, one might deduce these from parts of the interview, including from the extract below.

> "...the men, the fathers have to be fathers!...yes, every man needs a father figure whether we like it or not!...But every young man in particular, needs a father figure and without a father figure after a while, there's only so much a mum could do. No matter how strong she is" (OA: p. 8-9)

In the above extract, even though OA does not appear to be speaking directly about his own father nor the relationship that he had with him, it is possible to infer this from his words since his own father had left the family home while he was still quite young. OA's description of fathers and their role might be an indication of how much he felt his father's absence. OA appears to be stating that men have a role to play in the way society turns out.

Similar to their home environments, all participants appear to have experienced troublesome and difficult relationships with their fathers, present or absent. All participants spoke of their fathers without receiving a prompt during the interview. This might be indicative of how significant the experiences of and relationships with these adults may have been in their lives.

3.3.3 Subtheme 1c: Escaping and running into the darkness – out of the frying pan and into the fire

This subtheme explores the participants' choices in coping with the difficult and inconducive home environment. There appears to be a likelihood that their chosen coping mechanisms may have indeed precipitated their journey into knife-enabled crime as all four participants detached or disengaged from their homes physically or via the use of substances. It seems that home had become an unbearable place for the participants, so much so that by the ages of about 13 and 11, RB and SH, respectively, had run away from home and began experiencing homelessness. FG does not appear to have left home and instead escaped via substance misuse from the age of approximately 13/14 years. OA's escape from home appears to have come in late adolescence or early twenties. It is not clear if at this age he lived outside the home or if his way of life meant that home only served as a place to refuel.

The extract below describes the moment RB decided to disconnect from his family and place himself within his “newfound family”.

> **“**Come join our gang! Come join our gang! And at that moment...I felt loved...I thought, wah these guys actually care about me! They're giving me attention...I wasn’t getting any love or attention from my parents...So I said, yes...they were going to be my newfound family. ...From there I began to disassociate myself with my family, my actual blood family.” (RB: p.4 - 5)

For RB, the decision to replace the “blood family” with a “newfound family” meant that he would experience that “attention” and love that he longed for but did not receive from his parents or from home. It is possible that RB had felt invisible to his parents, while the gang, on the other hand, appeared to have not only noticed him but to have also acknowledged and accepted him as he was. RB employs very emotive words and terms such as ‘felt loved’, “actually care about me”, “giving me attention” and “newfound family” in reference to the gang which might indicate how much in a vulnerable position he may have been at the time. He seemed to have been deeply longing for what he believed he was not getting from home and what appears to be his impulsive decision may have been caused by this hunger for love, attention and care.

> “...I ran away from home ‘cos things had got worse and worse at home … My mum was sending me to my dad and my dad was beating me. So, by this time

it’s like I’m out in the streets, I’m sleeping on kitchen floors. Like I’m sleeping on sofas, I’m sleeping on kitchen floors, I’m sleeping wherever I can.” (SH: p.7)

In the extract above, SH provides a description of his life after running away from home. While RB speaks of substituting one family with another, SH appears to be navigating the world alone as it appears that neither his mother’s home nor his father’s provided him with the childhood that he sought. Like RB, SH’s escape from home came in the form of physical movement and this change of environment appears to have been a desperate move to flee an unfavourable and distressing home environment.

In his resoluteness to not “think about stuff”, FG reached for substances easily available to him within the home, which he used to blot out the happenings in his home.

“P: I just started taking stuff you know, like drinking quite young age, gas, glue, Tipp-ex … I started drinking at family parties and nicking drinks...
I: How old were you when you started?
P: about 13, 14 … I didn’t really feel part, I felt very disconnected
I: To?
P: Just, just to life … Just wanted to escape...I loved not having to think about stuff.” (FG: p.5)

It seems that the home environment was comprised of unbearably difficult experiences which FG learned to escape from through the use of substance found in the home. When he says that he “loved not having to think about stuff” FG gives the impression of a person escaping to a place that they had come to associate with mental peace. It is possible that the feelings of being “very disconnected” to life may have left the young FG with a deep need to find a connection but not achieving this might have been too intolerable and hence the use of substances to silence the thoughts “about stuff”.

OA’s escape appeared to have manifested itself through the rejection of higher education and the adoption of “the street life”.

> “...when I got to the second year of university, I dropped out...one day one of my friends came in with the envelope of money...and then my mind just went bam! Next thing I knew, I was in a gang hanging out on the streets…and then from then for that 10-year period I just lived the street life which involved six of my friends getting murdered, me nearly getting shot dead and going to prison twice… But like with the money, it was just, you know, even the, even the good book says the love of money is the root of all evil.” (OA: p.1)

OA’s description of his change in life’s direction depicts a picture of a young man who seemingly impulsively made a financially motivated decision to replace one life with another, a decision that appears to have negatively impacted his life immensely

for the next decade. By quoting the bible and stating that “even the good book says money is the root of all evil”, OA appears to view his decision to abandon his ‘ordinary’ life and instead live ‘the street life’ possibly as a mistake as in the end the pursuance of money seems to have come at a high cost.

All four participants appeared to have taken steps to escape from or abandon a life they once knew and instead immerse themselves in a ‘new’ space that appears to have placed them in equally dire or worse environments. The exit chosen by each participant may have fortuitously led them to be enactors of knife-enabled crime.

3.3.4 Subtheme 1d: An approach to life informed by adverse family experiences

An individual’s approach to life may stem from the lens through which they view the world. This lens may be formed by the person’s lived experience and the meanings they attached to significant events and interactions with the world and those in it. If we are indeed born in a tabula rasa state, ready for the imprinting process to begin, then it might be safe to assume, that it is what is around us that will be engraved in our intrapsychic world and that will then determine how we interact with our surroundings. This subtheme speaks to the participants’ lived experiences explored in the previous subthemes and examines the participants’ approach to life shaped by these early experiences and relationships. All participants’ provided indications of how these experiences had impacted some aspect of their lives and how this

manifested in their everyday lives and in their constructed life views and assumptions.

RB's approach to life appears to be dictated by intense emotions of anger, rage and vengeance, which seem to have been triggered by the treatment he received from his father.

> "If I didn't learn the scripture then I would get more scriptures or beats and sometimes I'd get both...and that kinda, that pushed me away, that pushed me away man! ...I remember the final time, the final straw was I was 10 years old, and this is where I made up in my heart that I was going to do whatever it takes … I'm gonna do whatever it takes to get my dad back ... Whatever it takes to hurt him … I thought I wanna do it man, cause now my dad pissed me off and I'm going to get you back! So, I'm doing this stuff now to get you back!" (RB: p.6)

In the above extract, RB is describing the moment he decided that his life's focus will be to hurt his dad. His determination can be seen when he states, "I made up in my heart that I was going to do whatever it takes". The picture painted by RB in this excerpt is of a young boy whose feelings towards his father appear to have determined his approach to life. appears to have become angered by the beatings and treatment received from his father. When he uses the phrase the "final straw",

RB might be indicating he had endured this treatment for a long period of time and that he was determined to mete out some form of revenge on his father.

While RB's constructed reality entailed a deep sense of anger and a desire for vengeance toward his father, SH appeared to have introjected his family's world of violence and dysfunction, creating an internal world regulated by a state of hypervigilance.

> "I was coming from a dysfunctional family...there was a lot of dysfunction in the sense of there was a lot of different issues within the family that I was born into...So when these boys attacked me and whatever, it kind of triggered all the anger and the upset that I'd been going through that was underneath that I didn't know how to express and basically ended up switching and expressing it in that way ,..From that moment I had a taste of not letting anybody disrespect me" (SH, p.2-3)

And

> "Like I became like a very [short pause] I'm gonna hit you before you hit me. I'm gonna hit you before you hit me. Anyone! Anyone! Absolutely anyone! My own friends, [short pause] basically I just became very hit them before they hit you and that's what I did." (SH: p.12)

In the above excerpts, SH appears to be describing how he came to view and interact with the world as he did. The picture painted by SH is one where he seems

to be referring to a trigger moment in his childhood that released supressed emotions built up from years of living in a “dysfunctional family”. This moment seems to have been pivitol to the creation of a ‘new’ SH who became determined to be treated with respect or bear the brunt of his “anger and upset”. It appears that from that moment, SH began to exist in a world where hypervigilance was the angle from which he operated and where absolutely no one could be trusted not to hurt him. When he states, “basically I just became very hit them before they hit you and that’s what I did”, it is possible that SH viewed and treated the world and those in it as the enemy.

FG’s approach to life appeared to be dictated by an unshakeable need to avoid and escape what seem to be destructive thoughts and emotions.

> “...like my choice of drugs got progressively worse, but the way I felt emotionally underneath got progressively worse that anytime, anytime that I tried to stop I had a lot going on in my head which I couldn't handle. So that's why I seeked comfort in drugs but erm they weren't really my problem is underneath cause my true problem the drugs were like a symbol, my true problem was the stuff underneath cause it all leads to drug addiction...” (FG: p.9)

FG’s description paints a vivid picture of a person who appears to have been involuntarily caught up in a ruinous vortex that was controlled by a strong, and

possibly unwelcome determination not to experience that “stuff underneath”. When FG states that “the drugs were like a symbol” he may have been referring to the drugs being a signifier of how much he was struggling to cope with life but the only way he knew how to live was by escaping from what he felt “emotionally underneath”.

It seems that OA’s approach to life became grounded in the importance of having a sense of belonging or connection to a family, church and/or community. In the extracts below, although OA is not speaking directly about himself, it is possible to make inferences in view of what he has addressed in other parts of the interview where he spoke of his father’s departure from the home when he was a young child as well as when he repeatedly spoke of what appeared to be a lack of family cohesion within his home after his father left.

> “There has to be a family structure...So I think definitely...the family structure has to be put back in place...Like I said, growing up, we never sat down together as a family, me my mum and my sister...that’s a story of many, many young people I, I knew” (OA: p. 8)

And:

> “It was that you know, community...someone that I can relate to, someone I can talk to someone that, you know” (OA: p.10)

It seems that for OA, family cohesiveness and community belonging appear to be the launching pad and existence for individuals. He seems to come from an angle where he views the need to belong somewhere as being vital from childhood onwards. When OA states that “the family structure has to be put back in place” he appears to be stating that there has been some form of erosion of family structures, “a story of many, many, young people”. For OA, it appears that belonging to a community is an extension of the family structure.

This GET has attempted to map the possible journey to the engagement in knife-enabled beginning from the home environment to the exploration of how the participants’ lived experiences in their early years may have shaped their approach to life. GET 2, which follows, aims to continue the narrative by demonstrating how the participants’ approach to life may have led them to use a knife to physically harm or hurt another or others.

3.4 Group Experiential Theme 2 – Engaging in Knife-enabled Crime

Before using a knife to harm another individual, the enactors of knife-enabled crime would need to have been in possession of one in the first place. This GET examines the participants’ journey from being knife-carriers to the moment they employed it as a tool to cause injury to another. Three participants appeared to routinely carry a knife or a weapon for at least several months before employing, while a fourth seems

to have found and used a knife within a short space of time. This GET consists of two subthemes considered in turn below. The first subtheme considers decisions around carrying a knife and particularly as this relates to issues of reputation, peers groups and safety. The second subtheme looks at decisions to actually use a knife, especially in situations where participants' survival seemed to be at stake.

3.4.1 Subtheme 2a: Carrying the knife: The shield, the armour

This subtheme explores the unfolding of participants in knife-enabled crime. The most common reason given by the participants appears to be a need for protection from victimisation. RB and SH first carried a knife when they were between the ages of 12 and 14 years, while OA was a young adult possibly in his early twenties. It is unclear when FG first carried a knife.

