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Sinclair, Donna

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Abstract

According to recorded crime figures female youth offending rates are continuing to increase despite a decrease in overall youth offending rates. Despite this female youth aggression, violence and offending continues to be an under-researched area within social sciences. The current literature (n=8) on female youth aggression was examined through a themed analysis. The common explanations given in the current literature for the increase in female youth aggression were examined. The methodologies of the current research were evaluated with discussions on how effectively they explain the rise of female youth aggression. Further analysis was conducted on the ethical implications of conducting research into aggressive female youths. The findings indicate that the literature does not effectively explain the increase in female youth aggression or violence. This review also found that current methodologies are not always effective at investigating female youth aggression. One key issue raised from the literature was the impact that social, emotional and psychological issues can have on female youth offending; highlighting this as a key area for further investigation. This review found that the need for further research into the area of female youth aggression outweighs the potential ethical issues. The implications and recommendations for further research into female youth aggression, violence and offending are discussed.

Introduction

Recently, there have been several sensationalist claims made by the media in the United Kingdom that female youth aggression is increasing at an unprecedented rate, see Shaw (2019). With a new culture of masculine female youths who are, according to Muncer, Campbell, Jarvis & Lewis (2001), terrorising the nation and causing fear. According to the Office for National Statistics (2016) aggressive and violent female youth offending rates are continuing to increase. Despite this continuing rise, female youth aggression and violence are still under researched areas (Hutton & Woodworth, 2014). With the majority of research focusing on male youth violence and aggression. Walmsley (2014) argues that with world-wide female prison populations increasing at a faster rate than male prison populations it is important to investigate the reasons behind these increases. The aims of this review are to investigate the effectiveness of current research into female youth aggression. This research will critically review the current literature and methodologies used for gathering data on female youth aggression. In addition, a critical review of the ethical implications of conducting research into aggressive female youths aged 17-21 will be conducted. The findings from this review will be used to make recommendations to inform future practice and research.

Background

Trembley, Hartup & Archer (2005) argue that aggression is difficult to define due to the number of variables and the social and moral judgements that need to take place when assessing a behaviour. Nevertheless, Trembley et al (2005) do contend that intra-species intent to cause pain or harm should be central to the definition of aggression. According to Gavin & Porter (2015) this definition encompasses any interpersonal violence that occurs in everyday life. For this review violent actions will also be included, as several studies include female youth offenders who have been charged with violent crimes. The World Health Organisation (2019) state that violence is:

“the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (WHO,2019).

This definition can also be applied to Trembley et al's (2005) definition of aggression as both agree that there must be the intention to act and to cause injury and harm. The WHO's (2019) definition of violence also

includes behaviours against the community, which could be applied to female gang actions. Female gang violence and aggression will also be included and discussed in this review.

Recent Youth Justice Statistics (2018), as shown below in table 1, indicate that there has been an increase in aggressive crimes, such as knife crime and violence against the person. Indeed, several recent headlines have discussed the pandemic of youth knife crime, see Independent (2018) & Shaw (2019). In addition, according to the youth Justice Statistics (2018), physical aggression has increased amongst female youth offenders. Historically, George (1999) argues that, female aggression has been considered as insignificant and occasional, which has led to an overconcentration of the ‘maleness’ of violence. According to Krabbendam, Jansen, van de Ven, van de Molen, Doreleyers & Vermeiria, (2014), the concentration on the ‘maleness’ of violence has resulted in the focus of research into aggression and violence targeting mainly male populations. Indeed, female aggression is generally under-researched within the social and behavioural sciences. Hutton & Woodworth (2014) argue that this is especially the case in relation to female youth aggression.

Table 1.

Youth Justice Statistics on Aggressive Crimes and Female Youth Custody Populations.

Year	Number of knife or offensive weapon crimes committed by children.	Violence against the person, percentage of crimes.	Percentage of the Female Youth Custody Population. First time entrants aged 10-17 years.
2013-2014	2,800	22%	Not reported.
2014-2015	3,000	24%	21%
2015-2016	3,800	26%	21%
2016-2017	4,200	28%	49%
2017-2018	4,500	29%	49%

Note. From Youth Justice Statistics 2014-2019.

Snethen & Van Puymbroeck, (2008) maintain that whilst the amount of physical aggression demonstrated by females is still less than males, the percentage of arrests for physical aggression has amplified for females. According to the Youth Justice Statistics (2017-2018) females make up forty-nine per cent of the youth custody population aged 10-17 years old, as shown above in table 1. The number of overall arrests, for all offence groups, has decreased by eight per cent over the last ten years, however, there has been an increase in the number of more ‘aggressive’ offences (Youth Justice Statistics, 2018). For example, the possession of weapons offences has increased by ten percentage points and violence against the person offences have increased by four percentage points (Youth Justice Statistics, 2018). Due to the way this

information is reported it is difficult to determine if this overall increase is due offences committed by females or males. However, as the number of females in custody is increasing it would be prudent to conclude that there has been an increase in the number of females committing more violent and aggressive offences.

A significant amount of historical research, Archer & Haigh (1997), and more current research, Vilojoen, O'Neill & Sidhu (2005), focuses on the differences between genders and does not treat female aggression as a separate research area. Archer & Haigh (1997) found that there was no significant difference between male and female prisoner's beliefs about physical violence and aggression. Indeed Archer & Haigh (1997) argue that for both genders those that had been convicted of violent offences scored significantly higher for overall aggression levels. In contrast, Vilojoen et al (2005) found that aggressive male adolescent offenders were more prone to physical aggression. Whereas aggressive female adolescent offenders were more likely to be involved with bullying. As Sharma, Kishore, Sharma & Duggal (2017) contend, these differences may well be explained by the time differences in when the research was conducted and the development of social media and online bullying.

Indeed, Sharma et al (2017) research supports Vilojoen et al (2005) suggesting that adolescent males are more likely to fight in-person and that adolescent females are more prone to bullying behaviour. Vilojoen et al (2005) also concluded that female offenders who are aggressive and prone to bullying are often victims of bullying themselves. Considering the more recent findings of Vilojoen et al (2005) and Sharma et al (2017) it would be reasonable to speculate that female and male youth aggression manifest differently. As Police Care UK (2019) suggest bullying can result in harm, fear and threat, which supports both Trembley et al (2005) and the WHO (2019) definitions of aggression and violence. Therefore, implying that bullying is another form of aggressive behaviour that should not be overlooked. Sutton (2017) argues that the differences in how aggression is displayed across genders, also raises concerns as to whether research into female and male youth aggression should be conducted as a comparison of the genders. Due to the complex nature of aggression and violence in general, Sutton (2017) argues that female youth aggression should be treated as a separate research topic and should not be compared to male youth aggression.

As Gavin & Porter (2015, p.3) point out, female aggression "has become more prevalent" not just in the criminal justice system but also in sports and the media. According to Snethen & Van Puymbroeck, (2008) females are exposed to aggression from a wide range of sources, including family, community and more increasingly media and social media. Young, Young & Len-Rios (2017) support Snethen & Van Puymbroeck, (2008) suggesting that female youths were more likely to use social media than their male counterparts and that female youths were more likely to perpetrate and be victims to online aggression. According to Slonje &

Smith (2008) online bullying and aggression is now a main form of bullying for youths. Once again, demonstrating that bullying should be viewed as a serious form of aggression. In contrast, Sharma, Kishore, Sharma & Duggal (2017) argue that male youths are more likely to be the victims of both online and offline aggression. Sharma et al's (2017) research was conducted in India whereas Young et al's (2017) study was conducted in America. Indicating that cultural differences may account for the discrepancies in their findings. The contradictory findings of Young et al (2017) and Sharma et al (2017) suggest that further research needs to be completed around female youths and the influence of social media on aggression, especially in the United Kingdom.

Bandura (1973;1978) argues that exposure to violence or aggression only aids to increase the knowledge and acceptance of aggression. Indeed, to trigger aggressive acts individuals are responding to heightened emotional arousal 'caused by either a perceived infliction of wrong upon the self or an attempt to gain status or power' (Bandura, 1973;1978). Grusec (1999) suggests that through socialisation aggression is caused by exposure to frustration and that the motivation to injure is learned through secondary reinforcement. Grusec (1999) also argues that observational learning has a large impact on aggression and violence. Bandura's (1973;1978) and Grusec's (1999) theories are supported by Batchelor's (2005) findings, which suggest that female youth offenders felt rage when they were unable to protect people from the similar violence that they had been subjected too.

Additionally, Batchelor (2005) found that approximately two-fifths of young women in youth custody witness regular incidents of 'serious' violence between their parents and are often victims of violence themselves. According to Crawford, Whitbeck & Hoyt (2011) exposure to aggression implies that responsiveness to violence can be learned and that growing-up in a violent environment increases the chance of violent responses. Indicating that aggressive and violent female youths often have complex family environments. As Crawford et al (2011) argue the complex family environments that aggressive female youths face may cause a direct correlation between their behaviour and their aggression levels. Further exploration of family environments is needed in order to fully understand why female youths commit aggressive crimes.

Severe aggression is common and problematic with detained female adolescents, according to Krabbendam, Jansen et al (2014). Aggression can also impact on future outcomes, as Foster & Jones (2006) contend aggressive adolescent females are prone to educational difficulties, substance misuse problems and early sexual promiscuity. Crawford, Whitbeck & Hoyt (2011) argue that female youth offenders often face complex social and emotional factors that directly impact on their aggression levels. Supporting Foster & Jones

(2006) Crawford et al (2011) also conclude that female youths, aged 16-19, who suffered a from history of abuse and substance abuse disorders are more likely to be violent.

To further highlight the complex social and emotional issues that aggressive female youths face, Batchelor (2005) found that over half of female youths in custody had been looked after by the local authority at some point in their life. Crawford et al (2011) support Batchelor's (2005) findings and propose that for female youths anytime spent homeless or living on the streets, increased the probability of aggressive and violent behaviour. Batchelor (2005) also concluded that grief, especially over the loss of children, was a source of anger amongst female youth offenders. Batchelor (2005) found that a mixture of these complex social and emotional factors were significant contributors to female youth aggression. Supporting Crawford et al (2011) and emphasising not only the complexity of female youth aggression but also the complicated social and emotional factors that female youth offenders face. Highlighting the need for further research to be conducted into this area, especially when deciding how to punish and rehabilitate females who have committed aggressive crimes.

Muncer, Campbell, Jervis & Lewis (2001) argue that the increasing number of arrests for violent young women has led the British media to label aggressive female youths as 'ladettes'. A term which, according to Sharpe (2009) has derived from the perceived adoption of 'laddish' and 'masculine' behaviour by female youths. As such Brennan & Vanderburg (2009) argue that female youth offenders are often treated more harshly by the criminal justice system. Chesney-Lind (1999) contends that when female offenders commit aggressive acts they are considered 'unfeminine' as they are seen to be breaking traditional gender 'norms'. Mankarious (2013) argues that aggressive females are often seen as 'double deviant' and 'bad women'. To some extent they are being punished based on their gender alone. However, Grabe, Trager, Lear & Rauch (2006) argue that the media treats female criminals more leniently than male criminals, unless males and females collaborate on a crime.

Sharpe (2009) argues that historically police chivalry enabled crimes committed by female youths to be overlooked. However, Sharpe (2009) concludes that this leniency is no longer the case and that police interventions have led to more female youths being drawn into the criminal justice system. Mankarious (2013) also argues that violent and aggressive females are often treated more harshly by the media and society as well as the criminal justice system. It is therefore important investigate whether the 'ladette' image as described by Muncer et al (2001) is in fact influencing how female youth aggression is viewed and subsequently dealt with. Due to the complexities around female aggression, aggressive or violent female offenders deserve to have research conducted on them separately from male offenders.

Rationale

According to Walmsley (2014) world-wide female prison populations growing sharply and at a faster rate than male prison populations. Therefore, it is important for current research in this emerging area to be reviewed. As previously discussed, exposure to female aggression and violence is increasing and there appears to be an increase in the number of aggressive female youth offenders. As such it is important to understand the current research that has been conducted into this area. By completing a critical review of the current literature this research will be able to discover if the rise in female youth aggression is being effectively explained. It is important to address this, as highlighted by Muncer et al (2001), as aggressive females are being labelled as 'ladettes' and compared to aggressive males. This could have a detrimental effect on the way aggressive females are perceived not only by society but also by the criminal justice system. Consequently, impacting on punishment, sentencing and rehabilitation of female youth offenders.

It is also essential to review the current methodologies being used to investigate female youth aggression. There are numerous implications for this area of research if methodologies are not effectively investigating female aggression or violence. Without the correct method of data retrieval, research will not be able to provide an insight into why female youth aggression appears to be increasing at such a fast rate. Additionally, without the correct methodology research will not be able to put forward recommendations on how to treat and rehabilitate violent or aggressive female youths. Petticrew & Robert (2006) suggest that by completing a critical review of the methodologies that current research has used; recommendations can be made to best inform future practice. This in turn will allow for more focused 'female only' studies. Again, resulting in more attention being given to the rehabilitation of an increasing number of aggressive and violent females.

It is important to check that the correct methodologies are being applied to this contemporary issue especially, due to the complexity of female youth aggression and violence. Batchelor (2005) argues that female youth offenders need to work on their emotional responses in order to break the cycle of reoffending. As such professionals need to understand how to help and support female youths in breaking the reoffending cycle. By addressing the anger and frustration concerns of the female youth offender population. Therefore, it is important to ensure that current methodologies are effective at investigating the causes of female youth aggression, so that the root causes can be addressed. By reviewing the methodologies used the ethical implications for this form of research can also be discussed.

It is crucial for any research that is completed on a sample of female youths aged 17-21 is conducted in an ethical manner. However, as previously discussed a large proportion of female youths have experienced or witnessed violence and aggression from a young age. A large percentage suffer from alcohol or drug addiction. Batchelor (2005) contends that around four-fifths of female youth offending occurs whilst the offender is under the influence of drugs or alcohol. In addition, many female youth offenders have been homeless for a period and, according to Crawford, Whitbeck & Hoyt (2011), approximately 55 per cent have suffered from sexual abuse. Batchelor (2005) also argues that many are experience grief as a result of having their children removed by the state, due to lack of parental care. Indeed, as Batchelor (2005) states these figures many be underestimated due to the difficulties of discussing and disclosing this information. Therefore, it is important to explore whether it is truly ethical to conduct research of female youth offenders

Research questions

The following research questions will be explored throughout this critical review.

- 1) Does the current literature effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression?
- 2) Are the current methodologies used to investigate female youth aggression effective?
- 3) Is it ethical to conduct research on aggressive female youths aged 17-21?