> "I was 12...I started carrying a knife because, so everyone around me, from my perspective was doing it at the time because all of my friends were gang members, everyone that was hanging around had a knife on them and I felt like I was at a disadvantage...because I saw all these stabbings happening and my friends getting robbed and them robbing people and them stabbing people, I just felt like I need to have a knife...I thought, I don't want that to happen to me." (RB: p.10)

RB's reasons for carrying a knife conjure powerful images of a young boy who is surrounded by armed peers and who has borne witness to serious knife-enabled crime. It appears that due to these two factors, RB feared for his life and wellbeing and chose to carry a knife as a form of protection from the harm that he had seen happen around him. There seems to be a sense of logic to his choice when he states that he felt at a "disadvantage" without a knife almost as though he were a sitting duck who could be seriously harmed as others around him had been. RB's reality appears to have been constructed firmly within a world where violence was real and prevalent which may have rendered the knife as the most important shield he could carry if he were to survive.

SH reasons for carrying a knife appear to echo those of RB.

> "So, when they, when they, when they was kicking me, when they was bullying me, they was older than me, so I ended up, I needed to protect myself, so I got a knife … So the first thing I got was a knife … and I'm only 11/12 … these are some of the situations that I found myself in like that caused me to want to have a weapon" (SH: p.10)

While RB carried a knife to protect himself from potential victimisation, it appears that SH carried one as a means of averting any further physical assaults on him. From the extract above it appears that the assaults that SH experienced happened frequently and regularly enough for him to feel the need to get a knife. When he

states, “and I’m only 11/12 years old” it seems as though SH is wondering why anyone would treat a child in this manner. SH stated that “these are some of the situations that I found myself int” which might indicate that the bullying and kicking were only some of the experiences that caused SH to feel insecure and vulnerable enough as to arm himself.

For OA, carrying a knife appeared to be part and parcel of the life he led at the time.

> “...when you live that particular lifestyle, you're involved in gang warfare, directly or indirectly, you're either gonna have to carry a knife or you gonna carry a gun, or you don't carry anything but you just take your chance.” (OA: p.2)

Like RB, OA seems to imply that his reality at the time dictated that weapon carrying was imperative if he wanted to ensure his safety. Indeed, it appears that opting not to carry a weapon would have been a reckless move that could undermine his survival. By stating “when you live that particular lifestyle” it seems as though OA had chose to exist in this world or that at some given moment, once involved in the gang, he learned that knife carrying or being armed was practically obligatory if he wanted to survive.

> “I kind of wanted to be like feared…I don't really remember much times when I was carrying one around constantly with me, I’ve been quite frightened by

them...I just thought like it made me kind of like hard or something like that. But it wasn't really a big part of my life." (FG: p.22)

On the surface, FG's decision to carry a knife appeared to be more about reputation when he states, "I kind of wanted to be like feared" than about protection or fear of victimisation as it was with the other participants. The knife-carrying does not appear to have been an important part of FG's life as he does not "really remember much times when I was carrying one around constantly".

For the participants, it seems that the knife was more an instrument to use as a shield from real or perceived (potential) physical harm. It appears to also have been an armour that not only protected them but also in donning it, they gained respect and recognition from those around them. The next subtheme looks in depth at the issue of using the knife that was carried and participants' perspectives on this.

3.4.2 Subtheme 2b: "This is what I've got to do to survive"

There exists a line between engaging in knife-carrying and ultimately using the knife to physically harm another person. Fortunately, not all knife-carriers cross that line. In this study all four participants' employed the knife to physically harm another individual. This subtheme examines and explores the participants' experiences and reflections on their actions. OA and SH spoke of their use of the knife to harm

another as factual occurrences without much elaboration on the incident itself, while RB and FG were able to reflect on the moment that they first used the knife.

> “I said, okay, I need to carry a knife to protect myself. But that didn’t mean that people would leave you alone if you had a knife on you. Do you know what I mean? So I thought, okay I need to do something. I need to use it. I need to use it because there is one thing carrying a knife but if you're not going to use it then there is no point carrying it, so I decided to use it ... I used the knife on someone because that was my way of telling everyone that I would do whatever it takes to protect myself, so leave me alone.” (RB: p.10-11)

RB’s extract above gives a clear decision-making process as to why he crossed the line between carrying and using the knife to physically hurt another person. He appears to be stating that carrying a knife was not enough protection and that survival meant having to actually it otherwise, “there’s no point carrying it.” There appears to be a sense of desperation to ensure he is protected from physical harm and attacks when he says that he “would do whatever it takes to protect” himself. It is possible that using the knife was an extension of his armour the ultimate defence strategy.

For SH using the knife to physically harm another appeared to not to be an unusual occurrence.

> “By this time I didn’t care about anything. Violence was normal to me. It was just the reaction, that’s how you deal with the situation.” (SH: p.14)

SH’s extract above is the response he gave when speaking about the first time he used a knife to physically harm another person. It appears that by that time, violence had become deeply embedded in his life and he in it. Violence seems to have become simply another problem-solving tool that he used if and when he required to with possibly no feelings of remorse nor regret attached to his actions. When he stated that, “It was just the reaction...” it might indicate that his first use of the knife was impulsive, that he possibly believes that he did what was necessary to solve a problem at that time.

In FG’s case, impulsivity coupled with rage seemed to have been the driving force behind his use of the knife.

> “I was so angry with everything in life, that when I was angry with him, everything else I was angry with, all mixed in with that and, and sadly, it spilt, it spilt out in rage and I,..I remember it happening. It’s like…like I was a puppet. It's like don't remember saying this is what I'm gonna do. I know, I know it's more than it just happened but I can't, I can't fully explain it. I just completely lost it and then after all that rage...” (FG: p.22).

For FG there appears to have been an accumulation of anger turned rage that masterminded his action on that fateful day. FG's description appears to indicate that there was an overwhelming and powerful loss of self-control that caused him to physically attack the other person. Comparing himself with a puppet indicates the extent to which he lost control. When he stated that he cannot remember saying "this is what I'm gonna do...it just happened", FG, like SH, appears to have acted quickly and impulsively as the rage took control of him and his actions.

OA considers his actions as a complex synthesis of three factors.

"...it was supposed to be a badge of honour, stroke protection, stroke defensive mode, yeah, it was a combination of all three." (OA: p.2)

By employing the words "it was supposed to be" it might appear that for OA, none of these factors either eased the burden of having used the knife or perhaps he did not experience the anticipated sense of achievement in getting that badge of honour. Like SH's statement of "that's how you deal with the situation", engaging in knife-enabled crime for OA appears to have been the *modus vivendi* among him and his peers at the time.

All the participants appear to have been able to reflect on the day they used the knife to harm another. What seems to emerge is the strong likelihood that their actions were dictated by the meanings they attached to their lived experiences. SH, OA and

RB's realities appear to depict danger and a deep need for survival. FG's reality seems to be a blur of negative thoughts and suppressed emotions that translated into a destructive act on another in a moment. This section has explored the participants involvement in the act of using a knife to seriously harm another physically. The next subtheme looks at the participants journey to desistance.

3.5 Group experiential theme 3 – Beyond the Blade

All participants hold recollections of the day or moment their lives changed – leaving the knife life behind. This third GET examines that moment. There are two subthemes in this GET: the first related to the desire to change, the second to how participants under their actions in the light of these changes. These are considered in turn below.

3.5.1 Subtheme 3a: Arriving at life's crossroads: "I wanted change"

There appears to have come a time in their lives where the participants were either seeking a change in life's direction or where change found them and they let it in. This subtheme looks at the participants' journey moment of change. All four participants' spoke of their life transformations occurring through finding God when they were at the lowest points of their lives.

> "…I just thought, this is, this is, it's all just mad! It's all messed up and I wanted to change… I didn't know how to change. I didn't know how to turn my life around…Now, I said a little prayer...if you can get me out of this, I promise you I'll go to church…I remember sitting at the back of the church…So I went to the front, and I just lifted my hand and I said, God if you're real, help me…I felt this warm presence on me that I'd never felt before in my life…like someone got a hot towel and wrapped it around me and felt this voice say to me, I love you man, and everything is going to be alright." (RB: p.22)

RB's description above paints a picture of an individual who seems to have come to a realisation that the life he was living was "all just mad...all messed up". His description of his encounter with God might be equated to a parent gathering a child into their arms and reassuring them that they are loved unconditionally and that they are not alone. RB appears to have reached a point where he was experiencing absolute struggle both in his external and internal world and could no longer tolerate the storm and therefore decided to find solace in God.

Similar to RB, SH appears to have been experiencing inner turmoil by the time he reached what appeared to be his own life's crossroads.

> "...I just wanted change. I wanted change. I was seeking change… Is this how your life's always gonna be? So, anyway, I started searching for help and I found, I found God...I was so bad, so lost, so angry, just bitter, just yeah. So,

then here I am now, looking for God, searching for God, saying, all right, is there a God out there? Is there somebody, like a higher power that can help me ‘cos I can’t change. So, I surrendered to it and as soon as I surrendered, that was it, I felt it get to me. I fully felt it pull me from inside. I felt something come upon me and it was so real. Especially for someone that was so thugged out and gangster and bad to feel these feelings that came upon me. It just, I knew something happened.” (SH: p.17)

SH’s repetition of the word “change” might demonstrate a deep sense of desperation to move away from the life he had come to know and live. SH appears to see himself as damaged to the point where only what he believes to be the most powerful force can save him. Similar to RB, SH experienced what appears to be a powerful entity come upon him and “pull me from inside” which he might have caused him to experience a sense of relief from the thoughts, beliefs and emotions that he carried with him of being “so bad, so angry, just bitter and so thugged out and gangster”. That he states that he “surrendered to it” might mean that he initially struggled with the thought of changing his way of life and relinquishing complete control of his life.

FG attributed his being alive and change in life’s direction as a miracle from God.

“P: Yeah, so even though I had all that stuff going on in my mind there was something in the background that wanted to try and get out and erm**.**

S: What do you think that's something was?

P: God...I was in the healthcare of the prison and I was playing Bob Marley natural Mystic there's a natural mystic flowing through the air and it was really hot. There was no air. The window was open and something stroked my face and it just, just gobsmacked as soon as they said there was a natural mystic flowing through the air something stroked my face … The miracle of my turn around my life...like it's a miracle that I'm even alive." (FG: p16 – 17)

Unlike RB and SH, FG does not appear to have been in search of change nor God when he experienced what he perceived as God's presence. It appears that this moment of transformation happened unexpectedly which might be why he perceives it as the miracle that saved his life. During this time, FG had been in the hospital prison due to serious drug-related complications. It seems possible, therefore, that FG might understand the stroking of the face as a message from God possibly letting him know that he will pull through.

Unlike RB, SH and FG, OA did not speak of feeling God's presence. However, the fact that he could remember the exact date that he turned his life around might indicate that he too experienced a transformational internal shift.

"On 2nd November 2008, after being in a very bad place, I became a born again Christian. I gave my life to Christ and my journey started from there_..._I'm just fed up of the street life. I was fed up of dodging bullets, fed up of chasing fed up of that

whole life, so of course it being the appointed time I knew that OK (laughs) this, this is it." (OA: p.6)

Like the other participants, it appears that OA had also reached life's crossroads. He could either continue as he was or to completely change direction and save himself from "the street life" and all that that life entailed. By stating "it being the appointed time I knew that OK this, this is it", it is possible that OA believed that it was God who chose that specific moment for him to change his life as opposed to OA electing the moment of his turnaround. Similar to the other participants, the moment of transformation and the pursuance of change seemed to have happened at a critical point in his life, when he was "in a very bad place".

All the participants appear to have reached rock-bottom in their lives by the time their transformations occured. It seems that RB, SH and OA, had arrived at internal, dare it be said, moral crossroads and that they had to make a choice whether to continue as they were or change complete direction. It is possible that the embodied experiences of God's acceptance signified a confirmation of which way to go. This section explored the moment in the participants that perhaps heralded their journey into desistance. In the next subtheme, the participants reflect on their past actions.

3.5.2 Subtheme 3b: Engagement in knife-enabled crime: Understanding actions today

By the time the interviews were conducted, none of the four participants had engaged in knife-enabled crime for several years. This subtheme focuses on the participants' interpretations of and reflections on their knife-related offences. Three of the participants appeared to express remorse for their actions and two participants consider on what might have led them to behave as they did at that time.

In the extract below, RB appears to be experiencing regret and remorse for his actions.

> "[Extra-long pause] If I can go back, I would do a lot of things different ... oh yeah, I would do a lot of things different if I could go back." (RB: p. 11)

It appears that RB recognises that there were perhaps moments in his life where he could have made different choices which might have led him in another direction. With the extra-long pause, it is possible that RB was replaying moments in his life where those opportunities to change direction might have been presented to him but that he did not take up. It is perhaps for this reason that RB appears to be experiencing regret for his actions and possibly guilt. The extra-long pause at the start of his response might be RB reflecting on his actions and then coming to the realisation that they were perhaps, in retrospect, excessive and undeserved. It appears that RB harbours regretful thoughts that his life turned out as it did and seems to carry some responsibility for it.

> "…personally I see it as survival. … I do have remorse for people that have been hurt along the way, I do have remorse for that, but, at the same time...it's like casualties were taken along the way. It's like in a war you're fighting to save your country but, at the same time, people's families you're going to hurt in a kill and I feel like that's how it was for me. I was in a war." (SH: p.15 -16)

It appears that, like RB, SH bears some remorse for his actions. However, SH seems to be experiencing an internal conflict where he understands that his actions were ruinous and destructive. However, he also appears to perceive his actions as necessary for his own survival. SH equates his lived experiences to living in a state of "war" possibly both internally and externally. It is possible that all he ever knew was how to fight and save himself, his country possibly in reference to his body.

Like SH, FG appears to experience remorse and possibly guilt for his actions.

> "There were awful! Absolutely awful! I was an awful, awful person! But very, very unwell_..._spiritually, so you know...if you've never faced a drug addiction like mine then you're not going to fully understand_…_It's not even living its existing! But I was too scared to live or die. I was stuck in the middle_…_Like something's not right. I don't think I'm just making excuses for myself, but at the same time the reason that I took drugs is down to me no one forced them

into me but once you get into that slippery path sometimes it's very hard to get back out here." (FG: p. 27)

FG appears to regret his actions deeply as he repeats the word "awful" several times including in reference to himself. Although there is a sense of self-condemnation and possible feelings of shame for the person he perceived that he was, there also appears to be a sense of self-compassion in that he recognises that, due to his addiction, he was not in the right state of mind either. FG appears to want to clarify that the addiction was down to him which might indicate him taking responsibility for his actions. When he speaks of being "stuck in the middle" FG might be emphasising his 'lost' mental state when he used the knife to fatally attack another person.

"Yes, it was all part of the journey! It really, it makes you know I just said my legacy, my life story is titled from Detention to distinction. So I realized I had to go through what I went through to be at this point in life. (OA: p:12)

OA was philosophical and pragmatic about his actions at the time. Like SH, he appears to acknowledge them as a necessary part of his life's journey and thinks of his actions and lived experiences as significant ingredients to where he is today. When speaking of being where he is "at this point in life", OA is referring to the various activities he is engaged in today which includes working with and mentoring young people including those at risk of knife-enabled crime.

Remorse, regret and shame are some of the sentiments expressed, directly or inferred, by the participants. This GET explored the participants change in lifestyle and addressed the views on how they view their actions today.

3.6 Group Experiential Theme 4 – The knife-enabled crime: To be Black and Male

The aim of this research project is to explore the lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime in the London area. This final GET looks at two themes emerging from the research question: race and masculinity. As per the participant criteria, all participants' were male and of Black heritage with one participant being of dual heritage. There are two subthemes in this GET are related to experiences of blackness and issues related to masculinity and knife-enabled crime. These are considered in turn below.

3.6.1 Subtheme 1b: Race in the picture: "You Black this, you Black that!"

Racial identity appears to be an aspect of our lives that has come to be strongly linked to how some of us see ourselves and are seen. Stating what ethnicity one belongs in, is something that is required in many aspects of our lives, from registering with the GP to filling in a job application. It is a matter that we can neither avoid nor escape from. Over the past several years knife-enabled crime has gradually come to be associated with Black young boys and men. An assocation that

appears to correlate this offence primarily to the young men's Blackness without regard to any other possible contributing factors outside their pigmentation. This subtheme looks at the participants' lived experience of knife-enabled crime from the position of their ethnic backgrounds. All four participants raised the matter of race albeit in different contexts.

When RB had decided to no longer participate in a life that involved knife-enabled crime, he made the decision to seek help from mental health services, whom he hoped would help him deal with the repercussions of his experiences.

> "…they used to say because of the violence in my background they wouldn't meet me in person…I wanna change, and I want help. And they're like we can do it over the phone, but we're feeling a bit concerned blah, blah, blah, because of your background. So from that moment, when that happened, I just hung up the phone [sucks teeth] people don't care about me! … they were people too scared of where I come from and didn't want to work with me. Like a Black, [shrugs shoulders] I'm just a Black person innit, too much of a nasty person to people" (RB: p.35)

From the excerpt above, it appears that RB's efforts to get help from mental health services were met with what he perceived as a reluctance to engage with him and possibly judgement centred on his background and race. When he states, "I'm just a Black person innit, too much of a nasty person to people.", RB might mean that in

the eyes of the mental health workers, he was reduced to just another Black person with a criminal background. In stating that the workers “were people too scared of where I come from” he might be referring experience of ‘othering” in that his whole being is alien to the workers who have little or no understanding of his contextual existence. He appears to experience frustration when he sucks his teeth and states, “people don’t care about me!”

FG was of dual heritage; his father was Black and his mother White. From the extract below, it seems that FG was confronted by his dual heritage background from a young age.

> “Just not feeling good enough. Not feeling part of life. Going from Black and from White … but people were fascinated by me as a kid...White people, especially, would love to come up and start feeling my hair. Ohh “let me feel his hair”. It could just make me feel quite unusual. Like these kids as well they call me Urko. And I said to my mom why do they keep calling me Urko and then she explained to me it was from Planet of the Apes.” (FG: p.29)

In this excerpt, FG appears to be saying that growing up he was unable to embrace his dual heritage ethnicity and had to pendulate between being Black and being White with no option of stopping in the middle. When he speaks of “not feeling good enough” FG might mean not being good enough Black nor good enough White therefore leaving him feeling possibly lost and not “part of life”. That he speaks of

being compared to an ape and of people being “fascinated” by him and of White people touching his hair, FG, like RB might be experiencing the notion of othering so much so that it made him “feel quite unusual” in his community and possibly society.

Despite his young age, SH, who lived in a “predominantly white area” appears to not have felt safe from both adults and children because of his racial identity.

> “...I remember a scenario that happened where this man was drunk out of his face. We were just little kids walking down the road and he come charging at us, you black this, you black that! We were coming from a predominantly white area...I’m only 11 years old...these are some of the situations that I found myself in like that caused me to want to have a weapon...I was in Year 6 where these boys like were throwing slingshots at me. Now, this is all racist, 100%. These are all racist attacks that are happening. … These are a lot of racist acts...” (SH: p.10)

Like FG, SH appeared to have experienced racism from childhood while out in the community. The “racist acts” seem to have been meted out by both adults and children which appear to have left him feeling vulnerable and defenceless enough to “want to have a weapon”. SH’s description paints a vivid picture of a young boy who was appeared to be constantly reminded that he was different from his neighbours and did not belong in that community due to the colour of his skin. The reminders came through racial insults as well as physical attacks.

During the interview, OA spoke openly and frequently about what appeared to be the apparent lack of family cohesiveness within his own family, a situation that he seems to have associated with his ethnicity as coming from a Black African family.

> "…for some strange reason, I only speak from my own example, as a, as a Black African, very rarely we, we sit down compared to Asians, compared to other Indians, compared to Chinese compared to even eastern Europeans...there should be a point where at least three times a week sitting down together as one, they have to because if not, you know streets will raise your children…" (OA: p.9)

It appears that for OA, the dearth of family time and structure occurred due to his culture as a Black African. For him it seems that family time is a significant protective factor in a child's wellbeing without which he predicts that the parents will lose their children to the streets. The use of the phrase "for some strange reason" implies that he does not understand why this lack of family time exists within the Black African culture while it does in many others.

This GET introduced a part of the participants' lived experience that demonstrated the impact of racism on the participants as well as the importance of having a sense of belonging be it within the family home and/or community. The next subtheme looks at the role of masculinity and how this might have manifested itself in the participants lived experience.

3.6.2 Subtheme 2b: Masculinity and knife-enabled crime

This subtheme will be exploring the concept of masculinity and learning masculinity. All the participants were male with two of them being young boys at the time of engaging in knife-enabled crime. Knife-enabled crime has been largely studies from the perspective of boys and men and is thought to be occurring predominantly within the world of boys and men. All the participants addressed this matter of maleness in one capacity or other. Two of the participants appearesd to come from the angle of creating tough personas so as to ward off danger and threats while the other two mentioned their fathers and/or fatherhood.

In his account below, it appears that RB's manifestation of toughness and ruthlessness was a necessary façade demanded by what might have been not only a male-dominated environment at the time but also one that was .

> "I used the knife on someone because that was my way of telling everyone that I would do whatever it takes to protect myself...And that was my way of letting everyone know I'm not a guy to be messed around with, so leave me alone...I was afraid! I was afraid! Most of it was driven by fear! Yeah man. Yeah! And the guy...it's not nice. It's not nice. The guy he didn't deserve it...He didn't deserve it." (RB: p.11)

In the above excerpt RB appears to demonstrate two sides to him; the observable tough, menacing and dangerous side that conceals the unseen vulnerable and frightened young boy. It appears that RB was determined to exaggerate his masculinity, toughness and courage by demanding respect from those around him through using the knife to physically harm another. For RB, masculinity, reputation and image seem to have been the critical ingredients to surviving in his surroundings. The statement, “He didn’t deserve it”, might indicate that this, for RB, was not a mindless crime but one driven purely by fear and that he was operating from a self-preservation stance.

Like RB, it appears that SH, by the age of 11/12, had ‘successfully’ created a strong and tough identity that he may have hoped would protect him “in the streets world”.

> “In the streets world I’m, I’m a G! I’m a gangster, I’m, I’m a boss! At a very young age I’m a boss … the guys with me,...they saw me as a boss, as the top guy. So I was the guy and I’m only 11/12” (SH: p.10)

That SH employs several terms to demonstrate his position, and possibly his masculinity, among his peers could signify just how significant identification with this a tough and threatening characteristic was to him. It appears that it was also crucial that his peers acknowledged his status too when he states, “the guys with me, they saw me as a boss, as the top guy”. SH’s deliberate manifestation of and identification with a strong indestructible toughness appears to invoke a sense of

achievement in that he had managed to become “a G, a gangster, a boss and top guy” by age of “only 11/12” years old.

In the case of FG, it appears that he learned how to solve problems from his father.

> “Times I really remember is that when my dad like sat me down and spoke to me about my behaviour. I can remember sitting with him one time. I thought, I thought that was the most effective thing … at the time it felt weird … Like alien not what I'm used to. Er, it's not the way people sorted things out in my mind its only reflecting back and realising how beneficial that was...just opened my eyes when I look back” (FG: p.4)

In the above extract, when FG states that “it’s not the way people sorted things out in my mind”, it appears that FG is insinuating that through his father he learned that problem solving for him came in any other form other than through talking. It appears that in the instant mentioned above, his father opting to talk through a certain behaviour was so foreign to FG that “it felt weird...like alien”. It seems that that moment of verbal chastisement was to have a positive effect on FG later on in life. Perhaps, the father who had taught him that problem solving was managed in any other way than verbally is the same father who had taught him that talking can indeed be “effective” in dealing with problems.

I employ the extract below again as I find it speaks to OA’s views on masculinity and the role of men and fathers in their sons' lives.