Methodology

Design & setting

A critical review will be conducted on current research into female youth aggression. This approach has been chosen because a critical review can be used to gather an overall picture to help to inform future research efforts (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). It will also gather an accurate picture of past methodologies, which will allow for the development of new methods of research (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006, p. 21). According to Boland, Cherry & Dickson (2017, p.2) critical reviews require a 'definition of the question or problem, identification and critical appraisal of the available evidence, synthesis of the findings and the drawing of relevant conclusions.' These guidelines will be followed to complete this research and allow for recommendations to be made for future research. The focus of this critical review will be on previous research conducted in the United Kingdom into violent and aggressive female youths aged 17-21-years-old.

Search Strategy

After the initial scoping searches, four bibliographical databases were searched for relevant published literature from their inception until April 2018. The following databases were used for the search: EBSCO Host; ProQuest; JSTOR; and google scholar. According to Boland et al (2017) using Boolean operators allows researchers to combine terms and broaden the search parameters. For this review the Boolean operators 'and' and 'or' were used for example, female youths 'and' aggression; aggression 'or' violence. The searches did not include methodological search filters and only full text studies were included. Searches were repeated in November 2018 and May 2019 to identify any relevant new publications, none were found. The following key search terms were used to identify literature: female youth aggression; female youth violence; female gangs; female aggression and violence; female gangs and aggression or violence; youth aggression and violence; aggression and females; violence and female; female aggression United Kingdom; female violence United Kingdom; Female gangs United Kingdom; female gangs aggression or violence.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

All titles and abstracts were screened. The full-text papers were obtained, where possible, for any titles and abstracts that were deemed relevant for the review. The relevance of each paper was assessed according to the inclusion criteria stated in table 2. Studies that did not meet the inclusion criteria were excluded and stored in a separate folder for future reference.

Table 2.

Inclusion Criteria

Population(s)	Females aged 17-21 years old, who resided in the United Kingdom.
Interventions	Youths, gangs, violence, aggression and aggressive behaviour.
Comparators	Research reporting on aggression, violence or gang membership in the United Kingdom.
Outcomes	Any validated research.
Study design	Any study design, including qualitative and quantitative methods.
Setting	Any.

Research Available

Electronic searches identified 958 citations, once duplicates were removed the 902 unique citations could be included for screening. These titles and abstracts were assessed for the relevance to the review (stage 1

screening), this resulted in 17 potential citations were retained. The full text of all but three of these citations were obtained. After applying the inclusion criteria (see table 2) 9 citations were excluded; 2 did not examine the correct interventions; 4 did not meet the population criteria and 3 were not conducted in the United Kingdom. As such, this left 8 citations to be included in this review (see figure 1).

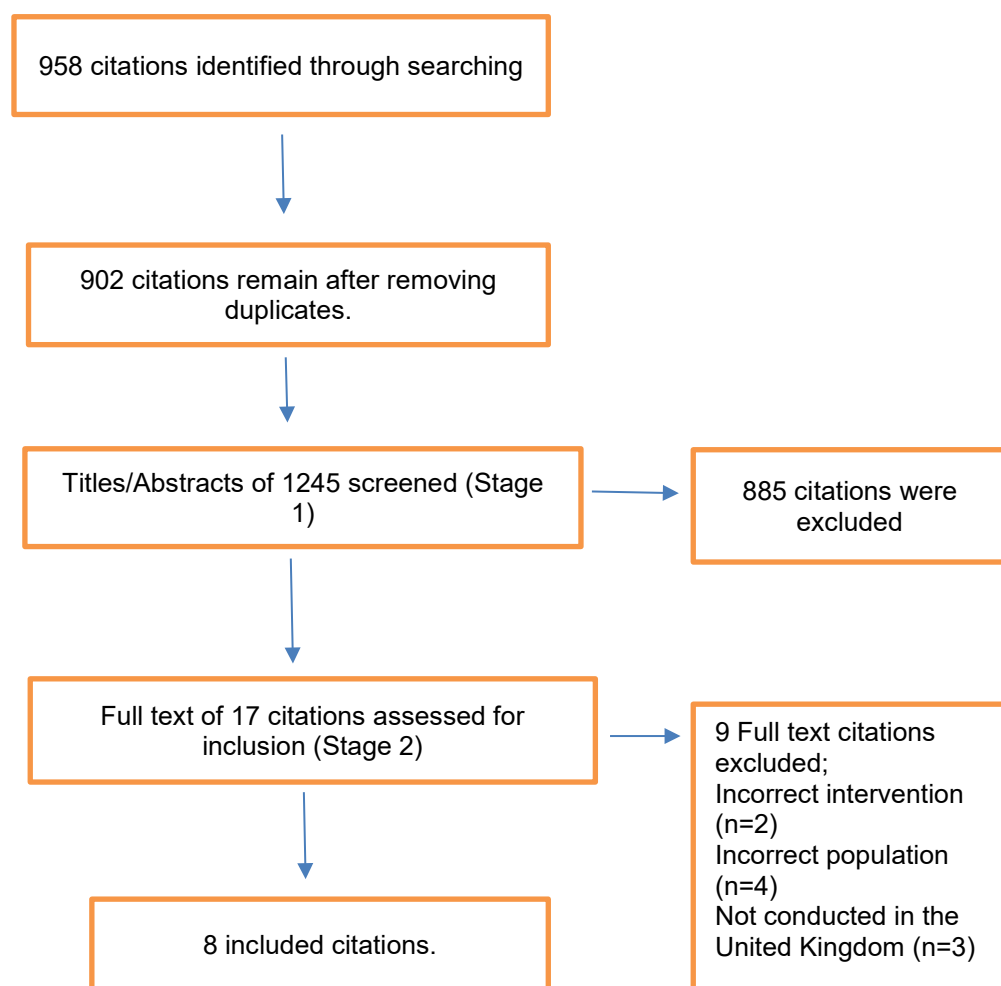


Figure 1 Identification of included studies.

Description of all processes

Boland, Cherry & Dickson (2017) structure will be followed to conduct this critical review into female youth aggression. In step 1- a plan was developed that began to investigate the topic of female youth aggression. Once this was established as a viable research area a timeline of events was created, this allowed for the research to be tracked and managed effectively. Step 2- the scoping research was conducted this involved conducting the preliminary literature searches and allowed for the gathering of suitable initial data. It also provided a snapshot of the amount and type of data available for synthesis. For step 3- the ideas were focused, and the scope of the review was defined. During this process it was decided that qualitative and quantitative

data would be included in this review, especially as the scoping research identified numerous studies that were conducted by interview.

Step 4- involved finalising the review questions (see above) and developing the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as discussed above. Three PICO tables were designed, one for each of the review questions. According to Boland, Cherry & Dickson (2017) a PICO table stands for population, interventions, comparator and outcome. Boland et al (2017) contend that using PICO tables allows for a focused approach to the review and allows for a more in depth understanding of the research questions. The PICO tables for this study are displayed below:

Table 3

PICO table for research question 1

Review question	Does the current literature effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression?
Population	Female youths with a history of violence or aggression. The opinions of other age/ genders will also be included.
Interventions	Any form of research that explores the current rise in female aggression and violence.
Comparator	The comparison of themes throughout the literature, on the potential explanation for the recent increase in female youth aggression.
Outcome	Any discussions or evaluations that focus on female youth aggression or violence, that provide an explanation for the increase in female youth aggression.

Table 4

PICO table for research question 2

Review question	Are the current methodologies used to investigate female youth aggression effective?
Population	Females youth aged 17-21 years old with a history of violence or aggression. The opinions of other age/ genders will also be included.
Interventions	Any form of methodology used to review female youth aggression and violence.
Comparator	The comparison of methods and a critical discussion on how effective those methodologies are for research female youth aggression and violence.
Outcome	Any methodologies that are focused on female youth aggression and violence, and that address the issue of the rise in female youth aggression.

Table 5

PICO table for research question 3

Review question	Is it ethical to conduct research on aggressive female youths aged 17-21?
Population	Current research which involves 17-21-year-old aggressive female youths.
Interventions	Any research that involves the target population and provides an explanation for the increase in female youth aggression.
Comparator	The comparison of the research to discuss the potential ethical issues of using the population sample.
Outcome	Any positive or adverse ethical issues that arise from using the population sample.

For step 5- key search terms were identified and refined, and literature searches were conducted. For this research project the terms used to search for literature included: 'female aggression'; 'aggressive females'; 'aggressive youth females'; 'female gangs'; 'violent females', and 'violent female youths.' Step 6- The literature was screened to ascertain whether it met the inclusion criteria. Any research not conducted in the United Kingdom was excluded along with any research that did not meet the target group, aggressive or violent female youths aged between 17-21 years old (see inclusion and exclusion criteria for more detail). Step 7- all relevant data was extracted from each paper and a summary was developed (see summary of literature for more detail).

Step 8- a critical analysis of the literature was completed, focusing on whether the current literature can effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression. Step 9- The methodological quality was critically analysed, focusing on whether current methodologies can effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression. Step 10- a critical analysis of the ethical issues of conducting research on aggressive female youths aged 17-21 years old was completed. For steps 8-10 a narrative synthesis will be conducted to analyse the data. This will involve summarising the results of the included studies; describing the main characteristics of the included studies; analysis of the methodological and ethical problems and conclusions will then be drawn (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). Step 11- Recommendations will be made to inform future research into the area of female youth aggression. Step 12- The report will be then written up and edited.

Summary of Literature

For this critical review eight pieces of research met the inclusion criteria; they were conducted in the United Kingdom on female youths aged between 17 and 21 years old and were investigating aggression, violence or gang affiliation. Out of the eight studies included six were included in the review of methodologies and ethics. Two were excluded from these sections of analysis as they were providing a summary of previous studies and literature. All eight pieces of research were included in the review of the literature as all offered explanations for why female youth aggression and violence was increasing. In the following section a brief chronological summary will be provided for each piece of research that will be analysed in this critical review. Justifications for the inclusion of each piece of research will also be provided.

The first study to be included was conducted by Muncer, Campbell, Jervis & Lewis (2001), although this research is dated it was included in the review due to the value of the study. Muncer et al (2001) set out to study the 'Ladette' culture amongst young women. One hundred and eighty (75 male and 105 female) undergraduate students were asked to complete a Laddish questionnaire to measure 'Laddish' behaviour and aggression levels. Although, Muncer et al's (2001) study asked both male and female participants they conducted their analysis separately, so their study could be included in this review. Muncer et al (2001) found no relationship between laddish attitudes and aggression in the young women who completed the questionnaire. This study was deemed to be a pivotal piece of research as it set out to see if the portrayal of aggressive female youths as 'Ladettes' was accurate. Muncer et al's (2001) research will be included in all sections of analysis in this critical review.

The next research to be included is Batchelor's (2005) study, again is dated however due to the value of the study it was included in this review. In contrast to Muncer et al's (2001) study, which questioned undergraduate students, Batchelor (2005) conducted in-depth oral history interviews with twenty-one young women detained in HMPYOI Cornton Vale in Scotland. She also interviewed the adults who worked with the young women. In addition, Batchelor (2005) completed a documentary analysis of social work and trial judge reports and programme records. Although Batchelor's (2005) sample was aged 16 to 24 years and slightly outside of the ages boundaries it was decided due to the value of this study it should be included in the review. Through the interviews Batchelor (2005) was able to pose several explanations for why female youths commit violent and aggressive offences. As per Muncer et al's (2001) findings, Batchelor (2005) also found no evidence that laddish behaviour increased aggression in young female offenders. Through gathering background information on the interviewees, Batchelor (2005) was able to identify common themes in the young women's histories and circumstances. Again, the research by Batchelor (2005) will be included in all the sections of analysis for this review.

The third piece of research included was Ringrose's (2006) examination of the discursive construction and social regulation of aggressive female youths. Ringrose's (2006) research was a discursive examination of how the media portrays aggressive female youths. Thus, differing from Muncer et al's (2001) study and Batchelor's (2005) as these both used primary research to investigate why female youths are aggressive. Rather than investigating how aggressive youths are portrayed in the media. In their study, Ringrose (2006) investigated the attention that aggressive female youths nicknamed 'mean girls' received from sensationalist media coverage. Through her examination Ringrose (2006) was able to provide explanations for why there has been an increase in media attention on female aggression and violence, and why female youth aggression seems to be increasing. Ringrose (2006) was also able to investigate the potentially damaging consequences of media attention on female youths, especially due to the shift from the notion of girls as vulnerable to mean. As Ringrose's (2006) provided an examination of media attention it was included in the literature analysis for this review. Ringrose's (2006) study provides insight into the dangers of sensationalising aggressive female youth behaviour and provides an explanation for why female youth aggression is seen to be increasing.

Sharpe's (2009) study was also included in this review, again it is dated research but was valuable to this review. Sharpe (2009) interviewed forty-eight youth justice and related professionals, most of the sample were employed in two youth offending teams in the Midlands of England. The aim of Sharpe's (2009) study was to ascertain why the professionals believed that female youth aggression was increasing. This contrasts with Batchelor's (2005) research which interviewed the female youth offenders themselves as well as the professionals. Although both Sharpe (2009) and Batchelor's (2005) research did set out to understand why female youth aggression is increasing.

Sharpe's (2009) research is also dissimilar to Muncer et al (2001) and Ringrose's (2006) research. Muncer et al (2001) used an undergraduate sample to answer a questionnaire, rather than conducting interviews as Sharpe (2009) did. Unlike Sharpe's (2009) study Ringrose (2006) examined the impact of media attention on aggressive female youths. Although, Sharpe's (2009) research was conducted on an older sample, than the criteria for this review, it was included as it was asking for the opinions on why female youths were aggressive and violent. Through her interviews, Sharpe (2009), was able to pose several explanations as to why female youth offending and aggression was increasing. She was also able to identify common themes around the backgrounds of the young women that her interviewees came in to contact with. Sharpe's (2009) research will be included in all sections of analysis for this critical review.

The next study to be included for analysis is Batchelor's (2009) review into girls, gangs and violence. Again, Batchelor's (2009) research is ten years old however, it has been included in this review as explanations

for female gang violence and aggression are explored. Through her research Batchelor (2009) was able to explore the narratives around female gang affiliation and female violence. Batchelor's (2009) research is completely different from the previous research identified for use in this review, as it was targeting female gang violence as a major reason for the current increase in female youth aggression and violence. Batchelor's (2009) research also investigated the methodological issues raised by conducting research into female gang membership. As Batchelor's (2009) study was examining the discourse around female gang membership and why female aggression may be increasing the study was included in the literature analysis for this review.

Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study was also included in this analysis. Campbell & Muncer (2009) used questionnaires to measure aggression levels and impulsivity for male and female participants. Although, their sample consisted of male and female participants Campbell & Muncer (2009) analysed the data separately and provided a separate set of results by gender, so their study was included in this analysis. Campbell & Muncer (2009) used an opportunity sample of 164 female undergraduates for one component of their experiment and 182 women in the other component. Campbell & Muncer's (2009) has several similarities to that of Muncer et al's (2001) study as both use undergraduate students for their sample. Both studies were also examining the causes for gender differences in aggression. However, Campbell & Muncer's (2009) research was examining a completely different theme for the cause of aggression. Campbell & Muncer (2009) were investigating whether impulsivity has any impact on aggression levels. The theme of impulsivity is not explored in any of the other identified research papers included in this review. The age range of the participants was slightly out of the target range, with the oldest being 24, however the majority were within the target range of 17-21 so Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study was used for analysis. Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study offers insight into whether 'risky' impulsivity may explain gender differences in aggression levels. Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study was analysed in all sections of this review.

The next piece of research to be analysed in this review is Vasquez, Osman & Wood's (2012) study into youth gang affiliation and displaced aggression. Vasquez et al (2012) used a questionnaire on 310 youths attending one of three comprehensive schools in or outside of London. The sample consisted of 185 males and 125 females, although this was a mixed sample the data analysis was completed by gender and a comparison was made. Vasquez et al's (2012) study has similarities to Batchelor's (2009) research as both were examining the impact of gang affiliation on aggression levels. However, Vasquez et al (2012) conducted primary research using a questionnaire whereas Batchelor (2009) conducted a discourse review. Vasquez et al's (2012) research differs from the other research identified for analysis in this review, as they questioned current gang members. This provides a completely different perspective from undergraduates, youth offenders,

and professional. Vasquez et al (2012) found that males were more likely to be gang member than females, however for both genders gang affiliation correlated to increased aggression levels. Vasquez et al's (2012) study provides insight to female gang-related aggression and offers explanations for why female gang membership is increasing. Vasquez et al (2012) also offer some insight into why female youth aggression, particularly for those in gangs, maybe increasing. Vasquez et al's (2012) will be included in all sections of analysis for this critical review.

The final study to be included in this review is Newberry's, Williams & Caulfield's (2013) study into female alcohol consumption, motivations for aggression and aggressive incidents. Newberry et al (2013) used questionnaires on a sample of female university students aged 16 or over to measure alcohol consumption and aggression levels. Again, Newberry et al (2013) use undergraduates as their sample, as per Muncer et al (2001) and Campbell & Muncer (2009). However, Newberry et al (2013) were focusing on alcohol consumption and aggression. Although mentioned, in the other research included in this review, alcohol consumption was not seen as a main theme for the increase in female youth aggression. Therefore, Newberry et al (2013) research is providing a different perspective and theme for the increase seen in female youth aggression. Although, some of the sample fall outside of the target age range for this review, due to the value of Newberry et al's (2013) it will be included. Newberry et al (2013) found that consuming significantly more alcohol increased the chances of the females being involved in an aggressive incident. Newberry et al (2013) explain the increase in female youth aggression, the increase in female alcohol consumption and binge drinking, along with the 'Ladette' culture amongst female youths. This contrasts with Muncer et al (2001) who found no correlation between the 'Ladette' culture and aggression. Newberry et al's (2013) study will be analysed in all sections of this critical review.

As previously justified, some of the research analysed in this review did not meet the inclusion criteria for the age element; some of the participants were over the upper age limit of 21. However, during the extraction process it became more apparent that very little research had been conducted on the targeted age range. Therefore, it was deemed prudent to include some valuable studies in the field that were slightly out of the target age range. It was also noted during the extraction process how all the research was not very current; indeed, the most recent research was completed six years ago. It would appear that female youth aggression for 17-21-year-olds is an extremely under researched area especially in the United Kingdom. During the extraction process much of the research was excluded due to the geographical location of the study. Several studies were also excluded as they analysed male and female aggression levels and did not separate the two

during data analysis or discussion. It was therefore impossible to ascertain which results belonged to the female participants.

Results

The following section will provide a review of the current literature on female youth aggression. Exploring whether the literature can effectively explain the raise of female youth aggression. It will then investigate the current methodologies used and whether they are effective for researching female youth aggression. Finally, this section will discuss whether it is ethical to research female youths aged 17-21 and their aggressive or violent behaviour. Especially considering the complex social and psychological issues that many aggressive female youths experience.

Review of Literature

A common theme amongst the current literature is that female youth aggression is increasing and that a “new breed” of aggressive female youths are emerging. The intention of this section, of this is to determine how effectively the current literature can explain this increase in female youth aggression. The following section will explore the common themes that are generated through the discourse of the current literature, as shown below in figure 2. As well trying to determine why female youth aggression is often compared to male youth aggression and why female youth aggression is often overlooked as a separate area of research.

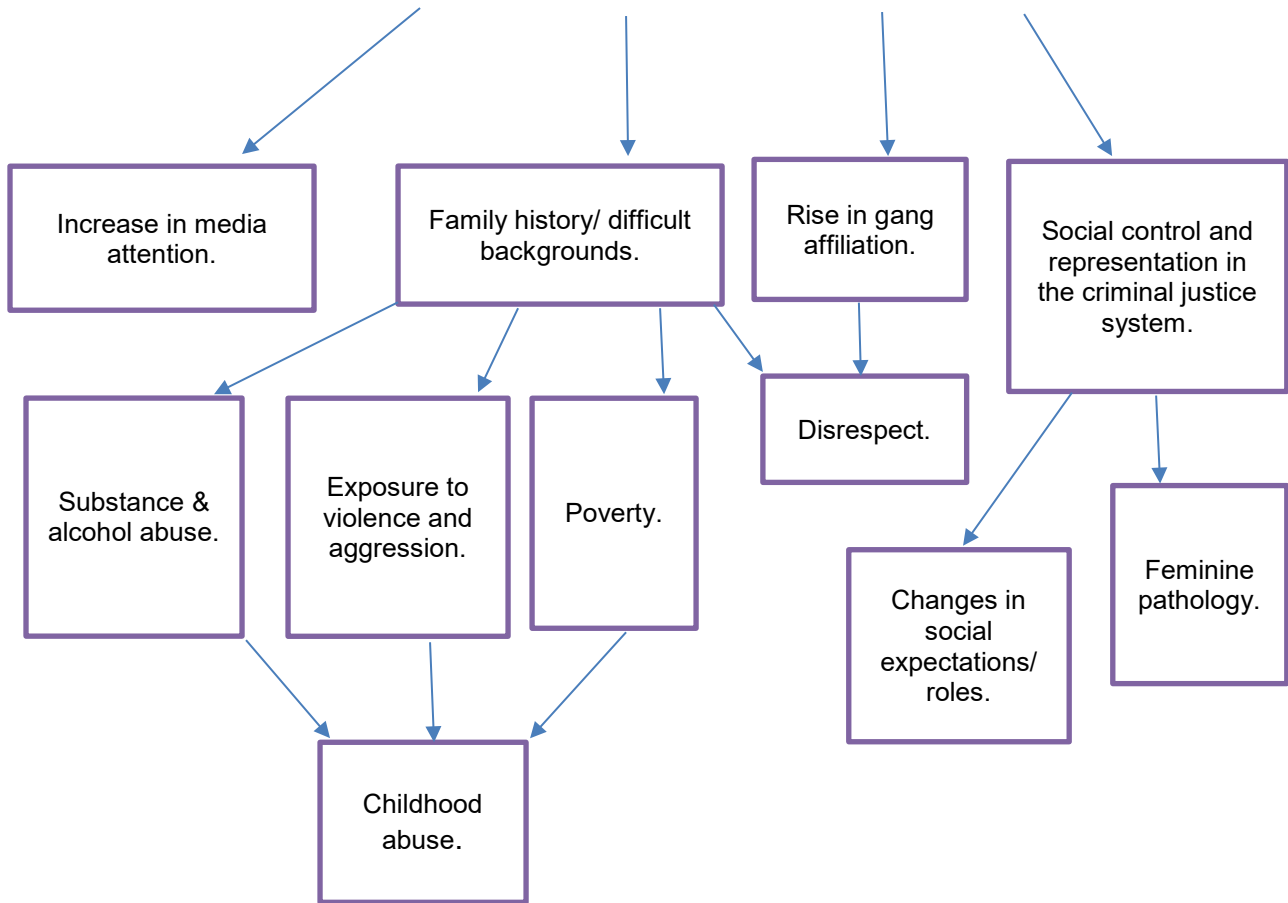


Figure 2. An overview of the common themes identified in this review.

According to a large proportion of the research, included in this review, there has been a severe increase in the number of females being arrested for violent and aggressive behaviours. Sharpe (2009) contends that alongside this there has also been an increase in media attention and television representation of female violent and aggressive behaviours. Indeed, Muncer, Campbell, Jervis & Lewis (2001) and Newberry, Williams & Caulfield (2013) studies both argue that the increase in arrests have led to young women being branded as ‘Ladettes’ due to their masculine behaviours and the masculinity of crime. The term ‘Ladette’ was developed by the British Media and was, according to Muncer et al (2001), created due to rise of masculine attitudes and behaviour amongst young women; where young women are adopting the behaviours of ‘working-class-antisocial’ males. Ringrose (2006) supports this belief and suggests that a ‘new creature’ has been released, ‘a mean girl who is aggressive and bullies’. Implying that a ‘new phenomenon’ of the violent and aggressive young women has suddenly arisen. Obvious issues arise with the concept of violence or aggression with women only occurring recently. Historically, according to Cauffman (2008,) women have instigated aggression and violence in many contexts for generations.

Campbell (1986) suggests that violence or aggression by females is viewed as a defiance of both social and gender norms. Campbell's (1986) conclusions support the theory of the 'Ladette' as a social construct. Whereby young women are embracing the masculine culture and thus becoming more aggressive and prone to committing more violent behaviours (Newberry et al, 2013). Additionally, the young women who are committing those more aggressive behaviours are seen to be defying traditional gender norms (Makarious, 2013). These young women are therefore not only being compared to their male counterparts they are in some ways being judged more harshly by society, particularly by the mass media. Indeed, McVeigh (2002) argues that girls are now posing a bigger problem than boys, especially with bullying behaviours. However, it is difficult to ascertain if this is correct or whether advances in technology and media attention are more likely to be the cause of the 'sudden' rise in female aggression.

According to the Youth Justice Statistics (2019) the way youth crimes are logged and reported has changed recently. These changes along with better online record keeping and cross departmental information sharing procedures may go some way to account for the increase in female youth offending rates. However, Taylor (2016) argues that the police and the youth justice system have increasingly sought to informally deal with offending by children and youths. Taylor (2016) suggests that this has accounted for the large fall in reported youth crime. Indeed, Taylor (2016) reports that youth cautions and convictions dropped by 79 per cent between 2007-2015. This is supported by the Youth Justice Statistics (2019) which report an 8 per cent decrease in youth arrests from 2017-2018. These figures do not support the notion that the changes in youth crime logging and reporting (Youth Justice Statistics, 2019) have caused an increase in female youth offending. It would be prudent to assume that an overall drop in youth arrests would result in a decrease not an increase in female youth offending.

Alder & Worrell (2004) claim historically arresting a girl or young woman for any crime would bring ridicule to the arresting officer. Therefore, historically many crimes committed by girls and young women may have been unrecorded and unreported (Alder & Worrell, 2004). Sharpe's (2009) study supports this claim with a police officer suggesting that in the past police chivalry sometimes occurred. Allowing for crimes committed by girls to be overlooked, especially if they were 'male' offences. Additionally, with media focus and the sensationalised claims such as "girls' aggression is ominous...vicious... and...repressed" (Simmons 2002) it is easy to understand why it is generally believed that female youth aggression is on a steep and severe rise and why it is often linked to the 'masculinity of crime'.

Although, support is provided in the current literature to the claims that female youths are behaving in a more 'Laddish' manner, see Newberry et al (2013), some do not support that claim. This is especially true

for Muncer et al's (2001) study who through their 'Laddish questionnaire' found that for young women there is no relationship between laddish attitudes and aggression. Therefore, it is unfounded for the media to claim that the current rise in female youth violence and aggression is due to an increase in more 'masculine' behaviours by 'Laddish' female youths. Furthermore, it is incorrect for the current literature to use this as an explanation for why female youth aggression and violence is increasing. It would be more prudent for the literature to explore female youth aggression as a separate area of research. Rather than comparing female aggression against male aggression and using 'male aggressiveness' as a standard for how aggressive a female is being. This may provide more insight into why female youth aggression and violence is increasing.

It is also incorrect for the literature to claim that incidents of aggression are increasing due to a new type of violent female youth emerging. As previously discussed historically female youths have committed numerous aggressive crimes. According to Wilson (2013) one such notorious case was that of Mary Ann Cotton, who from the age of 19 (in 1852) had 21-year period of murder. Over that period Cotton killed at least 21 people, mainly children. Another infamous case was that of Mary Bell who, according to Sereny (1995), in 1968 aged 10 or 11 killed 2 young boys. Both occurred in the United Kingdom and are extreme cases of violent acts; however, they do highlight that female youths who are violent and aggressive are not a new concept. It also emphasises that violent crime should not be viewed as an 'overwhelming masculine activity' (Muncer et al, 2001) and that females are as capable of violence. It is, therefore, not appropriate to explain the rise of female youth aggression as the result of a 'new breed' of more masculine 'Ladettes' being created. If anything, this proves that female youths are just as capable of violence as their male counterparts and that more research into this area is required.

Another key theme that runs through a large portion of the literature is that substance and alcohol misuse, particularly binge drinking, has fuelled the rise of aggressive female youths. According to Batchelor's (2005) study one of the main causes of female youth aggression, especially assault, was related to alcohol or drug misuse. Batchelor (2005) found that around four-fifths of their sample had experienced problems with alcohol and a further three-fifths reported being addicted to heroin at the time of their arrest. Furthermore, some interviewees in Sharpe's (2009) study concluded that an increase in alcohol consumption was a main influence behind the rise of female youth violence. Additionally, Newberry, Williams & Caulfield's (2013) research focused entirely on alcohol consumption and motivations for aggression. Newberry et al (2013) concluded that females who had been involved in an aggressive incident had consumed significantly more alcohol at the time of the incident. These studies do provide a direct correlation between alcohol and substance misuse and increased levels of aggression in female youths.