> “...the men, the fathers have to be fathers. You can't just, pardon my language, have sex with a woman and, and then have a child or the woman has a child and then that’s it. He had nothing to do with it. The only thing you do is buy trainers because yes, every man needs a father figure whether we like it or not...but every young man in particular, needs a father figure...” (OA: p.8)

In terms of masculinity, OA seems to be implying that the there exists a group of men who have neglected their obligations towards their sons and other younger men and have failed to nurture and guide them as their role dictates. OA seems to imply that the significant male does not have to be the biological father when he says that “every man needs a father figure”. For OA, it seems that to be a man means to own up to your responsibilities towards the children that you father as opposed to behaving as though you “had nothing to do with it” that you chose a behaviour, you chose a consequence which entails, in this case, playing an active role in raising the children you helped bring to this earth.

All four participants appeared to hold a subjective notion of the concept of masculinity. Two of the participants abstracted masculinity from the angle of being in the street while the other two referenced it in terms of fatherhood with one speaking directly of his relationship with his father while the other spoke in general terms of the roles and responsibilities men and particular fathers hold in terms of the generation of men who come after them.

This section presented and analysed the four GETs and the corresponding subthemes. The following Chapter is the final chapter of this research study. This is where the findings will be discussed.

Chapter 4

Discussion

4 Overview

This first part of this chapter contextualises the findings of this study within the current and existing research by exploring each Group Experiential Theme individually. The second part of the chapter addresses the adopted research method, focusing on its strengths and limitations as well as the clinical implications of the study along with suggestions for future research.

In keeping with IPA approach, the interpretations and content addressed in this chapter are based upon my subjective interpretation of the participants' experiences, as opposed to attempting to obtain a universal explanation of the participants' lived experiences.

4.1 Research aims and summary of results

The aim of this research was to explore the lived experience of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime and how they made sense of their experiences. As previously mentioned, research on this specific issue is scant. Indeed, at the time of conducting and writing this study, I had been unsuccessful in locating any study that focused purely on the lived experience of enactors of knife-enabled crime, beyond studies specifically focused on knife-carrying. Most of the literature addressed the possible determinants of knife-enabled crime, often from the perspective of people who work in this area including doctors, nurses, charity worker and youth workers. From the literature I reviewed, I was able to locate one research paper (Traynor, 2016) that had conducted interviews with those directly involved in knife-enabled crime in the form of knife-carriers.

The participants in this research had used the knife to physically harm another person. Their narratives on their lived experiences helped contribute to an area of this phenomenon that appears to be remarkably sparsely researched yet often discussed with urgent concern and gravity to the point of it being named an epidemic in both the media (Braddick, 2021); and in journals (Phillips et al., 2022; Ward, 2019; Thornton, 2019). Within this study, the analysis proposed that participants' reflections of their lived experiences fell into in four main areas: 1) starting the journey into knife-enabled crime, 2) engaging in knife-enabled crime: "It's like in a war 3) life after using the knife: I wanted change, and 4) knife-enabled crime:

Blackness and Maleness. The four GETs will be explored within the wider context of some of the literature reviewed in chapter one.

In line with IPA, the results discussed in the analysis and in this chapter are not meant to be used as a generalisation of the lived experience of all enactors of knife-enabled crime. In other words, the focus remains on the particular, rather than the universal, experiences. In addition, the analysis of the participants' narratives is based on the researcher's own idiosyncratic interpretations as opposed to them being panoramic explanations of knife-enabled crime.

Today, all participants are in employment or are self-employed. They all hold positions that entail helping others take back control of their lives, be it through coaching or mentoring, working with charities involved in curbing knife-enabled crime, here in the UK and/or abroad. The participants' current age (between 30 and 50+ years), chosen professions and length of time in desistance (minimum 8 years) may have influenced the data in terms of enrichment of findings. Over the years, the participants may have had time to reflect, relive and examine their actions which might mean that their narratives and therefore the data gathered contains information that could have otherwise been unobtainable and/or unavailable such as their subjective journeys into desistance, the influence of religion in this process as well as the possible long-term impact of a fraught father-son relationship. Over the recent years, the participants have interacted with the world from a different space and place. Living what appears to be a very contrasted life and then being able to reflect on the past lived experiences from this new space may have informed their

narratives with in-depth insights into what meanings they attached to significant events such as locating the triggers that were responsible for their approach to life.

4.2. Contextualising The journey into knife-enabled crime' into current literature

Existing research and studies have put forward several examples of maladaptive familial experiences that enactors of knife-enabled crime appear to have endured during their early years (Falkner, 2021; Jones, 2008; Cassidy, 2011; Phillips et al., 2022; Traynor, 2016). However, these studies tend to create a generalisation on the causative factors for the participation in knife-enabled crime at the expense of understanding the subjective experiences of the participants and the meanings they attached to significant events in their lives. The cause-and-effect model does not lend itself to understanding the complexities of individual experiences for example as described in this study by RB as his lived experiences at home of neither being loved nor cared for, which might point towards a sense of isolation and alienation from his family as a factor in his knife carrying.

In a report commissioned by the World Health Organisation, Sethi et. al. (2010) found that children who experienced adverse events in their early years were more likely to engage in knife-enabled crime and weapon-carrying in adolescence. These findings were echoed by Haylock et al., (2020) and McNeill & Wheller, (2019). By the ages of 10 years, all participants in this study had been exposed to events within the

family as well as external to the home that would be considered adverse, even traumatic. OA's father had left the family home, while Rob, FG and SH experienced what they described as 'beatings' but which might also be described as physical violence (see below for a discussion of these terms), particularly from their fathers. FG and SH also spoke of violence within the home which might be assumed to have been between the adults in the home. In their study of adverse childhood experiences in relation to health, Felitti et al., (1998) produced a list of events that continue to be used as a benchmark for the definition for abuse. Three of the categories were labelled as psychological, physical or sexual abuse, while substance abuse, mental illness, violence against mother or stepmother and criminal behaviour were labelled as household or family dysfunction. With Felitti's categorisation of abuse in mind, it can be assumed that three of the participants reported having experienced both psychological and physical abuse within the home. Haque et al., (2020) define psychological abuse as, "a pattern of caregiver's intentional or unintentional behaviour towards the child that convey to a child that s/he is worthless, flawed, unloved, unwanted, endangered or only of value to meet another's needs" (p.1). The participants who reported to have received beatings stated that these beatings made them feel degraded, unloved, angry and uncared for which is in line with the same study that found that children who experienced psychological abuse, tended to experience intense negative emotions (Haque et al., 2020). There exists other definitions of abuse such as that on the NSPCC website on physical abuse. Here it is defined as someone causing physical harm or hurt to a child and could include "hitting with hands or objects, slapping and punching and kicking." (NSPCC, 2022). As mentioned above, none of the participants used the term physical abuse but instead referred to "beatings", perhaps not viewing it as physical

abuse because for them it was normalised. In the analysis and discussion chapters, the word “beatings” is used (as opposed to “abuse”), to respect the participants’ choice of words and to support the voices of the participants.

In his paper on ‘delinquency’, Wilson (2009) identified feelings that included, rejection and fear of criticism and annihilation. The children are said to "feel betrayed by parental failure to safeguard their safety and integrity. In response, they become resentful and on guard, without faith in those around them and disinclined to comply with their social requirements.” (Lanyado & Horne, 2009, p. 408). This sense of betrayal and feelings of resentment appeared to be within the participants’ reach as they all had on one level or another, experienced parental maltreatment and/or lived in homes that were not conducive to their wellbeing. OA’s father’s departure appears to have left a vacuum that was possibly never plugged, leaving his experiencing what Perrin et al., (2009) refer to as “father hunger” which is, “...the emotional and psychological longing that a person has for a father who has been physically, emotionally, or psychologically distant in the person’s life.” (p.2). Indeed, father hunger is not limited to those whose fathers are physically absent. This can develop in children whose fathers suffer from substance misuse and/or are emotionally absent. FG described his father as an alcoholic while RB spoke of his parents as not having time for him as they were engaged in running the rehabilitation centre they had set up within the home. The few times that SH spoke of his father was in reference to the violence he experienced at his hands. Some of the emotional and psychological repercussions of father hunger include low self-esteem, intense feelings of loneliness, shame, anger, issues with emotional regulation and problems

trusting others (Perrin et al., (2009). According to Erickson (1998) father hunger can predispose an individual to violence and substance misuse, both apparent in the participants. Overall, it appears that the participants' lived experiences in relation to their fathers, whether physically present or altogether absent, appear to have left them bearing intense and complex feelings including rejection, anger and a sense of betrayal. Father hunger, as defined by Perrin et al., (2009), was experienced by all participants including in those who had regular contact with their fathers. Their presence in the home or in their lives did not constitute emotional psychological availability. Of the beatings that three of the participants received from their fathers, Jones (2008) stated that such "repeated experience of punishment following transgressive acts leads to an internalisation of aversive feelings" (p.116) including shame and guilt and where a child is not helped to process and work through feelings of shame and that it remains unresolved within them, then it tends to manifest itself in the form of anger, hostility and shame-rage cycles. Ray et al., (2004) wrote that offenders tend to experience unresolved or unacknowledged shame which, when turned to rage and anger, is usually directed to those who draw out the sense of shame. RB, SH and FG all experienced beatings by their fathers and at times, in the case of RB by his mother too.

4.3 Contextualising ‘Engaging in knife-enabled crime’ into current literature

There is a critical paucity in literature that has examined or explored the lived experiences of enactors of knife-enabled crime that has involved a physical attack on another. Indeed, at the time of writing this thesis, I had been unsuccessful in locating an academic article, study or research on this matter.

All the participants engaged in knife-carrying before eventually using it to harm another. The causal links made by current literature suggest that some of the motivators for knife-carrying included for protection and out of fear of victimisation (Akala, 2018; Hirsch, 2018; Densley & Stevens, 2014). Others have suggested that gang membership can be a factor (Harding, 2020) although this view remains debatable (Falkner, 2021; Traynor; 2016). On the surface it appears that the main reason the participants chose to carry a knife was for protection or from fear of victimisation. Beyond this, however, there appears to be a deep sense of vulnerability which is said to be masked by a presentation of toughness (Traynor, 2016) or a need to appear “hard” as FG stated. Harding (2020) includes vulnerability among the list of internal triggers that can lead an individual to carry a knife which can lead to aggression. He acknowledged that there are several factors that may contribute to an individual’s choice to engage in knife-carrying but what was equally important, yet remains inaccessible, is our understanding and knowledge of the meanings that individuals have attached to significant events and which they use to navigate the world (Harding, 2020). This research has perhaps begun that conversation. The findings overall, suggest that the participants early childhood

experiences left them with certain emotions; betrayal, shame, anger, rage, aloneness, isolation and view of the world as a dangerous place where no one is to be trusted, that might have indeed played a pivotal role in their eventual engagement in knife-enabled crime.

The findings in relation to the participants' use of the knife are considered new as, to my knowledge, research that includes the voices of Black men who have used the knife to physically harm another is currently not available. In this study, the overall findings suggest that the early adverse lived experiences of the participants gradually almost insidiously created realities of a dangerous, undependable and untrustworthy world. At the moment of using the knife, the participants stated doing so for different reasons including pent-up rage and for image, reputation and toughness. However, it appears that behind these stated motivations, were other driving forces. The findings suggest the existence of vulnerability that was linked to a need for belonging and an overwhelming desire to survive.

4.2.1 Life after using the knife

All participants recalled the exact moment that their lives took a different turn. They appeared to have been at the lowest point in their lives and the only options available to them were to either leave the life that they were engaged in or carry on leading the same existence. Their journey to desistance appears to have been triggered by a sense of desperation to change and possibly a realisation that they no longer wanted to engage in that life. Upon reflection of their past actions, three of the

participants spoke of experiencing feelings of regret and remorse while one was more pragmatic and philosophical about his journey, viewing his past as a necessary experience that got him where he is today.