Contrary to their predictions, Newberry et al (2013) found that females who had been involved in aggressive incidents did not report drinking male-orientated drinks (beer). Newberry et al (2013) concluded that the increase in female binge drinkers is due to alcohol that is targeted specifically for the female market. This as well as changes in behaviours and attitudes towards alcohol by British society (Staddon, 2015) has led to an overall increase in general alcohol consumption. However, as Staddon (2015) suggests the increase in alcohol consumption has occurred for both males and females and does not fully explain why there has been more of an increase in aggressive behaviours by female youths only. Therefore, the literature does not fully explain why an increase in overall alcohol consumption has only led to an increase in female youth aggression.

According to Fish, Pollitt, Schuloenberg & Russell (2017) another explanation for the increase in female youth aggression could be that large amounts of alcohol consumption increases the probability of risky behaviour and helps to lower inhibitions. Indeed, Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study found that risky impulsivity correlated with higher levels of aggression for both male and female participants. Although, the male participants reported having higher levels of physical aggression. Again, Campbell & Muncer's (2009) findings do not fully explain why there has been more of an increase in female youth aggression, as appears that binge drinking has a similar impact on males and females. However, their findings do indicate that the lowering of reservations through alcohol or drug consumption may have a dual impact on whether a female youth commits an aggressive act. Further research on the impact of alcohol on female youths is required to fully understand the extent of the problem and whether there are further underlying issues that are causing the increase in female youth violence and aggression.

According to the research by Batchelor (2005) and Sharpe (2009) most of the female youths in custody have underlying emotional, social and mental health problems which is impacting on their alcohol and substance use as well as their aggression levels. Through her interviews with young offenders Batchelor (2005) was able to discuss the historical issues that the young women faced. Out of her sample Batchelor (2005) found that two-fifths of the young women said they had been subjected to sexual abuse and a further two-fifths has suffered from physical abuse. This is further supported by Sharpe's (2009) findings where one youth offending team worker reported that the young women in custody have "really, really broken family backgrounds...Always abused." In addition, the ONS (2016) found that significantly more females reported being the victim of any form of abuse during childhood. Indicating that a history of abuse may have an impact on how female youths cope and may result in an increase in aggressive or violent behaviour.

Further research by Banducci, Hoffman, Lejuez & Koene (2014) found a direct correlation between adults with substance use disorders and incidents of childhood abuse and higher levels of aggression. Banducci et al (2014) also determined that a history of childhood physical abuse increased the probability of being arrested for assault or weapon offences. Banducci et al (2014) conclude that different types of abuse are linked with different types of negative behaviours and that understanding how abuse impacts on an individual may help to rehabilitate offenders. This is especially important when helping to rehabilitate aggressive female youths with a history of abuse. The theme of abuse only runs through a small proportion of the literature covered in this review despite the ramifications. As such this is an area that requires further research to help to understand how victimisation may impact on female youth aggression and violent behaviour.

According to the ONS (2018) suicide rates for females aged 10-24 years old have increased significantly and are at their highest level since 2012. In Batchelor's (2005) study she found that out of the 21 young women being interviewed eight reported that they had attempted suicide an additional twelve said they had self-harmed. This means that nearly all of Batchelor's (2005) sample admitted to suffering from mental health issues. Out of her sample nearly 40 per cent has attempted suicide, which is concerning especially with the general increase in suicide rate amongst female youths (ONS, 2018). Sharpe's (2009) findings offers some support around the impact of mental health and aggression levels in female youths. According to Sharpe (2009) the professionals working for youth offending teams consider low self-esteem as a risk factor for female youth aggression and offending. However, Pollock (2000) argues that linking female youth offending to their low self-esteem is potentially damaging. Pollock (2000) suggests that condemning female offending to part of a women's psychology, rather than addressing the individual experiences and the social and political issues, is oppressive and ignores other contributing factors.

Mental health issues, although touched upon in the narrative, are not treated as a common theme throughout all the literature which is surprising. High levels of mental health issues, grief about past experiences and victimisation are, according to Batchelor's (2005) research, another source of anger. Batchelor (2005) argues that this anger and resentment are the key causes of female youth aggression. However, it is difficult to determine the extent that mental health issues have on aggression levels. It is often difficult for individuals to discuss and disclose experiences which may have impacted on their mental health (Batchelor, 2005). Further research needs to be conducted into this area to try to determine the recent increase in female youth aggression, although this may be difficult due to potential ethical issues.

Concerns around family history are also mentioned in the current literature and offered as an explanation for the increase in female youth aggression. According to the research conducted by Batchelor (2005) a significant number of female youth offenders experienced significant family disruption. Many reported changes to their main care giver and social service involvement; over half had been in care (Batchelor, 2005). Sharpe (2009) argues that female youth offenders are “carrying a lot of baggage in relation to their family histories” (Sharpe, 2009, p. 256). According to Sharpe’s (2009) study female youth offenders tend to have more difficult backgrounds and often tense family relationships and family breakdowns have a negative effect of female youths. Indeed, Arthur (2005) argues that there is a large connection between youth offending and family dysfunction. However, according to the ONS (2019) there are 2.9 million lone parent families in the United Kingdom, with the majority experiencing some kind family disruption. Therefore, it is not suitable to link all family disruptions with female youth aggression. Although, family history and family disruptions maybe contributing factors it is difficult to ascertain if they can be exclusively attributed to the increase in female youth aggression.

Another theme that is discussed in the literature is the impact of poverty on offending and aggression. Sharpe (2009) argues that material deprivation is likely to cause boredom and disaffection amongst poor young people. Poverty is, according to Sharpe’s (2009) interviewees, a significant factor in female youths being drawn into offending, due to a lack of other options and the constraints that poverty has on individuals. Batchelor (2005) also argues that poverty is a big driving factor behind female offending and anger and aggression. Batchelor (2005) found that ninety per cent of her sample of violent female youth offenders were reliant on state benefits to survive and quarter were reported homeless at the time of their arrest. Crawford, Whitbeck & Hoyt (2011) found direct correlation between homelessness and violence. Crawford et al (2011) conclude that any period of homelessness increases overall aggression levels in female youths. Crawford et al (2011) argue that this increase in aggression may be due to self-preservation and survival tactics, especially for female youths who are at more risk of victimisation.

It is estimated that in the United Kingdom approximately 103,000 young people were reported as homeless in 2017/18 (Webster & Wairumbi, 2018). According to Webster & Wairumbi (2018) this figure is rising year-on-year and is having a damaging impact on young people’s lives. It is difficult to ascertain if the increase in female youth aggression can be solely attributed to poverty and homelessness. However, it would appear that both poverty and homelessness can have a significant impact on a young person’s life. Especially if they become involved in crimes of survival, such as the selling drugs (Webster & Wairumbi, 2018). It is evident from this review that further research needs to be conducted into the areas of female youth poverty and

homelessness to determine if there is a direct correlation to aggression and violence. It is possible that the increase in female youth aggression may in some ways correlate to the increase in youth homelessness. However, as the exact number of homeless female youths is unknown would be difficult to determine how much of an impact it is having on aggression and violence levels.

Exposure to violence and aggression is another theme that arises from the current literature especially through Batchelor's (2005) and Sharpe's (2009) studies. Batchelor (2005) reported that a significant amount of violence had been witnessed in home environments, by female youth offenders. With two-fifths of the females witnessing regular serious physical violence between their parents. Batchelor's (2005) interviewees also reported seeing violence against their siblings, sometimes with weapons; such as belts or bricks. As previously discussed, many were also abused themselves. Chesney-Lind (2002) argues that girls may be arrested for domestic violence for their attempts to prevent familial abuse and consequently become the offender rather than the victim. Despite this, Batchelor (2009), found that the many female youth offenders show great loyalty towards their families and friends and that they often viewed violence as a form of self-defence. Batchelor (2009) also concluded that such violence tends to be normalised and only a small number of female youth's report using physical violence frequently. Additionally, Batchelor (2009) found that female youth offenders had a high tolerance for physical aggression and violence, especially is it was in self-defence.

It is difficult to determine whether, as the literature states, the recent increase in female youth aggression and violence is caused by an increase exposure to violent and aggressive behaviour. A significant amount research suggests that exposure to violence and aggression can cause increase aggression levels, see Grusec (1999) and Crawford, Whitbeck & Hoyt (2011). As Giordano (20019) reports, in 2019 Scotland became the first part of the UK to ban the smacking of children by making it a criminal offence. It is too early to determine if this has had any impact, however it is hoped that it will decrease the exposure to this type of violence. However, as Bandura, (1973;1978) and Karos, Meulder, Goubert & Vlaeyen (2018) suggest other factors need to be taken into consideration, for example the perceived threat level or an attempt to gain power. As Snethen & Van Puymbroeck, (2008) our exposure to violence and aggression is wide ranging and does not necessarily predetermine that someone will be aggressive. For the female youth population, it is important that further research is conducted into how the exposure to violence and aggression can impact on behaviour.

Another theme that is discussed in the literature is the rise of female gang affiliation and the impact that may be having on the increase of female youth aggression. According to Vasquez, Osman & Wood (2012) there is a significant correlation between gang affiliation and displaced aggression for both male and female members. Vasquez et al (2012) suggest that being affiliated with a gang is likely to have a significant impact

on a person's life, with the potential to disrupt social bonds and interactions. However, Batchelor (2009) argues that there is little evidence of a large rise in physical aggression in female youths, including those involved with gangs. Batchelor (2009) also concludes that only a small proportion of girl gang members reported using physical violence frequently. The contradictory nature of these findings makes it difficult for the literature to explain the rise of female aggression on the rise of female gang affiliation. Indeed, the most concerning aspect of Batchelor's (2009) findings is that the girls tended to normalise violence and that they demonstrated higher tolerances for physical violence. Suggesting that further research needs to be conducted on the effects of female youth gang affiliation and how aggression and violence are perceived.

Batchelor (2009) suggests that self-reporting surveys indicate that in the United Kingdom gang membership is almost split equally between male and females. However, this is not supported by Vasquez et al's (2012) self-reporting study, they found that males youths were still significantly more likely to be affiliated with a gang. Batchelor (2009) also argues that the qualitative research conducted into gang membership highlights that gangs are still dominated by males, and as a result little research has focused on the experiences of girl gang membership. These contradictory findings around gang membership highlight the need for more research to be conducted into female gang affiliation. This will help to determine whether female youth gang affiliation is rising and if it can account for the increase in female youth aggression and violence. However, due to the lack of research into female gangs and aggression, it is not reasonable for the current literature to explain the increase in female youth aggression through an increase in female gang membership. Indeed, the number of female youths affiliated with gangs seems to be an unknown quantity with little knowledge of how female gang members behave.

One issue that does arise from the small amount of research, into female youth gang affiliation in the United Kingdom, is that a key component towards gang aggression is a lack of respect. This theme of respect or disrespect is not limited to gang membership and may account for some of the increase in female youth aggression and violence. Batchelor (2005) found that disloyalty and disrespect were common themes in the female youth offenders accounts on what made them angry. Indeed, Batchelor (2005) concluded that much of the young women's violence was motivated by the search for respect. With high levels of significance being placed on being able to 'stand up for yourself'. Vasquez et al (2012) concluded gangs are branded with a culture of honour, with strong norms of retaliation. According to Vasquez et al (2012) gangs are more likely to experience situations that place them in a wide-range of aggressive situations, which means that gang-affiliated youths are likely to ruminate and be aggressive without proper justification. It is difficult to ascertain whether feeling of disrespect or honour can account for the increase in female youth aggression. However, it

would appear that more research needs to be conducted in this area to provide further understanding of the role respect and honour have on female youth aggression.

Another theme that the literature discusses is the social control of female youths; including the changes in attitudes towards female youths and how they are represented through the criminal justice system. Sharpe (2009) concluded that young women are subjected to more social control and that legislative and practice changes are responsible for the increase in recorded female youth crime. Sharpe's (2009) interviewees argued that changes to policing, especially the change for all incidents to be recorded and the demise of repeat cautioning, have led to overinflated youth recorded crime numbers. Indeed, as Verkaik (2005) argues the surge in anti-social behaviour orders (ASBO's) made it almost criminal to be a child. This would have an impact on youth recorded crime rates and as such could account for why female youth offending is increasing.

Several of the youth offending team professionals interviewed by Sharpe (2009) emphasise how, over a short period, legislative changes have swollen the numbers of young people going through court. Indeed, the interviewees in Sharpe's (2009) study argue that these changes have resulted in girls and boys being escalated through the system, being charged in court and then having a criminal record. This may provide some explanation as to why female youth offending figures are increasing, especially if crimes are being recorded that were previously unrecorded. However, it does not account for why overall youth offending figures are decreasing. According to the Youth justice statistics (2019) overall youth offending rates are continuing to decrease with a six per cent decrease over the last year. Over the last ten years youth offending rates have decreased by eighty-two per cent (Youth justice statistics, 2019). These figures do not support the opinions of Sharpe's (2009) interviewees, they indicate that youth offending is no longer escalating or overinflating.

Surely tighter control over youths in general would lead to an increase in overall youth offending. It is difficult to see how tighter social control over youths can account for the rise in female youth offending and aggression when overall offending is decreasing. Once again, the literature does not fully explain how changes to police reporting and the recording of crimes has impacted on the increase in female youth aggression and violence. At most these changes can only account for a very small percentage of the increase, otherwise overall youth offending and crime rates would be increasing not decreasing. Additionally, as Kelly (2012) reports the ASBO was scrapped and replaced with the criminal behaviour orders (CBO) and the crime prevention injunctions (CPI). Both CPO and CPI have firmer enforcement procedures than the ASBO and could have help to contribute to the decrease in youth offending rates over the last ten years (Kelly, 2012).

As previously discussed, it is evident that more female youths are being drawn into the youth justice system as they now account for forty-nine per cent of first-time youth offenders (see youth justice statistics

2017-18). This maybe, as one youth offending team member in Sharpe's (2009) research contends due to misinterpreted 'equal opportunities' police training. Where the message to treat everyone equal has been misunderstood as meaning that everyone should be treated the 'same'. This, according to the interviewees in Sharpe's (2009) study has done a disservice to female youths by pulling them into the youth justice system. Although, this misinterpretation and subsequent mistreatment may account for some of the increase in female youth offending it is difficult to ascertain how much of an impact this has had. Once again, the literature does not effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression and has left questions around whether changes to policing have indeed caused an increase in reported female youth offending. Again, this is an area that requires further investigation to help to develop an understanding of how police reporting is impacting on female youth offending rates. Further investigation may help to effectively explain the increase in female youth aggression, which is going against the overall trend in youth offending rates.