Both these findings were unexpected possibly due to the current lack of research and literature on the lived experience of enactors of knife enabled crime. Previous research has focused on the causes of knife-enabled crime and a study that has moved beyond the causes and looked at the lived experience of the enactors, primarily knife-carriers, (Traynor, 2016), does not extend beyond the committing of the offense. That all participants in this study addressed these areas of their lives is a significant manifestation of the humanistic principles on which the profession of counselling psychology is founded as they inadvertently remind us about "taking a holistic perspective and the belief that all humans are capable of positive growth", (Swanepoel, 2013, p.6).

4.2.2 Knife-enabled crime: Race and Masculinity

All of the participants addressed issues related to race and masculinity, albeit not always in the same context. Existing literature on knife-enabled crime has explored the issue of race from different perspectives. There are papers that approach the subject from an in-depth examination of the racialisation of knife-enabled crime (Williams & Squires, 2021) then there are others that provide the statistics or 'facts' without further examination of the 'reality behind the "knife crime" debate' (Wood, 2010).

One participant did not refer to race explicitly but instead referred to cultural differences in terms of family cohesion. He also pointed out that it was his personal view and experience. Three of the participants discussed their experiences of racism with two of them relating back to their childhood where the racism came from both adults and children within their community. The racism experienced was both via verbal and physical attacks. Literature on knife-enabled crime does indeed address the issue of racism both in the context of police and community relations, and in the racialisation of knife-enabled crime. That the participants in this study discussed their experiences of racism as part of their adverse childhood events could be an indication as to how much of a significant role those experiences played in the creation and construction of the lenses through which they view the world.

The other narrative on racism was in relation to an attempt at accessing mental health services and being treated in a manner that left the participant feeling angry and believing it was because of his gender and race that he was treated as such. This is in line with the literature on mental health and ethnicity which has been discussed both in this study and in the existing literature (Nazroo et al., 2019; Bansal et al., 2022; Keating & Robertson, 2004). Indeed Keating & Robertson (2004) addressed the issue of “circles of fear” relating it to the interrelationship between Black people and Mental Health services. They describe this circle as one where some staff within MH services appear to be fearful of Black people and especially young Black men and the mistrust that some Black communities hold of MH services (Keating & Robertson, (2004).

In reference to masculinity, although none of the participants spoke directly on this, it is possible to infer of its existence within their narratives. Masculinity seemed to come in reference to a type of ‘father influence’ as well as in the form of hyper-masculinity. The finding of hyper-masculinity is in line current literature on knife-enabled crime (Traynor, 2016; Sethi et al., 2010; Palasinski, 2013). The two participants who appeared to practice hyper-masculinity appeared to do so as a form of protection from victimisation. Traynor (2016) expounds this point further by stating that this need to practice hyper-masculinity goes beyond self-protection, that is comes to manifest in a young man “in the absence of other sources of security and self-esteem" (p.78). The two participants involved in demonstrating hyper-masculinity were under the age of 13 when they were homeless and therefore with no sources of security or at least sources of security that did not involve the threat of violence. In terms of father influence, literature on knife-enabled crime does refer to fathers but not under the same theme as the participants in this study. The literature often discusses the absent father’s impact on knife-enabled crime and even then, it is as an expansion or in relation to single-mother homes (Mwangangi, 2019; Roberts, 2021; Phillips et al., 2022) or where there is parental substance misuse**.** However, in this study, the form in which father influence was addressed was unexpected. One participant appeared to imply that, from his father, he had learned that violence and beatings were the way to resolve difficulties. The other participant spoke at length about what he believed the role of the father is or should be although his father had been absent from his life since early childhood. It is likely that this absence and the repercussions for him and his family, are what influenced his view of fatherhood and possibly manhood.

4.3 Evaluation of the study

This section evaluates the study using Yardley's (2000) four principles for assessing qualitative research. The four principles are: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance. It also employs Guba and Lincoln (1989) measure of trustworthiness in qualitative research which is comprised of four criteria: transferability, dependability, credibility and conformability.

4.3.1 Sensitivity to context:

To ensure sensitivity to context, I explored the various forms of literature available on knife-enabled crime, including academic and grey literature, documentaries and past and present newspaper articles, I also requested meetings with individuals at the heart of this phenomenon including Gary Younge of the Guardian's Beyond the Blade Project (The Guardian, 2018), Ciaran Thapar author of Cut Short; youth violence, loss and hope in the city (Thapar, 2021) and Andrez Harriot of The Liminality Group who works closely young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. I was aware that, before embarking on this research project, most of the information I held on knife-enabled crime originated primarily from the media, whose biases and assumptions have been explored in this study. The doctoral training for which this research is a part, encouraged the practice of reflexivity, which I believe contributed to my ability to observe and respect the various contextual factors that were

important to my participants. During the training, I maintained a reflexive journal as well as attended personal supervision, both of which I found particularly valuable in supporting me manage my feelings and thoughts which might otherwise have affected my ability to keep my participants in mind.

4.3.2 Commitment and Rigour

The sensitivity of the research topic meant that locating participants for the study was particularly yet understandably challenging. However, what was particularly challenging was working through the analytical process. It was not only difficult to hear the narratives of the participants, but it was equally quite challenging to carry out the interpretation of their interpretations mainly due to the content of their interviews. Employing the assistance of my supervisor as well as my personal therapist, I was able to proceed and yield the insights that have been discussed in this chapter. This assistance was vitally important as a part of my emerging identity as a counselling psychologist is that of a reflective-researcher (Swanepoel, 2013).

4.3.3 Transparency and coherence

In this research project, coherence was maintained by ensuring that the theoretical approach was congruent with the research method and the analytical process. In terms of transparency, the research process was documented throughout, which culminated in the current study. In addition to the reflexive diary, I maintained a separate notebook, in which I would record the various stages of the research process including research title searches (appendix 9), rudimentary inclusion criteria

(appendix 10) and organisations I had been in touch with and the responses I received, if any, and when.

4.3.4 Impact and importance

As there is currently a paucity in literature that explores the lived experiences of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime, it is hoped that this study will provide useful information and knowledge to organisations, institutions and mental health services that work closely with people such as my participants. It is also hoped that, on reading this study, or at the very least the analysis and discussion chapters, that the views and treatment of young Black boys and men, as portrayed in the media and other relevant and influential spaces, will begin to change. Finally, it is hoped that when a young Black or dual-heritage boy or man engages in knife-enabled crime, that their full story is given so that the onus does not begin and stop with them, but is shared among all those who have interacted with him along the way, including parents, schools, social services, CAMHS and the police. To be able to create this impact, I hope to publish articles in the relevant journals as well as present my findings wherever possible.

In addition to the academic contribution, I intend to participate in conferences, community and third sector activities that focus on the phenomenon of knife-enabled crime and youth violence such as the one I recently attended entitled Ending Youth Violence.

4.3.5 Trustworthiness

Credibility is demonstrated in this research primarily by the prolonged engagement with the data. I not only conducted all the interviews, but I also spent numerous hours listening to the audio recordings of each interview as well as reading and re-reading the transcripts including on two occasions per interview while listening to the audio recordings. This was important to do as I found it gave me a real feel of what the participants verbal as well as non-verbal communication in the sense of tone of voice, laughter and pauses. In line with IPA research methodology, I kept a reflexive journal so as to remain aware of my thoughts and feelings as I worked through each transcript independently of the others so as to practice bracketing. Credibility was also established through the presentation of excerpts of interview transcripts throughout the analysis process as well as with a submission of excerpts to demonstrate the quotes from the participants pertaining to a particular GET (appendix 14).

In terms of transferability, a detailed description of the setting in which the research took place was made available therefore placing the phenomenon understudy in context. The research question in this study foregrounds the contextual nature of the phenomenon in that, knife-enabled crime is explored with relevance to Black adult men in the London region.

Confirmability was observed by working closely with my supervisor who not only oversaw the research study but was also able to ensure that the interpretation of the

data was based on the voice and words of the participants by reading transcript extracts against my interpretation of the data.

Dependability is demonstrated in this study by the detailed audit trail presented in the methodology section. Here the theoretical and methodological processes are detailed including the examination of my epistemological and ontological positions and how they relate to the elected research method. Participant criteria are also included as well as the recruitment process and the information shared with the participants before and after the interviews (appendix 4, 5 and 8).

4.4 Limitations of the study

This section addresses some of the limitations of this study namely participant sample, interview process and issues with IPA and language.

The recruitment process for the research required that the participant be contacted through an organisation as opposed to directly by me. This measure was put in place to ensure that each participant could access immediate support should the interview process cause any upset. The involvement of the third parties meant that access to more participants was limited. In addition, recruiting participants via established organisations increased the likelihood of some selection bias unfolding in that the people most likely to take part are those for whom change was desirable, possible,

and made. In terms of the number of participants, this was also affected by the online interview process which was in place during the COVID-19 restrictions. There were two potential participants who were reluctant to be interviewed online as they did not trust that their material would be safe and believed that anyone could reach it if they were determined to. They would only agree to have the interview if it was face-to-face. However, this was not in line with the approved ethical application.

A limitation of the IPA research method is on the focus of language. It is through language that the participants relate their experiences to the researcher. However, as Willig (2013, p.98-99) stated, language “adds meanings that reside in the words themselves and, therefore, makes direct access to someone else’s experience impossible.” This reliance on language can create barriers in the capturing of the participants’ lived experience, and on different levels. During the interviews for this research study, for instance, it became clear that my presence as the researcher, possibly my gender, age, ethnicity, doctoral student, affected the language that participants used. On a couple of occasion SH stated he was "I’m trying to use my words so you understand as well.” This could be viewed as an example of a participant using language to construct rather than describe the experience and hence his reality (Willig, 2013).

4.5. Strengths and clinical implications

A particular strength of this research study is that it addresses the paucity in existing literature on the lived experience of those involved in knife-enabled crime no matter

the gender or ethnicity. This study not only contributes to the current literature but it also, with the support of the participants, helps in highlighting the voices of those involved in knife-enabled crime who are often overlooked in the exploration of this phenomenon. It is via their inclusivity in this work that the wider community, organisations and institutions are likely to gain more knowledge and understanding of this phenomenon and those involved in it which could impact the current restorative systems and therapeutic approaches. It is hoped that this study has contributed to the profession of counselling psychology by maintaining the principles of the profession, in particular the subjectivity of human experience that is shaped and formed by familial, cultural and societal contexts.

4.6 Future research recommendations

Knife-enabled crime continues to be a concern not only in the London region but some other parts of the country. In line with the principles of counselling psychology, where context and the subjective experiences of individuals are paramount, future research could include similar studies as this. If “human beings are complex and develop ways of experiencing the world according to influences and experiences encountered throughout their lives” (Swanepoel, 2013, p.3), it is then possible that effective changes made in a particular space in the London region might not be as successful in another London area or even another place outside the M25.

In view of the role their perceptions of or relationship with God played in the life changes of the participants, research on desistance and knife-enabled crime that

positions the participant within their own social, cultural and familial context could be relevant and appropriate for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon and those involved in it.

4.7 Conclusion

This research set out to explore the lived experiences of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime. The findings highlight the counselling psychology tenet that beholds the complexity of human beings as people firmly situated in and influenced by the context in which they exist. The participants' accounts demonstrated the relational nature of human beings and the way their interactions with others contributed to the creation of their realities which in turn contributed to their view of the world. Existing literature has put forward several factors believed to be causes of knife-enabled crime some of which the participants mentioned some of which they did not. From this research study and via the voices and narratives of the participants, new findings have emerged that may be significant when working with enactors of knife-enabled crime. Their overall sentiments about the adverse experiences within the home and families, relationship with their fathers and their harmful coping strategies largely go unrecognised in current literature. It is possible that some of the current causative factors are focusing on the wrong elements of knife-enabled crime. For instance, current literature addresses the issues of the racialisation of knife-enabled crime which indeed it is, but at an individual level, as it was here, the racism was more personal as opposed to generalised.

This research set out to explore the lived experiences of Black men involved in knife enabled crime in the London region. The findings addressed a gap in current literature and provided new insights and knowledge regarding this phenomenon and the lived experiences of those involved in it. It has explored the lived experience of some enactors and has been able to identify meanings that they attached to their lived experiences that may have contributed to their involvement in this phenomenon.

Existing literature has pinpointed some factors as causes of knife-enabled crime, some of which the participants mentioned including need for protection and reputation. What seems to have been omitted is an understanding of what experiences led the enactor to use a knife to physically harm another. The study offers suggestions for future research as well as new considerations for those involved in working with enactors of knife-enabled crime.

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Appendix 1 – Ethics Approval

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Ana Paula Nacif

SUPERVISOR: Claire Marshall

STUDENT: Soila Sindiyo

Course: Prof Doc in Counselling Psychology

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.

2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.

3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below)**:** In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY
(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

APPROVED

Minor amendments required *(for reviewer)*:

Major amendments required *(for reviewer):*

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments *(for students)*:

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name *(Typed name to act as signature):*
Student number:

Date:

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER *(for reviewer)*

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

☐ HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

☐ MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

☐ LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer *(Typed name to act as signature)*: Ana Paula Nacif

Date: 04th June 2021

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2 – Change of Title to Ethics Applicaiton

School of Psychology Ethics Committee

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

For BSc, MSc/MA and taught Professional Doctorate students

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for a proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology

By applying for a change of title request, you confirm that in doing so, the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed, then you are required to complete an 'Ethics Application Amendment Form'.

How to complete and submit the request	
1	Complete the request form electronically.
2	Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).
3	Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to Dr Jérémy Lemoine (School Ethics Committee Member): j.lemoine@uel.ac.uk
4	Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with the reviewer's decision box completed. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your dissertation.

Required documents	
A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.	**YES**

Details	
Name of applicant:	**Soila Jennifer Sindiyo**
Programme of study:	**Professional Doctorate in Counselling Psychology**
Title of research:	**The lived experience of young Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime**
Name of supervisor:	**Dr Claire Marshall**

Proposed title change	
Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below	
Old title:	The lived experience of young Black men involved in knife crime in London – an Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis

New title:	The lived experience of Black men involved in knife-enabled crime in London – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
Rationale:	The focus of the research is not solely on young Black men but on Black men regardless of their age.

Confirmation		
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed change of title and in agreement with it?	**YES**	**NO**
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?	**YES**	**NO**

Student's signature	
Student: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Soila Jennifer Sindiyo**
Date:	**10/01/2023**

Reviewer's decision		
Title change approved:	**YES**	**NO**
Comments:	**The new title reflects better the research study and will not impact the process of how the data are collected or how the research is conducted.**	
Reviewer: (Typed name to act as signature)	**Dr Jérémy Lemoine**	
Date:	**11/01/2023**	

Appendix 3 – Email to organisations

Dear [insert name]

My name is Soila and I am a Professional Doctorate student at the University of East London on the Counselling Psychology program and a Child and Adolescent Developmental Psychologist across London for the past 18 years.

As part of my Doctorate, I am conducting research focused on the lived experiences of young men of African/Caribbean heritage aged between 18 and 30 years who have been drawn into serious youth violence, specifically knife-enabled crime.

My aim in conducting this research is to potentially impact the therapy interventions provided to our young men by increasing an understanding of this phenomena.

It is for this reason that I am writing to you. I came across your profile and the important work that you are doing with our young people and hope that you can help me in my research.

I would greatly appreciate your assistance in finding participants who may be interested in assisting me in this research or point me to individuals or organisations that work closely with knife-enabled crime and its impact on our young men.

If you are open to a 30-minute conversation, have any recommendations or would like to learn more about my research, please contact me on 07973 893 282, or via my university email address u1929202@uel.ac.uk.

I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you, answer any questions you may have and discuss the project further.

I appreciate your help with this and would like to thank you for your time. Looking forward to hearing back from you.

Kind Regards,
Soila Sindiyo

Appendix 4 – Participant Information Sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Research Question: What is the lived experience of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime?

What is the research?

My research seeks to explore the experiences of men who have been drawn into knife-enabled crime, with the aim of increasing understanding on this topic, to potentially impact the therapy interventions provided to them. I am hoping to do this with the help of the person behind the crime, understanding their journey into knife-enabled crime.

My research has been approved by the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee. This means that the Committee's evaluation of this ethics application has been guided by the standards of research ethics set by the British Psychological Society.

Why have you been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate in my research as someone who has been involved in knife-enabled crime and may therefore be able to help me gain a better understanding of this experience. I am looking to work with Black men aged 18 years and over, who live in London and have been involved in incidences where a knife was used against another. My choice to work with Black men is not because I believe that they are mostly responsible for knife-enabled crime but because as a Black woman, I understand how often Black men are misrepresented in the press as well as in some academic literature. Further details about the study are attached to this email – I am happy for you to share this with anyone you think would be interested.

I emphasise that I am not looking for 'experts' on the topic I am studying. You will not be judged or personally analysed in any way and you will be treated with respect.

You are quite free to decide whether or not to participate and should not feel coerced.

What will your participation involve?

If you agree to participate, I will request an interview with you, which will be like having an informal chat, which will last for approximately an hour. The conversation will be conducted online, via Microsoft Teams and will be audio recorded. Microsoft Teams is said to provide end-to-end encryption which makes is a safe and secure platform on which to conduct and record the interviews. Only I and possibly my university supervisor Dr Claire Marshall will have access to the recordings.

The conversation will be about your life experiences and how you became involved in knife-enabled crime. I am not looking to talk about anyone else but you. It is you and your life story that I am interested in. An example of some of the questions I will be asking is, "Tell me about your experience of knife-enabled crime".

I will not be able to pay you for participating in my research, but your participation would be very valuable in helping to develop knowledge and understanding of knife-enabled crime.

Your taking part will be safe and confidential

Your privacy and safety will be respected at all times. As mentioned above, our conversation will be conducted online via Microsoft Teams which is a safe and secure way of meeting and recording conversations. The recording will remain with me and will be stored on my university's private SharePoint account which is password protected.

You will not be obliged to answer all questions asked of them and can stop your participation at any time.

What will happen to the information that you provide?

Once the interview and recording are completed, I will personally transcribe and anonymise the recordings which means that I will do a complete write-up of the interview from the recording and remove all information that might lead to you being identified. The anonymised transcript will be available to my supervisor and examiners, but they will not be able to identify you as none of your details will be available.

This write-up will be stored on my password protected university SharePoint. Once the study is completed all data including the transcribed transcripts and the analysed data will be retained for 3 years.

For the completed study or the thesis, I may use short, anonymised quotes from my interview with you, in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in professional and academic journals, but these will not personally identify you. Once the study is completed and passed, it will be publicly accessible in the University of East London's Institutional Repository (ROAR).
If you would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed, please do let me know and provide me with contact details for this to be sent to.

What if you want to withdraw?

You are free to withdraw from the research study at any time without explanation, disadvantage or consequence. Separately, you may also request to withdraw your data even after you have participated data, provided that this request is made within 3 weeks of the data being collected (after which point the data analysis will begin, and withdrawal will not be possible).

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

My name is Soila Sindiyo and my university email address is – u1929202@uel.ac.uk or on 07850 85 60 66.

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Claire Marshall School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ,
Email: c.marshall@uel.ac.uk

or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix 5 – Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Consent to participate in a research study

Research Title - **The lived experience of young Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

☐ I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep.

☐ I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

☐ I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without providing a reason for doing so.

☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study, my data will not be used.

☐ I understand that I have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study.

☐ I understand that the interview will be recorded using Microsoft Teams.

☐

I understand that my interview data will be transcribed from the recording and anonymised to protect my identity.

☐ I understand that my personal information and data, including audio recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain strictly confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission.

☐ It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.

☐ I understand that if I make a disclosure that has legal implications, such as disclosure of an unreported crime, or safeguarding issue concerning the involvement of a person under the age of 16 in a crime, this information will be passed on to my Director of Studies and/or my second supervisor and may result in the involvement of the police

☐ I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview may be used in the thesis and that these will not personally identify me.

☐ I understand that the thesis will be publicly accessible in the University of East London's Institutional Repository (ROAR).

☐ I understand that short, anonymised quotes from my interview may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in professional and academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.

☐ I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.

☐ I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…… …….

Participant's Signature

……..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……..

Researcher's Signature

……

Date: ……..…….

Appendix 6 – Amended Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF EAST LONDON

Non-anonymity Consent to participate in a research study

Research Title - **The lived experience of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime – an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

I confirm that I have read the participant information sheet dated for the above study and that I have been given a copy to keep. ☐

I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily. ☐

I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time, without providing a reason for doing so. ☐

I understand that if I withdraw from the study, my data will not be used. ☐

I understand that I have 3 weeks from the date of the interview to withdraw my data from the study. ☐

I understand that the interview will be recorded using Microsoft Teams. ☐

I understand that my interview data will be transcribed from the recording ~~and anonymised to protect my identity.~~

I understand that my personal information and data, including audio recordings from the research will be securely stored and remain strictly confidential. Only the research team will have access to this information, to which I give my permission.

It has been explained to me what will happen to the data once the research has been completed.

I understand that if I make a disclosure that has legal implications, such as disclosure of an unreported crime, or safeguarding issue concerning the involvement of a person under the age of 16 in a crime, this information will be passed on to my Director of Studies and/or my second supervisor and may result in the involvement of the police

I understand that short, ~~anonymised~~ quotes from my interview may be used in the thesis and that these will not personally identify me.

I understand that the thesis will be publicly accessible in the University of East London's Institutional Repository (ROAR).

I understand that short, ~~anonymised~~ quotes from my interview may be used in material such as conference presentations, reports, articles in professional and academic journals resulting from the study and that these will not personally identify me.

I would like to receive a summary of the research findings once the study has been completed and am willing to provide contact details for this to be sent to.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

…… …….

Participant's Signature

…… ……..

Researcher's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

……..

Researcher's Signature ……

Date: ……..…….

Appendix 7 – Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

Research Title: The lived experience of Black and dual heritage men in London involved in knife-enabled crime – An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

- Maybe we can start by talking about you and your life before getting involved in using the knife.

- Can you tell me when you first used a knife to physically hurt or harm someone?

- Looking back, how you understand your actions today?

- Is there anything else which you would like to say?

Appendix 8 – Participant Debrief Letter

PARTICIPANT DEBRIEF LETTER

Thank you for participating in my research study on the lived experience of Black men in London involved in knife-enabled crime. This letter offers information that may be relevant in light of you having now taken part.

What will happen to the information that you have provided?

The following steps will be taken to ensure the confidentiality and integrity of the data you have provided.

- Once the interview is complete and the recording is over, I will personally transcribe the recordings removing any information that might lead to you being identified. This means that I will write up the interviews, word-for-word, making sure that they are anonymised meaning that any details that might identify you will be removed from the start including any names, places or people. Instead of your name, I will attach a number to the transcript e.g., Transcript 001. The anonymised transcript will be available to my supervisor and examiners, but they will not be able to identify you as there will be no identifiable details on it.

- This write-up will be stored on my password protected University's SharePoint account. Once the study is completed, all analysed data and transcripts will be stored in my private password protected SharePoint account.

- When the interview is over, you will have 3 weeks to request to withdraw from the research.

What if you have been adversely affected by taking part?

It is not anticipated that you will have been adversely affected by taking part in the research, and all reasonable steps have been taken to minimise potential harm. Nevertheless, it is still possible that your participation – or its after-effects – may have been challenging, distressing or uncomfortable in some way. If you have been affected in any of those ways you may find the following resources/services helpful in relation to obtaining information and support:

- The Samaritans – tel.: 116 123, email: jo@samaritans.org; website: https://www.samaritans.org/ - this is a 24 hour service

- Mind – 0300 123 3393; Email info@mind.org.uk; website: https://www.mind.org.uk/

- Shout – text messaging service – 85258; website: https://giveusashout.org/
  Shout 85258 is a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope

You are also very welcome to contact me via my email u1929202@uel.ac.uk or my supervisor, Dr Claire Marshal at c.marshall@uel.ac.uk if you have specific questions or concerns.