Another theme that is discussed in some of the literature on female youth aggression, violence and offending is that the social expectations of female youths had changed. These social changes have led to women's roles changing and changes to their position in society. Reidy, Sloan & Zeichner (2009) argue that it is conformity to gender roles that accounts for the difference in aggression levels of male and female youths. Reidy et al (2009) argue that social changes and the acceptance of females taking on more 'masculine' job roles is causing a shift in how women are perceived. Reidy et al (2009) conclude that gender nonconformity may account for the increase in female youth aggression, violence and offending. However, Muncer, Campbell, Jervis & Lewis (2001) conclude that research into gender role conformity and aggression has caused conflicting results and may not be responsible for the increase in female youth aggression and violence.

Although, as Björkqvist (2018) suggests, women's roles in society are changing this does not necessarily equate to an increase in aggression. Indeed, Ringrose (2006) argues that 'girlhood' is still carefully regulated through class and race-specific categories, whereby most female youths are closely monitored, and their behaviour is regulated by primary care givers. Rahimizadeh, Arabnarmi, Mizany, Shahbazi, & Bidgoli (2011) also suggest that more females are taking part in aggressive sports and athletics. Rahimizadeh et al (2011) found that there was a significant difference in aggression levels between athletic and non-athletic students. However, Rahimizadeh et al's (2011) finding showed that there was no significant difference between male and female students and aggression levels. Once again, indicating that although athleticism can increase aggression levels it does so across genders. Therefore, making it difficult to determine if societal changes in females' roles are responsible for the increase in female youth aggression.

According to Sharpe (2009) another potential cause for the increase in female youth aggression and offending are the interventions that occur when a girl is deemed at risk or vulnerable by policing female sexuality. Sharpe (2009) argues that it is practice for girls' sexuality to be policed through the youth justice system, especially if the girls are deemed to be in moral danger. Sharpe (2009) concludes that through Youth Inclusion and Support Panel's (YISP) young people aged 8-13, who are believed to be at high risk of offending or committing antisocial behaviour, are identified and supported before they enter the youth justice system. With regards to female youths Sharpe (2009) found that over sixty per cent had been referred to a YISP because they were 'sexual promiscuous' or 'sexually active.' Whereas none of male youths had been referred for any of these reasons. Sharpe (2009) argues that this has implications for female youth offending figures and that girls' sexuality should not be policed through the youth justice system.

There are numerous ethical implications of using early identification and interventions to prevent offending. Zedner (2007) argues that it is potentially harmful to the youths and suggests that the YISP's are moving toward 'pre-crime' interventions and are criminalising youths before they commit any crimes. Zedner (2007) suggests that by placing the youths in at 'risk categories' the youth justice system is making it evident that criminality is an issue for those youths. Thus, increasing the chance that the youths will identify as a criminal and start to 'live up to expectations' and start to commit criminal offences. However, according to Sharpe's (2009) findings YISP cases were predominately more male; with almost a five-to-one male-to-female ratio. Therefore, this does not account for why violent and aggressive female youth offending is increasing when it is decreasing for male youths. It is apparent that although discrepancies remain in female and male youth referrals to YISP's, the literature cannot effectively explain the increase on female youth aggression through 'pre-crime' interventions or through the policing of female sexuality.

In addition, Sharpe (2009) also contends that female youths are often referred to the police or to YISP's at statutory children's services are too pressured to cope with the demand and work with the youths. In some cases, Sharpe (2009) argues, that the lack of external support may result in female youths entering the youth justice system by default. This is especially the case when family relations are at breaking point and parents and carers are desperate for intervention and help. It is also apparent that once a young person become involved with YISP social services will often close the case. This can have oblivious consequences for the female youths who may still require social services support.

Sharpe (2009) also found that some YISP's will accept referrals from social workers of youths with welfare needs who have not offended or are not classed as at risk of offending. Once again this has potential consequences for the youths who are referred to the YISP's and for the amount of support that is provided to

vulnerable youths. It is evident that further research needs to be conducted around YISP's and their role with supporting youths. Unfortunately, it seems that YISP's are being used to fill in the gaps left by the erosion of statutory youth welfare provisions (Sharpe, 2009). This is effectively criminalising girls' welfare needs and may account for some of the increase in female youth offending rates (Sharpe, 2009). However, the reduction in statutory youth welfare provisions cannot effectively explain the rise in female youth aggression and offending, as more males are referred through this system.

An additional theme that runs through some of the literature is the role of a new feminine pathology of female aggression. Ringrose (2006) argues that there has been a shift in the notion of girls as vulnerable to girls that are mean. Indeed, Ringrose (2006) suggests that the new focus on female youth aggression and mean girls is a result of years of feminist research claiming that girls are by nature more caring and nurturing than males. Batchelor's (2009) findings somewhat support this theory by suggesting that female gang members were, in the past literature, often portrayed as 'sex objects' or 'tomboys.' However, Batchelor (2009) argues that this is no longer true and that the image of a female gang member is being challenged by feminist researchers. Suggesting that female gang affiliation is often about seeking refuge from abusive families and empowering female gang members who are resisting dominant gender stereotypes. Certainly, in the United Kingdom gang affiliation is still heavily focused on as a male phenomenon.

Ringrose (2006) concludes that the feminine and masculine binary opposition creates the notion that femininity is somehow inferior to masculinity. Ringrose (2006) argues that as such, aggressive and violent females are seen to be more unintended and repressed. This toxic belief that female aggression is somehow inferior to male aggression can be, according to Ringrose (2006), detrimental to how violent female youths are treated. However, Ringrose (2006) also suggests that the notion of the mean girl who bullies and can be aggressive or violent is based on sensational incidents of isolated girl violence. These isolated incidents are, according to Ringrose (2006), held up as dangerous uncontained female youth aggression. It is difficult to ascertain how much of an impact the image of the mean girl or the new image of feminine pathology is impacting on female youth aggression, especially if the incidents of the 'mean girl' are isolated. Again, further research needs to be conducted in this area to fully understand its impact on female youth aggression.

It is evident from the statistics that female youth offending is on the increase and that generally female youth offenders are becoming more aggressive. However, it is not obvious from the literature if all female youths are becoming more aggressive. It would appear that isolated incidents have caused a rise in media attention which is driving a new rhetoric around female youth aggression and violence. It is apparent from this review of the literature that the 'Ladette' is not a new breed of aggressive females that are terrorising the nation.

Although, masculinity and aggression are linked it is not the only reason why female youth are behaving aggressively and violently. Indeed, this review has uncovered several factors that can contribute to a female youth's aggression levels.

From this review of the literature it is apparent that changes to how youth offending is reported and dealt with by the police and the youth offending courts may have some impact on the reported offending figures of female youths. However, this can only account for a small proportion of youth crime statistics and does not explain why overall youth offending is decreasing when female youth offending is increasing. Additionally, there is no evidence to support the literature's claim that changes to the social role of female youth is also a driving force behind the increase in female youth aggression. Although, masculinity and masculine roles are linked with general increased aggression levels they are not specific to females, and as such cannot account for the rise in female youth aggression and violence. Especially, when you consider the historical acts of crime and offending that female youths have committed. In particular, this does not support the notion of a 'new breed' of overly aggressive female youths. Again, it would appear that the media attention placed on isolated incidents is shifting the focus and increasing the notion of more aggressive female youths exist in today's society.

One issue that is prevalent and agreed on in the literature is that a history of abuse and substance misuse, including alcohol, plays a role in increased aggression and violence levels. However, it is unclear from the current literature to what extent these issues account for the rise in female youth aggression and violence. It is clear from the literature that female youth offenders do have high levels of substance misuse problems and that a large majority have suffered from some form of abuse. Further research is required in this area to ascertain how much of an impact these issues are having on current female youth offending rates and aggression levels in female youths. This is particularly important for understanding why female youths commit offences in the first place, but it will also help with the sentencing and rehabilitation of female youth offenders.

It is also evident from the literature that aggressive female youth offenders have complex social, emotional and psychological issues that may also be impacting on general aggression levels in female youths. As discussed in the literature it is concerning that female youth suicide rates and mental health issues are increasing generally. However, it is more concerning that these issues appear to present in increased numbers amongst aggressive female youth offenders. As such further research needs to be conducted into these areas to determine the extent of the issues and provide more of an explanation on why female youth aggression and violence is increasing in general. It would also be beneficial for future research to investigate the impact that poverty and homelessness has on female youth aggression. Again, it would appear that poverty and

homelessness directly correlate to increase aggression levels in female youth. It is unclear from the current literature how much of an impact poverty and homelessness has in the United Kingdom on aggressive female youths.

It is apparent from the literature that the increased exposure to violence in today's society is not directly correlated with increase aggression levels in female youths or female youth offenders. It would seem that exposure to violence and aggression causes such behaviours to be normalised by the young women and for them to become desensitised. Indeed, according to the literature female youths who are exposed to aggression and violence report isolated incidents of aggression and violence themselves. As such it is incorrect for the literature to report this issue as a reason for the increase in female youth aggression and violence. It is also unhelpful for the literature to compare female youths with male youths. As discussed, this can cause numerous issues for aggressive female youths; particularly how they are viewed by society and the criminal justice system.

Finally, it is apparent that further research needs to be conducted into female gang affiliation in the United Kingdom. This under researched area may account for some of the increase in female aggression and violence. However, it is unclear from the current literature how much of an impact female gang affiliation is having on female youth aggression and violence. It is clear from the literature that role of the female gang member is changing, and that female gang membership seems to be increasing. It is also clear from the literature that female youths are at high risk from being recruited by gangs, especially those that are from broken homes and families. As previously discussed, gang membership has long-lasting social and emotional ramifications, therefore it is important to gain a more in-depth understanding of female gang affiliation, aggression and violence.

It is evident from this review that the current literature cannot effectively explain the rise of female youth aggression. Although, it does provide a detailed insight into numerous issues that need to be investigated in order to develop a more in-depth understanding. It is also clear from the literature that separate female only research needs to be conducted to fully appreciate the extent of the issue of female youth aggression. The literature also makes it apparent that female youths are a high-risk category for offending and high levels of aggression and violence. This high-risk is, according to the literature, caused by several vague issues that warrant further research. One thing that is clear that violent and aggressive female youth offending figures are increasing and that the cause of this is not effectively explained by the literature reviewed.

Investigation of Methodologies

The research conducted into female aggression appears to involve using questionnaires to gather data from participants, mainly focusing on opinions and perceptions. According to Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele, (2017) the use of questionnaires itself is problematic, however using this method to determine what causes female aggression creates further issues. In addition, not enough research seems to have been conducted by speaking to female offenders, or to female youths about the perceived increase in female aggression. In fact, only one such study was found that could be included as part of this review. The following section will review the current methodologies and discuss how these may impact on views around female aggression and behaviour.

Research conducted by Muncer et al (2001) titled "Ladettes," Social Representations, and Aggression" questioned 105 females and 75 males, all of which were principally white participants from a Northern English University. The questionnaire consisted of 23 statements (4 were excluded), which the participants were asked to strongly agree with or strongly disagree with on a scale of 1 to 5. Although, the research questioned both female and male participants it has been included as a valid study for this research, as both genders were examined and analysed separately. From their research, Muncer et al (2001) claim that they were successful in developing a "contemporary and valid measure of laddish-ness" that showed "that for females there is no relationship between laddish behaviour and aggression" (Muncer et al, 2001, p.33).

It is easy to identify several issues with Muncer et al's (2001) research. The most prominent issue being the use of a 'principally' white ethnic group, this is a vague notion that does not explain the ethnic makeup of their sample. According to Fielding, Lee & Blank (2016) this has a significant impact on the generalisability, reliability and validity of Muncer et al's (2001) findings. As their sample has not been clearly defined it is very difficult to be able to replicate their study to measure how valid their results were. A further issue with their sample was the unrepresentative nature. They asked university students to volunteer to take part again negatively impacting on the external validity of their findings (Fielding, Lee & Blank, 2016). Their sample does not represent the general population due the educational level of the sample. In addition, according to Fielding, Lee & Blank (2016) a volunteer sample also raises the issue of self-selection of bias. Although Muncer et al (2001) do claim that their sample represented a mix of socioeconomic backgrounds due to a national and local student sample being represented. Again, it is difficult to determine how correct this statement is as this data was not collected, potentially impacting of the findings of the study.

One aspect of Muncer et al's (2001) methodology consisted of using a 'Laddish questionnaire' which used 27 statements to endorse acceptable and nonacceptable public behaviours by young women. Laddish is defined as "characteristic of a young man who behaves in a boisterously 'macho' manner" (dictionary.com,

2018; Newbery, William & Caulfield, 2013), although no definition is provided for the research by Muncer et al (2001). The lack of definition around the 'Laddish questionnaire' and with only 4 examples statements being provided, questions can be raised around whether the researches can claim to have develop a "contemporary and valid measure of laddish-ness" (even with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.82). This may be true for male behaviour but once again the researchers are making a comparison of male behaviours against female behaviours, rather than treating female aggression as a separate issue. This raises questions around whether Muncer et al's (2001) research method is just comparing acceptable and nonacceptable male and female behaviour instead of investigating female aggression.

Although, the 27 statements were counterbalanced with both agree and disagree alternatives problems can be identified with the statements provided as examples. The four examples provided were;

- “1. Inconsiderate high-speed driving is even less acceptable when done by women than by men.
2. There is no difference between a woman drinking in the street and a man doing it.
3. When a man mouths off to authority figures it does not sound as bad as when a woman does.
4. Vandalism (graffiti writing, smashing windows) looks equally bad when done by women or men”.

(Muncer et al, 2001, p. 38).

Statement 1 it is unclear how a statement around "inconsiderate high-speed driving" can be used as a measure of aggression for either male or females, it may not equate to overall aggression and may just be a measure of aggression at the time of incident. This statement is leading as it is already saying that "inconsiderate high-speed driving" is unacceptable, not allowing the participants to decide whether they consider high speed- driving as an indicator of aggressive behaviour. Statement 2 again raises questions around whether it is a measure of aggressive behaviour, or if it is investigating antisocial behaviours. Anti-social behaviours are not necessarily aggressive in nature but are classed more as inappropriate or inconsiderate behaviours (Police.uk, n.d). In addition, no context is providing for the 'drinking in the street' statement, which depending on the circumstance may not be an inappropriate behaviour. Perhaps a more appropriate statement would be to discuss drunk and disorderly behaviour as opposed to 'drinking in the street'.

Statement 3 is also problematic and leading; the wording of the statement implies that it is worse when a woman 'mouths off' to an authority figure and does not provide an impartial view. The wording of the statement is also unclear 'mouthing off' and 'does not sound as bad' are both very subjective measures and difficult to score. Statement 4 maybe more valid, as it is looking at opinions around vandalism, and some vandalism behaviours can be classed as aggressive for example 'smashing windows'. However, it is unclear

if 'graffiti writing' is an accurate measure of aggression, and again some forms of vandalism may be classed more as anti-social behaviours (Police.uk, n.d) rather than aggressive behaviours. The main issue with all the example statements provided are that they are comparing female behaviour against a measure of male behaviour. The statements are then deciding whether that behaviour is more or less acceptable when conducted by a female. It is unclear if this is then creating a valid measure of female aggression, or just a comparison of opinions around a set of behaviours for males and females.

Participants of Muncer et al's (2001) study were also asked to report their own level of aggression in the past 12 months. The issues around this part of the study are that this is relying on memory recall, which is well known to be bias in most circumstances (Civettini & Redlawsk, 2009). However, adding in anger and aggression could also negatively affect memory recall. According to Talarico, Berntsen & Rubin (2009) anger causes the greatest impairment of memories, which would once again call into question the reliability of Muncer et al's (2001) findings. In addition, the sample of university students may not provide a true representation of female aggression in a 12-month period, as aggression can not only be influenced by personality type (Falk et al, 2017) but also education level (Kaya, Ikiz & Asici, 2019). The combining factors call into question whether Muncer et al's (2001) study can be used as a true measure of female aggression and whether it is acceptable to use the phrase 'Ladettes' when describing aggressive female behaviours. Muncer et al's (2001) method is not effective for investigating the rise of female youth aggression. At best they appear to have found a comparison between females and males and the perceptions of anti-social behaviour.

Campbell & Muncer (2009) conducted research into whether 'risky impulsivity explains sex difference in aggression'. In sample 1 they questioned 329 (165 men, 164 women) undergraduate students aged 18-24 on their impulsivity. Using a Likert scale participants were asked to rate 30 behavioural items to decide if they would carry out a certain behaviour on impulse. This sample were also asked to complete the 16-item angry behaviour questionnaire. In sample 2, 356 (174 men, 182 women) undergraduate students aged 18-24 completed a 30-item impulsivity scale and the angry behaviour questionnaire. Campbell and Muncer's (2009) participants raise issues around representativeness and could be bias (Howitt & Cramer, 2017), due to the opportunistic nature of the sample. Once more, their research is using a comparison of male and female data and not approaching female aggression as its own research area.

There are also issues around using a questionnaire to accurately measure whether someone would behave in an impulsive way to a set of hypothetical behaviours. "Impulsive behaviours are spontaneous, unplanned, reckless, potentially dangerous, rash and/or are performed without due consideration of their consequences" (Sharma, Kohl, Morgan & Clark, 2013, p.559). By asking participants to consider whether they

would be impulsive means that they are being asked to consider their actions, which by nature is not impulsive. As Lassiter (2009) argues impulsivity is a complex construct and as such is very difficult to accurately measure. Therefore, making a questionnaire an unlikely means for measuring impulsive behaviour by removing the spontaneity of an action. Additionally, self-reporting impulsivity introduces concerns around response bias (Howitt & Cramer, 2017). Potentially the respondents will answer 'very likely' to being impulsive, maybe to impress, or very unlikely as they do not want to be seen as impulsive by the researcher. Due to these issues it is difficult to see how questionnaires can be used as an effective measure of impulsiveness, especially when respondents are self-reporting on potential behaviours. This creates questions around how reliable Campbell & Muncer's study is in determining whether 'risky impulsivity' can explain aggression at all.

Further issues are raised when reviewing the impulsivity statements that Campbell and Muncer (2009) used. One statement asked the participants to rate whether on impulse they would 'have another drink when already drunk.' As alcohol is known to increase the likelihood of someone behaving impulsively (Gary & MacKillop, 2014; Hahn, Simons, Simons & Welker, 2019) it would be difficult for someone to be able to rate their potential behaviour in that situation. Another statement asked the participants if on impulse they would 'go into an expensive shop because I am walking past', it is difficult to determine whether this is an accurate measure of impulsivity. It is challenging to see how this behaviour is 'rash' or 'reckless' (Sharma et al, 2013), which is the definition of impulsive. The issues around the impulse statements makes it difficult to determine if Campbell & Muncer (2009) have a valid measure of impulsivity, again impacting on the reliability of their results.

Both the impulse measures and the angry behaviour questionnaire are subjective to the individual who is responding. The answers to the questions could easily be affected by the participant's mood, hunger, past experiences and the day they are having (Gendolla, 2000). It may have been prudent for the researchers to measure the responses over a period to provide a more accurate result of impulsive and aggressive behaviour. It is difficult to determine if, as the authors state, the 'risky impulsivity instrument' is suitable for examining impulse behaviour relevant to aggression. The combining problems with Campbell & Muncer's (2009) research implies that their method is not an effective approach to investigate female aggression. It is possible that they have managed to highlight the differences in perceptions to behaviours and how that affects males and females differently.

Correspondingly, the research conducted by Newberry, Williams & Caulfield (2013) into female aggression in licensed premises used the questionnaire method too. They questioned 84 female participants aged 16 or over, their sample was recruited through posters at two university campuses. Again, as with Campbell & Muncer (2009) and Muncer et al's (2001) study the representative nature of the sample can be

questioned. Newberry et al (2013) used the 'The Aggression Questionnaire' to measure the participants' levels of aggression. However, as educational level (Kaya et al, 2019) can have an impact on aggression levels, not only of an individual but also of a family member, Newbury et al's (2013) results may not be generalisable to the general population, especially to those with a lower educational status. Nevertheless, Newberry et al (2013) found that their sample's levels of aggression did range from medium to large (Cohen's $d = .56$ to $.87$). They also found that the participants who were involved in a previous aggressive incident had a higher total aggression score ($M=95.22$) than those who had no-aggressive incident ($M=74.58$). Indicating that there is a positive correlation between being involved in passed aggressive events and overall aggression levels in female university students.

The participants of Newberry et al's (2013) study were also asked to complete a questionnaire to measure their 'self-reported aggressive incidents'. This was to investigate whether the respondents had been involved in either a physically or verbally aggressive incident whilst in a licensed premise. Additionally, the participants were asked to complete the Student Alcohol Questionnaire to measure their own alcohol consumption. Again, as with Muncer et al's (2001) study and as previously discussed, self-reporting on aggressive incidents and alcohol consumption can be problematic due to issues with memory recall and bias. Other issues around the self-reporting of aggressive behaviours relate to the participant's over or under value (Chen, Xiang, Zhang & Zhang, 2017) their part in the incident, especially when alcohol and or drugs were involved. All these factors could negatively impact on the reliability and validity of Newberry et al's (2013) findings, calling into question whether self-reporting can be used as an accurate measure for female aggression and behaviour.

In addition, Newberry et al (2013) asked participants to recall aggressive events when they were under the influence of alcohol and or drugs. This raises several issues on how alcohol use and or drug use can negatively impact on memory and recall of events (Benson, Tiplady & Scholey, 2019; Devenney, Coyle, Kieran & Verster, 2019; Heffernan, 2018; Deshpande, 2015) especially, with adolescent binge drinkers (Vinader-Caerols, Duque, Montanes & Monteon, 2017). There is also the added correlation of alcohol consumption and an increase in violence and aggressive behaviour (Pedersen, Copes & Sandberg, 2016; Miczek, DeBold, Newman & Almeida, 2015), especially in nightlife settings. This raises issues around how accurately the participants were remembering the events and the affect this may have on Newberry et al's (2013) findings.

Indeed, Newberry et al (2013) found a significant moderate positive correlation between alcohol consumption and self-reported aggression. Indicating that alcohol does have an impact on aggression levels in female university students. These combining factors call into question whether the 37 participants, who

reported being involved in an aggressive incident, were accurately remembering the incidents. Potentially the alcohol consumption was having an impact on memory recall and causing the participants to over or under emphasize the incident. It further raises concerns on how effective it is to use questionnaires and self-reporting as a measure of female aggression and impulsivity. Newberry et al's (2013) study presents issues around the effectiveness of using university students as a measure of aggression and aggressive behaviours. Although, their results do support the theory that large amounts of alcohol consumption increase violence and aggression levels in females (Crane, Schlauch, Testa & Easton, 2018).

For their research Vasquez, Osman & Wood (2012) questioned 323 (185 males, 125 females) youths, aged 13 to 16, attending comprehensive schools in or outside of London. Vasquez et al (2012) were researching displaced aggression and gang affiliation, they found that gang affiliation was positively related to ruminative thinking about trait aggression. Although their sample was quite large, in comparison to the other research reviewed, they only focused on the London area. Therefore, it is difficult to ascertain if the results can be generalised to the whole of the UK. In addition, the researcher and classroom teacher were present throughout the 1-hour sessions. Potentially this raises issues around experimenter bias (Howitt & Cramer, 2017) and their influence over how the questions were answered. Also, an hour is a long period of time for 13-16-year olds to spend answering a questionnaire, due to their attention span (Brain Balance, 2019). This along may have negatively impacted on how the respondents answered towards the end of the questions, as they may have rushed to complete the questionnaire. These issues raise concerns over whether Vasquez et al's (2012) method was effective for analysing female, or even general youth, gang affiliation and aggression.

Vasquez et al (2012) found that gang affiliation was correlated to gender, with males being more likely to be affiliated with gangs and trait aggression. Research by Blum-Ross (2017), found that young people in South London were more at risk of being affiliated with a gang. Blum-Ross' (2017) research also concluded that gang affiliation by males was often portrayed in a positive light. This is especially true for male youths, who are often disengaged with education and are often targeted by gang leaders (Blum-Ross, 2017). Vasquez et al's (2012) study was conducted around the London district and as such their results could potentially be subject to response bias. The male participants may have wanted to project the image that they are affiliated with gang members to appear more 'masculine' and 'cool' (Thurrock.gov.uk, n.d), especially as the participants answered the questionnaire in the same room as their peers. In contrast, Sutton (2017) found that female gang members tend to downplay their role. Batchelor (2009) argues that most female youth violence is not-gang related and that female youths commit violent offences for several reasons. If this was true for Vasquez et al's (2012) findings and the females downplayed their gang role they could also have downplayed their aggression

levels. This would impact on the validity of Vasquez et al's (2012) findings and how successfully they measured gang affiliation and aggression.

Vasquez et al's (2012) research was comparing male and female gang affiliation and aggression instead of exploring female gang affiliation, as Peterson & Panfill (2017) suggest, as a separate research area. Sutton (2017) argues that female youth gang members are more complex than their male counterparts and that female youths' experiences are often influenced by their gender. Female youths often join a gang younger than their male counterparts (Sutton, 2017) and as such further research should be conducted into this topic as a separate research area. Although, Vasquez et al's (2012) research did find that female gang affiliation correlated to higher overall trait aggression levels, perhaps it would have been prudent for them to have researched female gang affiliation and aggression separately.

As discussed, there are several issues around using questionnaires as an effective measure of aggression. The questionnaire is always presented after the event, or to pose answers to hypothetical situations. This likely leads to issues with memory recall and whether the participants accurately portray themselves when answering the questions. Questionnaires will help researcher to understand opinions around aggression and why the respondents feel that female aggression is increasing or even occurring, However, they do not accurately provide reasons for why aggression levels in female youths are rising or indeed why some female youths are aggressive in the first place. As demonstrated with Muncer et al's (2001) study and Campbell & Muncer's (2009) study it is difficult to use a questionnaire as an accurate measure of either aggression or impulsivity. Both are subjective measures and can be difficult to define, especially impulsive behaviours which by nature are spontaneous and difficult to quantify.

There are issues around self-reporting questionnaires as demonstrated with Newburry et al's (2013) study, especially when reporting on aggressive incidents and alcohol consumption. Other issues arise around self-report especially when involving youths due the importance of their perceived image and how they may be viewed others. As demonstrated in Vasquez et al's (2012) study peer pressure and or response bias may occur when groups are completing questionnaires together or with an adult present. A further concerning issue with the reviewed research is that out of the four studies, using a questionnaire method, three compared male and female responses and did not treat female youth aggression as its own area of research. Unfortunately, the one study, in this review, that did use female participants focused on alcohol consumption and aggressive incidents. As previously discussed, the involvement of alcohol poses several issues and is highly unlikely to create effective research into female youth aggression. Unfortunately, there seems to be a lack of research

that has been conducted using qualitative methods, as highlighted by Batchelor (2005). For this review only two pieces of research were a match for the inclusion criteria.

Batchelor (2005) conducted in-depth oral-history interviews with 21 young women aged 16 to 24 years old, all were single, white and detained in a HMPYOI in Scotland. Obvious issues arise from the Batchelor's (2005) sample. Their sample was relatively small, all White, single and in custody, therefore decreasing the generalisability and reliability of their findings. According to the Youth Justice Statistic (2017) the number of first-time entrant Black youths has doubled over the last ten years, whereas the number of White youths has decreased by eighty-nine per cent in the same period. In addition, Youth Justice Statistics (2017) indicate that the proportion of cautions or sentences for Black youths increased by twelve per cent from 2016 to 2017 and is now three times higher than the general population. Although these figures include male and female youths it would be rational to conclude that these increases can be applied to the female youth population. Particularly as the youth custody population comprises of forty-nine per cent females (Youth Justice Statistic, 2017). As indicated, by the Youth Justice Statistics (2017), Batchelor's (2005) sample was highly unrepresentative of the general female youth population and as such their results may lack generalisability.

Oral-history interviews require memory recall, according to Banister (2011) this means they may be exaggerated and may not be accurate. As previously discussed, there are several issues around how accurate memory recall can be, especially when involving alcohol or drug use. Batchelor's (2005) findings from the narrative data concluded that the most aggressive incidents were often alcohol-related and or drug-related, which as previously discussed can have a detrimental impact on memory. However, Batchelor (2005) also conducted an in-depth documentary analysis of trial reports and programme records. This helps to increase the accuracy of Batchelor's (2005) conclusion, as the recall narrative data can be compared to the document analysis data. Consequently, increasing the effectiveness of Batchelor's (2005) methodology to investigate female aggression.

Batchelor's (2005) study was investigating female aggression as a separate research area. This is important because as Batchelor (2005) concluded female youths rarely described themselves as aggressive or violent, this is further supported by Sutton's (2017) findings. Whereas, as previously considered, male youths are more likely to exaggerate their aggression or violence levels. This has implications for rehabilitating female youths, especially they in the way they perceive violence or aggression. Batchelor's (2005) narrative data also suggests being mistreated or let down by family members and a lack of respect led to female youths acting aggressive or violent. Although Batchelor's (2005) study may not be generalisable, due to the ethnic

mix of the sample, their findings do have implications for the punishment and rehabilitation of female youths. In particular how to deal with family issues and aggression control and perceptions of violence.