Contact Details

If you would like further information about my research or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

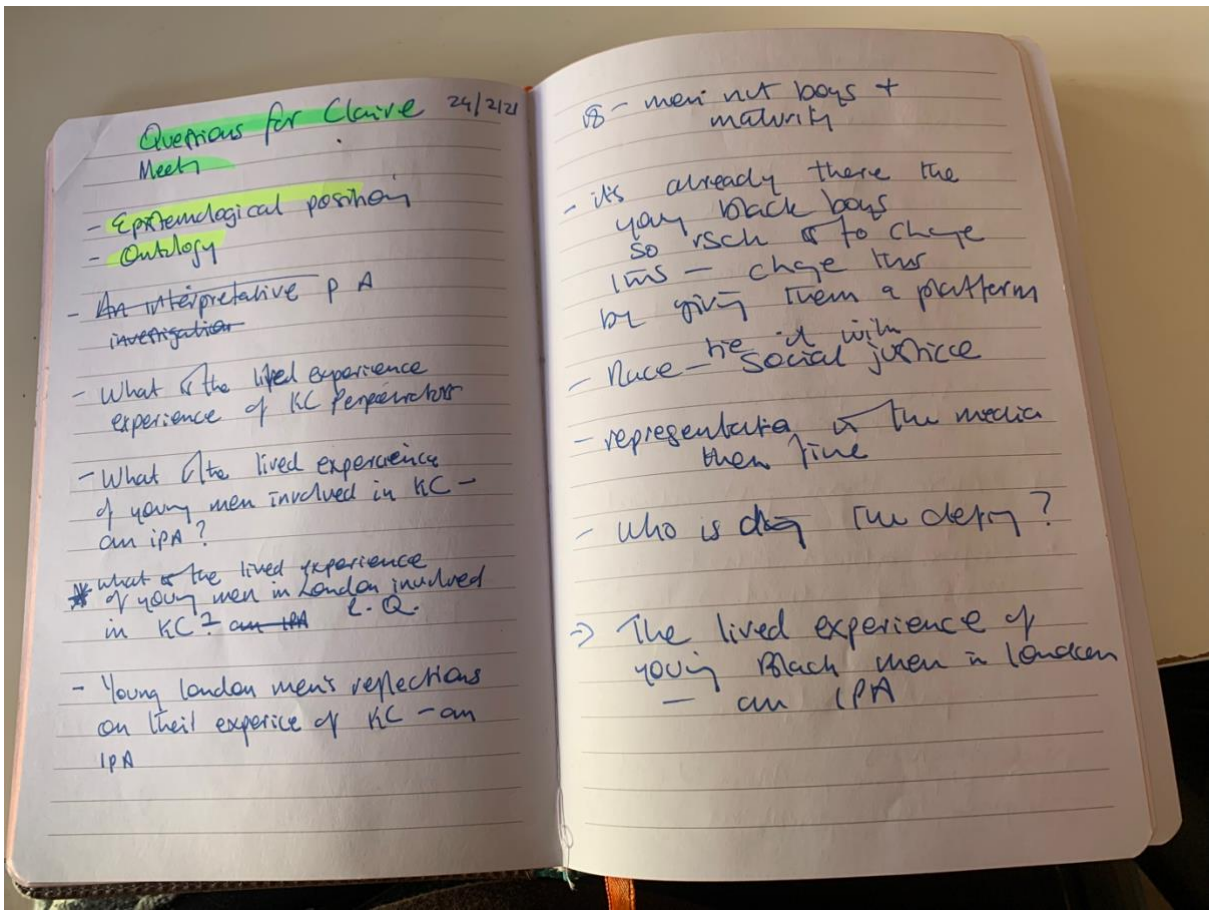
My name is Soila Sindiyo and my email address is u1929202@uel.ac.uk

If you have any questions or concerns about how the research has been conducted please contact the research supervisor Dr Claire Marshall School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ, Email: c.marshall@uel.ac.uk

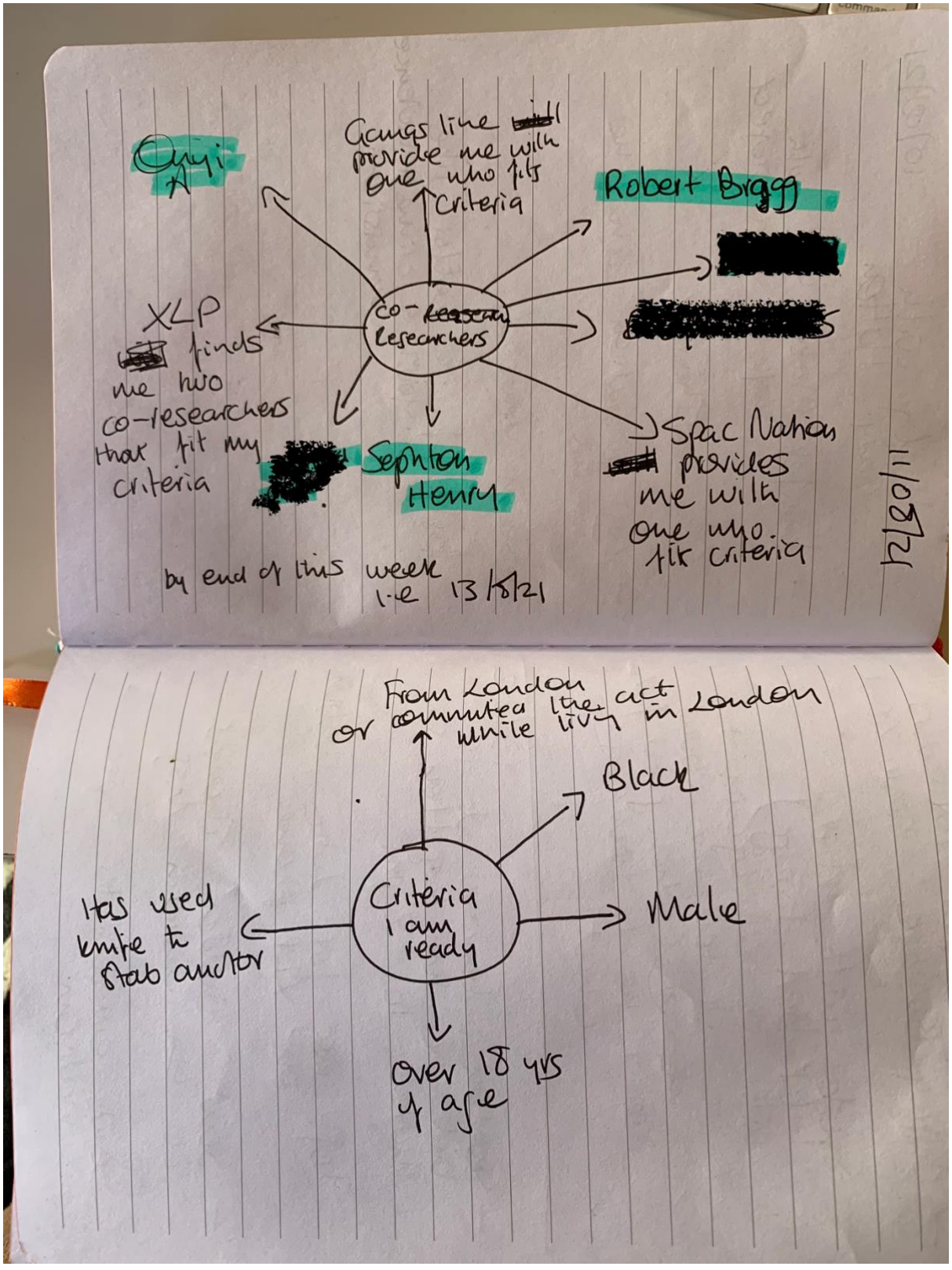
or

Chair of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Sub-committee: Dr Tim Lomas, School of Psychology, University of East London, Water Lane, London E15 4LZ.
(Email: t.lomas@uel.ac.uk)

Appendix 9 – Working through Research Titles



Appendix 10 – Working through Criteria and participant search


Gangs line will provide me with one who fits criteria
Robert Bragg
XLP finds me two co-researchers that fit my criteria
Spac Nahian provides me with one who fit criteria
Sephton Henry
by end of this week i.e 13/5/21
11/05/21
From London or committed the act while living in London
Black
Criteria I am ready
Has used knife to stab another
Male
over 18 yrs of age

Appendix 11 – Example Interview Transcript Analysis - RB

Experiential themes	Transcript	Exploratory comments
Showing toughness, being a man as form of protection from potential harm from others *The toughness was a façade – a self-imposed one – internally he was afraid* *Feeling deep regret, remorse now for his actions and what they meant for his victim* *Reflecting back and comparing the RB then and now – inner changes*	whenever you see me or hear my name, you know that okay this guy will stab you innit, so don't trouble him, just, just leave him alone. And that was my way of letting everyone know I'm not a guy to be messed around with, so leave me alone. And it wasn't some kind of pride trip, I just wanted to be left alone. I was afraid! I was afraid! Most of it was driven by fear. Yeah man. Yeah And the guy, yeah man, it's not nice. It's not nice. The guy, he didn't deserve it you know what I mean. He didn't deserve it. He ended up moving, moving houses, as well. And then, [short pause] Yeah, it's not nice. **SS: Yeah** RB: Not nice man. But in that situation in the years, I didn't feel the way I'm feeling now. There was no guilt. There was no conviction. There was no remorse. It was just like, this is what I've got to do to survive, so I'll do it.	*Masculinity – ego/pride – sounds like this was more a way of protecting himself through the creating of this tough man identity* *He was announcing his toughness – might show that he really wanted people to know who he was and what he can do so that he can be safe from harm?* *Had he identified with the aggressor father instilling fear and potential punishment in others also machismo, masculinity* *"I was afraid! I was afraid! Most of it was driven by fear! Fear intensified - blinded by fear - is this PTSD - not a pride thing- but a need to survive* *Thinking of the victim – is this in retrospect or was it what he thought at the time?* *Did the beatings suffered at home contribute to this way of rationalising his actions in terms of poor decision making or poor coping skills when stressed* *Remorse, regret - feels like it's more than that - attrition?* *"Not nice" - the action itself? The experience of it or the fact that he hurt someone else who 'didn't deserve it'* *How does he understand his actions today* *How does he understand his actions now? Guilt, remorse, not nice, thoughts about the guy who had to move house* *I've got to survive - this war, this conflict*

Appendix 12 – Tabulating the final arrangement of PETs (RB) with quotes

Home life	Father maltreatment and relationship	Running away from home to join the "new found family"	Life in gang	Knife carrying and use	Leaving the knife life
But things started to change because my parents decided to start a church. They also decided to open up our family home when I was 8 years old, they decided to open up our family home and convert it into a rehab programme for drug addicts. (p.1)	my dad was very strict and the way that affected me was, I didn't think my dad cared about me or loved me because he was always disciplining me (p.1)	Me and my sister, we came to the conclusion that our parents didn't love us, so as life went on, when things came up to join a gang, I didn't think twice. I didn't think about my parents. I didn't think about my sister, my brothers, I just thought this is what I need.	It just meant hang around with them, just being around them every day, spending time with them, just looking out for each other, just family. (p.8)	So, I started carrying that, I was 12	So I just thought, this is, this is, it's all just mad! It's all messed up and I wanted to change. (p.22)
So we moved from our flat into east London, into erm Leyton, just off Beaumont estate and we built a four-bedroom house and my parents started take in a lot of drug addicts. So we had 21 people that was living with us in the same house. There was me and my mum, my dad and my sister and my little brother at the	he would always discipline me, and er I just thought he didn't care about me (p.1)	Me and my sister, we came to the conclusion that our parents didn't love us, so as life went on, when things came up to join a gang, I didn't think twice. I didn't think about my parents. I didn't think about my sister, my brothers, I just thought this is what I need.	Within the first 6 months of me saying, yes to the gang. I spent a lot of my time with the gang, with the older lot. They would take me to things with them, like when they would commit a crime. I would see some of them get into fights with knives where they	I started carrying a knife because, so everyone around me from my perspective was doing it at the time because all of my friends were gang members, everyone that was hanging around had a knife on them and I felt like I was at a disadvantage. I really felt like I was at a disadvantage not having a knife and	. I wanted a way out and the only way I saw how to get out was to kill myself, because I didn't know how to change. I didn't know how to turn my life around. I didn't know how to get a job. I didn't know how to do nothing! All I knew was crime, hate, anger, rage and prison. (p.22)