In addition, Batchelor (2005) also interviews the adults who worked with the young women however, she does not provide a clarification on how many people she interviewed or who she interviewed. Additionally, Batchelor (2005) does not discuss the findings from these interviews, which implies that these interviews were not effective at explaining female aggression or violence. Overall the research by Batchelor (2005) appears to be effective at investigating violent female incidents and how the participants perceived their own aggression. The study was also useful at exploring the historical factors around the context of offending, which will be explored within the ethical considerations section of this report. Although it would be beneficial for research to be conducted that reflects the ethnic mix of the female youth offending populations.

Sharpe (2009) interviewed 48 (32 women, 16 men) youth justice and related professionals, all but one was White. Most of the participants were employed in two Youth Offending Teams in the Midlands of England. The interviewees came from a variety of professionals including social workers, probation, police, youth work and the prison service. The participants were asked for their beliefs on the causes of young women's offending and why we are experiencing an increase in female youth offending. It is difficult to ascertain if the sample used by Sharpe (2009) was representative of professionals working within these occupations. However, having a sample of 47 people with a White ethnic origin is not likely to be representative and as such may have impacted on Sharpe's (2009) conclusions as to why young women offend. This is especially true when considering the increase in Black youth offenders and the decrease in White youth offenders (Youth Justice Statistics, 2017). Having a majority sample of White professionals may not provide the insight into the rise Black youth offending. This implies that Sharpe's methodology may not be effective for investigating the rise of Black female youth offending.

As the participants in Sharpe's (2009) study, were all professionals working within the Youth Offending Teams, they are potentially exposed to more aggressive or violent youths than the general population. This is especially true for the participants with a large amount of experience working with youth offenders. The experience of Sharpe's (2009) participants ranged from one to twenty-three years' experience. According to Bushman (2016) the more exposure to aggression and aggressive behaviour a person has the more likely they are to be desensitised to the behaviour. Especially if, according to Mrug, Mandan & Windle (2016), this exposure is prolonged. It can be argued that twenty-three years' experience of working within Youth Offending Teams is prolonged exposure to aggressive situations. This may explain Sharpe's (2009) findings as to why there was confusion as to whether female youth behaviour had deteriorated. An unknown number of the

participants may have been desensitised to the violence and aggression they are observing on a day-to-day basis. Therefore, impacting on the effectiveness Sharpe's (2009) method to investigate female youth aggression.

The participants who had one year's experience do not have any historical context, or frame of reference as to whether 'girls are getting worse' or as to whether female youth offenders' behaviour has deteriorated. Their opinions may have been influenced by their colleagues with more experience. Yang, Liu, Naura, Caughlin & Spector (2016) found that social burdens of colleagues in the workplace predicted overall job attitudes. Indicating that the attitudes of colleagues can greatly impact on individual attitudes. This may again account for the confusion in Sharpe's (2009) findings on whether female youth behaviour was deteriorating. Again, raising concerns over whether Sharpe's (2009) methodology was effective in investigating female aggression.

Apparent concerns also arise, with Sharpe's (2009) study, from the use of professionals as the participants in the research and not asking the female youth's opinions directly. Asking professionals for their beliefs about the causes of female youth offending is subjective and can be influenced by several personal factors. Ortner, Briner & Marjanovic (2017) argue that emotional regulation impacts on beliefs, as does an individual's subjective well-being. The participants, from Sharpe's (2009) study, emotional regulation may have been influenced by the amount of exposure to aggression they have experienced. Impacting on the participants' beliefs on the causes of female youth aggression. Consequently, it would appear that interviewing professionals for their beliefs on why female youths are aggressive is not an effective method to investigate female youth aggression. Although, Sharpe's (2009) research did find that the opinion around 'girls getting worse' has become part of the overall youth justice discourse. This has potential consequences for the sentencing and rehabilitation of female youth offenders and how they are viewed by the justice system.

Half of the research papers included in the review of methodologies used undergraduate students as their sample, Muncer et al (2001), Campbell & Muncer (2009) & Newberry et al (2013). All these research papers used questionnaires to ascertain whether 'Laddish' behaviour, risky impulsivity, or alcohol intake increased aggression in youths. Through their research Muncer et al (2001) found no correlation between 'Laddish' behaviours and aggression levels in female youths. However, Newberry et al (2013) findings contradict Muncer et al (2001) as they found that increased alcohol consumption and more 'Laddish' binge drinking behaviour caused an increase in aggression levels in female youths. Additionally, Campbell & Muncer's (2009) research found a correlation between an increase in risky impulsivity and aggression levels in female youths. As Campbell (2006) suggests risky impulsivity tends to be higher in males than females and

is often seen as a male trait or 'Laddish' behaviour. With females generally making less risky decisions than males (Byrnes, Miller & Schafer, 1999). These contradictory findings make it difficult to confirm if using questionnaires on undergraduate students are the most effective methods to use. Especially when trying to understand the rise in female youth aggression and violence.

As previously discussed Muncer et al (2001) used a questionnaire to measure alcohol consumption and aggression levels. However, Batchelor (2005) conducted oral history interviews and found that alcohol and substance misuse was a common theme for the increase in aggression in female youth offenders. Despite this Batchelor (2005) found that the main cause for anger and aggression in female youth offenders was their experiences of family violence and abuse. Sharpe (2009) conducted interviews with professionals and also found that female youth offenders are often drawn into the criminal justice system for welfare reasons. Thus, supporting Batchelor's (2005) findings and supporting the argument that the past experiences of female youth offenders can impact on their current aggression levels. From Batchelor's (2005) and Sharpe's (2009) findings it would appear that oral interviews are a more effective method for investigating female youth aggression and violence. Especially when the interviews are conducted on female youth offenders.

In contrast to the previous studies discussed Vasquez et al (2012) used questionnaires on adolescents and found that a lack of respect contributed to female youth aggression and violence, especially amongst gang members. However, Batchelor (2005) conducted oral history interviews and found a similar theme. With negative worldviews and disrespect being identified as contributing factors to female youth offender's aggression (Batchelor, 2005). This would suggest that the use of questionnaires and interviews can be effective measure for researching female youth aggression, especially when investigating gang affiliation. However, as previously discussed there are numerous issues with using questionnaires as a method of investigating aggression, particularly in youths.

There appears to be a considerable lack of qualitative research investigating female youth aggression. Subsequently this has had a significant impact on the volume of research that can be included in this review. It would appear, that one of the best ways to investigate female youth aggression, as per Batchelor's (2005) study, would be through interviewing female youths who have been involved in aggressive or violent acts. As Batchelor (2005) indicates the best practice would be to then compare those findings with a documentary analysis from trial judge reports and social worker reports. Although, it would be prudent to ensure that the sample used was representative of the female youth custody population. In addition, it would be beneficial to interview female youths who have not been committed of aggressive or violent offences to provide a comparison and a thorough overview of female youth aggression.

As discussed, there are significant issues with the current methodologies used to investigate female youth aggression or violence. As highlighted in this review the most significant issue is that most research methodologies compare male and female behaviour and do not treat female youth aggression as a separate research area. Additionally, questionnaires are not always used effectively to investigate female youth aggression, especially those that are requiring memory recall whilst under the influence of alcohol or drugs. It is also sensible to avoid questioning people on impulsive behaviours, which can be difficult to quantify and measure. It would be constructive to use questionnaires alongside interviews to provide a mixed method approach. According to Webster & McKibben (2019) this will allow for more understanding of complex contexts and experiences of individuals. As such a mixed method approach would help to provide a more effective investigation in female youth aggression. It is apparent that the current methodologies used to investigate female youth aggression are not entirely effective.

Ethical Implications.

Shamoo & Resnik (2009) argue that ethics is a standard of conduct and an academic discipline and is important for protecting researchers and research subjects. Shamoo & Resnik (2009) argue that ethical research is particularly important for protecting vulnerable subjects. The research conducted on aggressive female youths aged 17-21 raises several ethical issues, especially when trying to determine what has caused their aggression or violent behaviour. Sargeant & Harcourt (2012) argue that occasionally research can be unintentionally unethical and that not all ethical dilemmas can be avoided or predicted. Farrell & Farrell (2017) suggest that any research involving children or adolescents is often ethically risky. Additionally, Te Riele & Brooks (2013) argue that youth research needs to be treated as an exercise in judgement and context. Implying that extra consideration should be considered when using youths as participants. Therefore, it is important to review current research into female youth aggression and discuss any ethical concerns that need to be considered. The following section will discuss the ethical considerations and limitations of the current research into female youth aggression and the implications for any future research.

As previously discussed, almost all the research used to conduct this critical review uses questionnaires to gather data on female youth aggression. According to Denscombe & Aubrock (1992) questionnaires are often seen as a more ethical way to conduct research, however ethical issues can still arise. Indeed, Evans, Robling, Maggs Rapport, Houston, Kinnersley & Wilkinson (2002) argue that questionnaires are often used to measure discomfort or harm and that ethical dilemmas can occur as to whether the value of the research out-ways the potential harm. This is a potential issue for Muncer Campbell, Jarvis & Lewis' (2001)

study which asked participants to report their aggression levels in the past 12 months. Muncer et al's (2001) research raises potential ethical concerns as the participants were asked to record whether they had done something physical that was designed to hurt someone. Ethically this could mean that the participants were distressed about remembering those incidents, potentially causing them harm. In addition, it raises questions around whether the researchers have a moral responsibility to report these incidents, especially if someone was harmed.

Bersoff & Bersoff (2009) argue that the fidelity- beneficence dilemma can be an issue when collecting self-reporting data, especially when reviewing sensitive topics. Indeed, this issue is pertinent to most of the research reviewed, as several of the studies are looking at drug and alcohol issues as well as gang violence. In particular, the fidelity-beneficence dilemma is a viable issue for Newberry, Williams & Caulifield's (2013) research. Newberry et al (2013) researched the links between female alcohol consumption, drug use and aggression in licensed premises. Although, Newburry et al (2013) did debrief their participants, via a form, it is unclear whether information was given to the participants about where to find help if they required it for alcohol or drug concerns. Data was also collected around weekly alcohol and drug consumption, which could highlight potential substance misuse issues with their participants. This raises ethical issues as to whether the researchers had an obligation to assist, or at least guide, the participants who recorded high alcohol or drug use, especially as they requested for female participants aged 16 or over. Indeed, as Henderson et al (2007) suggest many participants with a history of substance misuse often presume that research is going to help with treatment and not be used to gather data and knowledge. This raises ethical concerns as the participants maybe expecting rehabilitation and help for their problems.

Vasquez, Osman & Wood's (2012) research also presents the problem of the fidelity-beneficence dilemma, as they were researching gang affiliation and violence. Again, this is a potential ethical issue for the researchers, as the participants may be sharing details about behaviours that are illegal or that put them in jeopardy. This is especially concerning when you consider the ages of Vasquez et al's (2012) participants (13 to 16 years). Alleyne & Wood (2010) argue that long-term gang affiliation increasing the chance of gang members being involved with crime. Additionally, Vasquez et al's (2012) study was specifically targeting gang-affiliation and aggression. This once again raises questions around whether the researcher is obligated to provide assistance and guidance for the youths involved in their study. As, Bersoff & Bersoff (2009) conclude the researcher cannot always determine when interventions are required or necessary, especially if sensitive data is being collected. Therefore, calling into question whether it is ethical to research female youth

aggression, through the method of questionnaires, particularly if no support or guidance is offered to the participants.

According to Berscoff & Berscoff (2009) self-reporting methods can be used to collect data about third parties, which the researcher may not have got consent to collect. Sharpe (2009) used interviews to gain understanding on the perspectives of professionals working as part of a Youth Offending Team. Ethically this can be problematic as the professionals are discussing sensitive information, especially when they are providing examples to support their perspectives. One such example discussed how the "girls are always abused [...] always very unstable" (Sharpe, 2009). Although the identities of the "girls" were not disclosed questions can still be raised around whether it is appropriate or ethical for third parties to be discussing the private issues of female youth offenders. This not only raises concerns for the female youth offenders and the help that they need in order to be rehabilitated. Indeed, Batchelor (2005) and Moore, Gaskin & Indig (2015) found that female youth offenders reported significantly high rates of self-harm and suicidal behaviour. It also creates questions around the psychological support the people who are working in the Young Offender Teams need. Clearly, as an ethical researcher these aspects should be considered when conducting research into this sensitive topic.

The research conducted by Batchelor (2005) contains several ethical concerns as this research was looking at the victimisation of young women who were in custody for violent offences. Batchelor (2005) collected background historical information on the female youth offenders. The interviewer found that many of the participants had suffered from a form of abuse or witnessed abusive behaviour. Many of the participants had also experienced significant family disturbances, with over half being looked after by the local authority. Karatzias, Power, Woolston, Apurva, Begley, Mirza, Conway, Quinn, Jowett, Howard & Purdie (2017) found that women who had experience traumatic events were more likely to commit violent offences. Karatzias et al (2017) argue that it is therefore important to meet the trauma-related needs of female offenders. Again, this raises ethical issues around whether the interviewees should be questioned on this sensitive information, without providing support and guidance. Notably as female youth offenders are at a significantly high risk of self-harming behaviours.

Informed consent was gathered for all the research included within this review, however as Resnik (2018) argues informed consent is often difficult to obtain from vulnerable subjects. Resnik (2018) concludes that vulnerable subjects include both older children and prisoners, as they may be subjected to pressure to be included in the research. This is an issue when research female youth aggression, due to the age of the sample and that some of the participants were in Youth Offending Institutions. It is difficult to determine if anyone had

been subjected to coercion but is definitely an ethical issue to consider when conducting research into female youth aggression. Additionally, Flory & Emmanuel (2004) found that most research subjects do not understand the information they are being told during consent. Resnik, Peddada, Altilio, Wang & Menikoff (2008) found that most informed consent forms are written at a 10th grade (15-16-year-old) reading level. Indicating that vulnerable subjects would not be able to read and fully understand the informed consent form. The reading level of participants is potentially problematic for Batchelor's (2005) and Vasquez et al's (2012) research.

Batchelor (2005) found that all but one of their participants left school at age 16 or earlier and that over half of the female youths had attended a special education provision. This could have potentially impacted on the reading level of the participants and may have influenced their understanding of the consent form. Additionally, Vasquez et al's (2012) research was conducted on 13 to 16-year olds, with diverse literacy ability again this may have impacted on their ability to understand what they were consenting too. Vasquez et al (2012) also read out their consent form and were available to answer questions, this does not mean that participants understood what they were being told. Ethically this is problematic as the participants in both studies may not have fully comprehended what the research was investigating or what their rights were as participants.