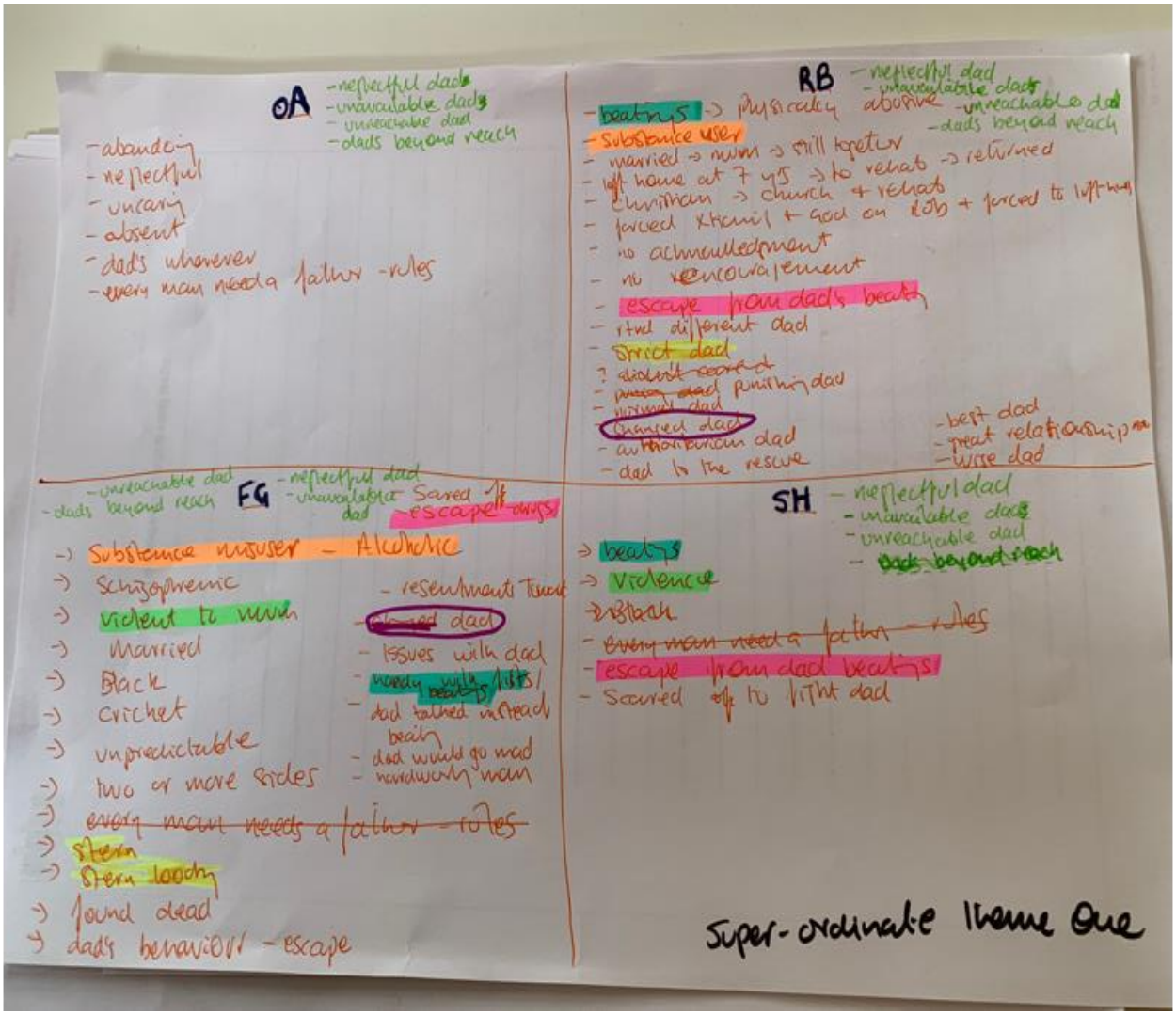
time. I've got two other brothers, but they didn't live with us. I never had my own room growing up, growing up. There was always 5 of us in one room. And in the 3 other bedrooms there was 7 people in each room that was suffering from drug addiction, depression and suicide. (p.1)			had been stabbed themselves or slashed in their face. And I'm only 12 years old and I've seen all this stuff and I'm thinking to myself, okay? (p.9)	because I saw all these stabbings happening and my friends getting robbed and them robbing people and them stabbing people, I just felt like I need to have a knife. And then I remember, [unclear 00:33:16 line break]. I thought, I don't want that to happen to me. (p.10)	
my perception as a kid growing up was that my parents didn't love me, and they didn't care about me because all their time was spent helping out drug addicts and praying for people and going to church and all that stuff. And yeah they dragged me along, but I didn't want to go, so I was forced to do a lot of things that I didn't want to do when it came to being a kid. (p.1-2)	I thought he was beating me because he didn't love me. (p.1)	Come join our gang! Come join our gang! And at that moment, I know it may sound silly to a lot of people, but I just felt like, I felt loved. I thought that was love to me anyway. I thought, wah these guys actually care about me. They're giving me attention. (p.4)	. I was finding my feet and I didn't know what role I wanted to play but until I saw my friends get stabbed and I saw my friends get robbed. And that's when I said, okay, I need to make a name for myself. I need to do something so people will know that not, this is, this is who I am and not to mess around with me. I didn't want to get stabbed. I didn't want to get robbed. I didn't want to get	So for me carrying a knife, I heard all this stuff going round about Damilola Taylor that he got killed and from seeing the stuff on the news and just hearing about people getting murdered and stabbings, I just made a choice now. I said, okay, I need to carry a knife to protect myself. But that didn't mean that [short pause] people would leave you alone if you had a knife on you. (p.10)	but before I attempt to take my life, I said I'm going to try something. Now, I said a little prayer when I was in the police station... but I said a prayer to get out of trouble. Like, like if you can get me out of this, I promise you I'll go to church. (p.22)

			slashed in the face, all that stuff. I didn't want to get shot. I didn't want to be that victim. So that's when I made the choice to start being more active and started to commit crime. (p.9)		
I was forced to lift my hands in church. And when I, when I said no, when I got home my parents would beat me. (p.2)	I developed a sense of hatred towards my father, because of the way he was treating me and the way he made me feel. (p.5)	the reason why I said, yes, was because I just felt that that is what I needed at the time. I wasn't getting any love or attention from my parents when I needed it and I really felt that this is what I need. This is going to be my family. So I said, yes. (p.4)		So I thought, okay I need to do something. I need to use it. I need to use it because there is one thing carrying a knife but if you're not going to use it then there is no point carrying it, so I decided to use it. (p.10)	So I went to the front, and I just lifted my hands and I said, God if you're real, help me. ...and God came. I felt this warm presence on me that I'd never felt before in my life. And in my assemblies, I tell the kids like that in every assembly, no he didn't come on a big white cloud with a nice, beautiful voice saying Rob this is God. That would have been cool though. I got a warm presence on me like someone got a hot towel and wrapped it around me and felt this voice say to

					me, I love you man, and everything is going to be alright. (p.22)
My parents didn't know. I think they only knew that I was doing bad things or not doing bad things. Well yeah. I never spoke to my parents about it. I didn't think they cared anyway. I never spoke to my parents about anything. I would never sit down with them and talk to them about my feelings, my emotions what's going on. They didn't make me feel like I could. (p.9)	He would beat me. He would use a belt, the curtain rod, the hosepipe, broomsticks, just whatever to beat me, because obviously I was misbehaving in their eyes. And erm, he would erm force me to write scriptures from the Bible, (p.5)	I just knew they were going to be my newfound family. We were going to have each other's back. We were going to look out for each other and I'm going to be loyal (p.4)	Not nice man. But in that situation in the years, I didn't feel the way I'm feeling now. There was no guilt. There was no conviction. There was no remorse. It was just like, this is what I've got to do to survive, so I'll do it. (p.11)	] I used the knife on someone because that was my way of telling everyone that I would do whatever it takes to protect myself, so leave me alone. So whenever you see me or hear my name, you know that okay this guy will stab you innit, so don't trouble him, just, just leave him alone. And that was my way of letting everyone know I'm not a guy to be messed around with, so leave me alone. And it wasn't some kind of pride trip, I just wanted to be left alone. I was afraid! I was afraid! Most of it was driven by fear. Yeah man. Yeah And the guy, yeah man, it's not nice. It's not nice. The guy, he didn't deserve it you know what I mean. He didn't deserve it. He ended up moving, moving	my mind was clear and I felt peace. Now, I felt a bit weird innit, I was thinking wah, okay this is what it feels like to have peace. Nothing, I had no worries man. Everyone was happy. I went back to my parent's house actually, and I was good. (p.23)

				houses, as well. And then, [short pause] Yeah, it's not nice. (p.11)	

Appendix 13 - Creating a Group Experiential Theme One from participants Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) One – Focus on fathers



Appendix 14 – Group Experiential Themes for Father Theme and quotes

Participant	RB	SH	FG	OA
Physical Abuse/Dad	I was forced to lift my hands in church. And when I, when I said no, when I got home my parents would beat me. " (p.2) "He would beat me. He would use a belt, the curtain rod, the hosepipe, broomsticks, just whatever to beat me" (p.5) "He would basically give me a choice, son listen, you can write out 100 scriptures and he would give me a scripture of whatever I misbehaved on and he said, you can write this out 100 times or you can get beat. So sometimes I would choose the scriptures, because I didn't want beating, because it is more painful" (p.5) "If I didn't learn the scripture then I would get more scriptures or beats and sometimes I'd get both"(p.6) "My dad told me to go to the front and lift my hands. I said, no. So he said, alright. So when I got home they, my mum and my dad held me down on the top	"My mum was sending me to my dad and my dad was beating me." (p.7) "I came from a dysfunctional home. I'll say this. My dad was beating me," (p.4) ". I didn't tell you but my uncle, he used to beat me" (p.14) "My dad would beat me, my uncle would beat me. Violence had been a part of my life before I even… I came into violence," (p.15)	"Yeah, but the thing is, is that what I've learned is that when you get like a beating or they're screaming and shouting they all kind of turn into one?" (p.3) "I thought, I thought that was the most effective thing. Beatings just kind of filled me with anger, resentment and the, the need in me to rebel." (p.3) "You know you were told to come home at a certain time and I was always covering for you that because dad he would go mad when you come back late. She said, you know, cause your dad could be pretty handy with his fists." (p.3) "my cousin he started having a go at me and then my aunt was there and she started to defend me. She said you don't know what he was like. He threw xxxx down the stairs when he was three years old and I was like, ooh, what did that come from?"(p.31) "To, to, to be the way he was and he also had a mild schizophrenia, so	PARENTAL ABANDONMENT "My dad left at a very early age, can't remember how old" (p.1) "Well, when my, when, when my dad was still around, we were, I think it was a white garment, used to go to a white garment church, then, then he left and then we became or we were Catholics" (p.6)

	bunk and they just beat me like until I listened." (p.6) "I don't wanna go home because if I go home my dad is going to force me to do stuff I don't wanna do and if I don't do it he's going to beat me. So I'm not going to go back to that! That's dead!" (p.13)		he made his his behaviour quite unpredictable (p.1)	