To assist with the ethical concerns of researching female youth aggression researchers need to ensure that participants are fully debriefed. However, as Kinchin & Turnbull (2007) argue the more trauma an individual has experienced the more complex the debriefing will need to be. As this review has shown the historically issues that most female youth offenders experience are often very complex. This has obvious implications for effectively debriefing aggressive females, especially those who have been exposed to significant or prolonged abusive behaviour. Additionally, Kinchin & Turnbull (2007) argue that debriefing should not be the end of the matter. This is particularly crucial with female youth offenders, especially when considering the mental health issues that many of them are experiencing. Batchelor (2005) found that the young women who commit aggressive or violent offences have numerous needs including issues of substance addiction, abuse, homelessness and self-harm. This presents concerns about whether it is ethical to conduct research which may not include adequate rehabilitation for the female youth offenders. However, in order to understand female youth aggression, it is important to address the issues around why they are being aggressive. This inevitably will need to include a background history of the participants.

As female youth aggression is increasing it is important to understand why female youths are being aggressive, in order to do this research needs to be conducted. This research needs to be conducted under the most ethically correct manner; otherwise undue harm could be caused to the participants. Unfortunately,

due the complex social and psychological issues that aggressive female youths have experienced it may be difficult for the research to be completed in an entirely ethical way. As discussed, the current research does have several ethical concerns due to the nature of the topic being researched, namely around the history of the female youths that are in custody. However, without the research it would be difficult to understand what is driving the increase in female aggression and how to aid with the rehabilitation of female youth offenders. For female youth aggression it would appear that the benefits outweigh the potential harm caused.

It is important that consent forms are written so that those with lower literacy skills can understand what they are consenting too and that they understand their rights. It is also crucial that debriefing occurs and that where possible this includes advice on support and guidance. This is prudent when researching female youth aggression due to the complex social and psychological issues that violent female youth offenders experience. Additionally, it is critical that all information is treated with sensitivity and the upmost confidentiality. It may not be possible to be truly ethical when conducting research into female youth aggression however, it is essential. Research will allow for more comprehension of female youth behaviour and may also provide insight into the most effective way of rehabilitating violent and aggressive female youth offenders. Any future research must ensure that all ethical issues are accounted for and that the research is as ethical as possible.

Discussion

Principle findings

It is evident from this review that the current literature is not effective at providing a comprehensive understanding of why female youth aggression is increasing. It is, however, apparent that female youth aggression and violence is very complicated in nature. There are often several underlying factors that impact on female youth aggression namely poverty and homelessness (Crawford et al, 2011). However, these factors can also include extremely complex social, emotional and psychological issues. Furthermore, as Batchelor (2005) identifies, a history of abuse and substance misuse seem to be contributing factors towards female youth aggression and violence. As Batchelor (2005) concludes, often the anger and grief from historical abuse coincides with increased violence and aggression levels in female youth offenders. Although as Chesney-Lind (2002) suggests, due to the hidden nature of abuse it is difficult to ascertain how much of an impact it is having on the increase aggression rates of female youths. Therefore, it is important for further research to focus on the social, emotional and psychological issues that female youths encounter to help to address the recent increase in female youth aggression.

Due to the complex issues that surround aggressive female youths it is apparent that female youth aggression should not be compared with, or to, male youth aggression. As Sutton (2017) suggests female youth aggression should be treated as a separate research area. This would allow for more understanding into why female youth aggression is increasing, when male youth aggression is stabilising and, in some cases, decreasing (Youth Justice Statistics, 2019). This is particularly important when addressing the issue of female youth gang membership. Although, gang membership is still predominately male, as discussed in the literature, female gang membership is also increasing (Vasquez et al, 2012). Additionally, as female youths make up forty-nine per cent of the youth custody population, it is no longer appropriate for them to be treated as 'less' important or as being overshadowed by their male counterparts (Sutton, 2017). It is no longer appropriate for aggression or violence to be classed as 'masculine' or for female youths to be regarded as doubly deviant for breaking traditional gender norms (Brennan & Vanderburg, 2009).

From Sharpe's (2009) research, it is also evident that referring to female youths as 'ladettes' is potentially detrimental to how aggressive female youths are treated by the general public and the youth justice system. The incidents that have caused the media to label female youths as 'ladettes' are often isolated events, that do not equate to a vast increase in overall female youth aggression (Ringrose, 2006). Additionally, the literature argues that the 'ladette' culture is synonymous with binge drinking and overall alcohol consumption. High levels of alcohol consumption have been proven to directly correlate with increased violence and aggression levels in both female and male youths (Newberry et al, 2013). However, as Staddon (2015) suggests, as overall alcohol consumption has increased for both male and female youths it cannot effectively explain why female youth aggression is increasing more rapidly than male aggression. It would, be prudent for more research to be conducting into the implications of binge drinking on female youths and their aggression levels.

As previously discussed, the notion of aggressive females is not a modern concept and historically women have committed and being involved in some of the most heinous crimes throughout the world. However, as Reidy et al (2009) suggest the changes to the social context surrounding female youth aggression, violence and offending may account for some of the increase in reported female youth aggression. It would appear that the increased focus on female youth aggression and violence has led to an increase in police attention (Sharpe, 2009). Indeed, media attention in the United Kingdom has led to a 'fear' amongst the public (see Kelly, 2012; Mankarios, 2013 & Independent, 2018) which has caused an increase in police focus and attention on female youth offending. Subsequently this could have had a negative impact on reported crime levels and sentencing of female youth offenders. With potentially harsher sentencing for female youth

offenders than in the past and crimes being dealt with more severely than before (Sharpe 2009). This also has further implications for the rehabilitation of female youth offenders and how to address their complex needs.

As Gavin & Porter (2015) suggest there has been a significant increase in the exposure to violence in the United Kingdom: through films; the media; sport and internet access. However, the increased exposure is not unique to female youths and cannot adequately explain the rise in female youth aggression alone. Although, female youths are more likely to be involved in online abuse and cyberbullying than male youths (Viljoen et al, 2005) this does not account for why female youth aggression is increasing. Indeed, the exposure to violence alone cannot account for increase in violence or aggression. As previously discussed, exposure to violent and aggressive behaviour often leads to desensitisation and acceptance of the behaviour as 'normal' (Gusec, 1999). As Batchelor (2005) contends other factors need to be presented for an individual to act aggressively or violently. One of the largest threats is perceived danger, which could be heightened with the addition of substances (Batchelor, 2005). As Fish et al (2017) conclude this may account for why the majority of violent female youth offending seems to occur whilst under the influence of drugs or alcohol. One again, highlighting how complex the area of female youth aggression is.

From the literature it is difficult to understand why female youth aggression is increasing at such a rapid rate. It does not appear to be one distinct issue that is causing the increase in female youth aggression and violence, but rather an intricate web of overlapping issues. The escalation in media attention (Ringrose, 2006) has definitely contributed to an increased focus but cannot solely account for the increase. In the same way that the relatively new 'binge drinking' culture cannot be exclusively accountable for the rise in female youth aggression (Staddon, 2015). One thing that is clear from the literature is that female youth aggression demands to be regarded as a separate research area, which needs to be addressed urgently. Without further research and understanding of this complex area, female youth aggression will continue to rise. Resulting in violent female youth offending overtaking violent male youth offending for the first time.

It is obvious from this review that the current methodologies are not always effective at investigating the causes of female youth aggression and violence. Indeed, the current methodologies have highlighted a need for more extensive research to be conducted into female youth aggression. One evidential issue is that questionnaires (the most favoured choice of research) are not effective at addressing the underlying causes of why female youth aggression is increasing (See Muncer et al, 2001; Campbell & Muncer, 2009; Newberry et al, 2013). They only provide an insight into attitudes and beliefs around female youth aggression and cannot realistically explore every facet of why female youths behave aggressively. Additionally, it is very difficult for a

questionnaire to be used to fully explore all the complex issues that surround female youth aggression, violence and offending.

Further in-depth interviews are needed with aggressive and violent female youth offenders to help to determine the cause in the rise of female youth aggression. It is evident from this review how valuable it is to discuss historical contexts and histories of the youth offenders to gain an insight into why they behaved aggressively in the first instance (Batchelor, 2005). It would also be beneficial for future research to speak to female youths in general to ascertain their opinions on aggression and violent. This particularly important for female gang members (Vasquez et al, 2012) and the interventions that may help to curtail female youth violence and aggression. Through interviews and discussion, it is clear that female youth offenders are more open about their personal circumstances and how they impacted on their behaviour (Batchelor, 2005). This will allow for a more detailed exploration of female youth offending and aggression.

Additionally, the methodologies need to ensure that they are not providing a comparison between male youth and female youth aggression. According to Sutton (2017) using methodologies that provide a comparison are putting aggressive female youths at a disadvantage. Using a comparison method will automatically cause a focus on how inappropriate it is for female youths to behave in an aggressive manner. It will also distract from how important female youth aggression is as a separate research area. A comparative methodology will also only look for the differences in female and male responses and will not allow for the research to fully explain why female youth aggression and violence is increasing.

From the review into current methodologies it is difficult to determine why female youth aggression is increasing. There are obvious advantages and disadvantages of using each method of investigation into female youth aggression. However, the most valuable and informative research was conducted via in depth oral histories of female youth offenders (see Batchelor, 2005). It would be beneficial for more research to be conducted using this methodology type to gain a greater understanding of violent and aggressive female youth offending. One aspect that is clear from the current methodologies and investigation is that female youth aggression is still an under-researched area. Future research needs to ensure that it is using the correct method(s) to fully investigate why female youth aggression is continuing to increase.

There are numerous ethical issues that arise when conducting research in female youth aggression, especially those that are aged 17-21 years old (Farrell & Farrell, 2017). It is apparent that aggressive and violent female youths have complex emotional and psychological issues that, as Bersoff & Bersoff (2009) suggest, may inadvertently cause ethical problems for researchers. These issues would be evidently apparent when conducting any interviews with female youths and could cause ethical consequences. As Robling et al

(2002) conclude obvious concerns arise when discussing any history of abuse and substance misuse with female youths. It is therefore important for any female youth participants to be fully informed and debriefed, with additional support services being provided as required (Kinchin & Turnbull, 2007). This would allow for researchers to be able to fully understand how these complex issues impact directly female youth offending, violence and aggression.

Although there are several ethical implications to consider when conducting research into female youth aggression it is an important area of research. Further research into this field needs to be conducted to allow for a greater understanding into why female youth aggression is increasing when overall youth crime is falling. From this review, it is clear that to fully understand female youth aggression and violence one needs to understand how complex the issue can be. Only then can ethically appropriate and insightful research be conducted (Resnik, 2018), allowing for a more in depth understanding of female youth aggression and violence. It is important that all factors are addressed, as this will not only allow for more awareness but will also help with the rehabilitation and treatment of female youth offenders.

Relevant factors

Overall youth offending figures are decreasing, however female youth offending figures are increasing, especially for violent and aggressive incidents. This is especially concerning when investigating the reasons behind this increase. It is therefore important that female youth aggression, violence and offending are addressed and researched. One main factor for consideration is that female youth aggression and violence should not be compared to male youth aggression or violence and should be treated as a separate area of research. Additionally, the topic of female youth aggression is very complex and needs to be treated with sensitivity and care to allow for a more detailed understanding. Female youth aggression remains an under researched topic, which is highly concerning when considering the implications.

Strengths & limitations

There are several limitations to this research including the lack of studies that could be included for critical review. It was difficult to find research that fit within the parameters of this review, especially research that was conducted in the United Kingdom. It was also difficult to keep the included research within the age range that was applied to the review. Indeed, as previously discussed, a few the studies did not fully fit within the anticipated age range. A further limitation of this critical review is how dated several of the included pieces of research are. This has consequences for how significant and applicable the research findings are to today's

aggressive female youths. However, due to the lack of more recent research it was unavoidable that the older research needed to be included in this critical review. Another limitation of this critical review was that a slightly more systematic approach could have been taken to allow for a more comprehensive review to be conducted.

One of strengths of this critical review is that it is the first review to investigate the current research into female youth aggression in the United Kingdom. It has highlighted the complex nature of female youth aggression, violence and offending. Detailing how difficult it is to find a single cause for the continued increase in female youth offending, violence and aggression. Another strength of this review is that it has investigated the literature, the current methodologies and the ethical implications of researching female youth aggression. Additionally, from this critical review recommendations can be made to best inform future research into the area of female youth aggression and violence. Finally, it has highlighted the need for female youth aggression to be treated as a separate research area and how critical it is for more research to be conducted in the United Kingdom.

Recommendations

It is imperative that further research is conducted into the area of female youth aggression, especially to help to understand why female youth offending is rising. There is a definite need for more female only focused research to be conducted that explores female youth aggression of 17-21-year olds in the United Kingdom. It is recommended that to fully understand this continued increase, a clearer understanding of the backgrounds of female youth offenders needs to be explored; through a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research. It is also important that careful attention is paid to the ethical considerations of any future research, especially if the research is investigating the histories of female youths. It is also recommended that a wider range of research needs to be conducted to create a broader picture of female youths and their aggressive behaviour. Finally, it is important that any future research is focused on why female youth aggression is increasing to help address and challenge these behaviours effectively. Further research should aim to curtail the potentially dangerous increase in female youth aggression, before it does spiral out of control.

Conclusion

It is clear from this review that female youth aggression is an under researched topic and that more female focused research needs to be conducted. It is evident that female youth aggression is increasing, as are the number of violent and aggressive offences committed by female youths. However, the current literature does not fully explain this rise in aggressive and violent behaviour by female youths. Additionally, the current

literature cannot cohesively account for the increase, with numerous factors being blamed as the cause. One thing that the literature does agree on is that female youth aggression is complex and difficult to untangle. It is also evident that female youth aggression should not be compared to male youth aggression, as it is a separate area for research.

Additionally, many of the current research methodologies are not effective at investigating female youth aggression, with many failing to provide the required level of exploration. The methodologies need to focus more on discussing female youth aggression and violence with female youths. It is apparent that there is a lack of research which focuses on understanding why female youth aggression is increasing and as such the research methodologies need to address this issue. It is also vital that any research conducted on female youths aged 17-21 years old is completed in the upmost ethical manner. It is evident from this review that numerous female youth offenders have a history of abuse and substance misuse, which if not handled sensitively could cause serious health issues and concerns for the young offenders. It is important that all research is handled sensitively, and that all information is treated confidentially.

In conclusion, it is difficult to understand why violent and aggressive female youth offending is not following the trend of all other youth offending. From this critical review, it would appear that there are numerous issues that female youths face in their day-to-day lives, which can significantly impact on how they handle volatile situations. With a continued increase in female youth offending rates and more media focus on female youth aggression and violence it is essential that more research is conducted in this area. Only through developing an insightful understanding of female youth aggression will we be able to address the underlying issues and help to reduce female aggression violence and offending.

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