

Sports-based intervention and the problem of youth offending: a diverse tool for a diverse society?

Abstract

This paper discusses the role of sports-based interventions (SBIs) in tackling youth crime. It notes the positive role sport can play in changing for the better the lives of young people. However, there is a lack of robust evidence to support the argument that participation in sporting activity can lead to a reduction in anti-social and offending behaviour. The paper discusses how through focusing on 'individual needs' and 'pathways to work', SBIs can serve to mask broader structural class- gender- and race-based inequalities that permeate through neoliberal nation-states and western criminal justice systems. It concludes that SBI enthusiasts must seek to promote a less homogenous idea of what a SBI is, as well as be more sensitive to the diverse needs of their target audience, particularly if they are to tackle the underlying structural inequalities that arguably create the social problem that is youth crime in the first place.

Keywords

Anti-social behaviour, criminal justice, crime prevention, sports-based intervention, youth crime

Introduction

This paper explores the use of sport-based intervention (SBI) to tackle the problem of youth crime and anti-social behaviour in the United Kingdom (UK). In doing so, the paper notes key issues pertinent to the future development of such interventions as youth justice workers seek to ensure SBIs do not serve to further stigmatize what is arguably already a highly excluded diverse social group. Although its focus is on the UK context, international research concerning the use of SBI to tackle the problem of youth crime is discussed, while the themes outlined are arguably common to many westernized criminal justice systems, particularly as over the last two decades criminologists and youth workers have noted how the criminalization of young people increasingly appears to be a prevalent feature of modern criminal justice (Goldson and Muncie, 2006).

Ever since the advent of the modern Olympics in 1896, organized sport has been regarded internationally as a force for social good which can promote mutual understanding and tolerance between culturally diverse groups and nations (Sage, 1979). There is widespread policy support at an international level for sporting programmes that promote social change, health and wellbeing, as well as educational and employment opportunities (Kidd, 2007). Indeed, in 2001 the United Nations established the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace (UNOSDP). The UNOSDP recognises over 700 sporting organisations worldwide and its mandate is to support the activity of the United Nations by using sport as an aide to peace and mutual understanding through helping to promote urban regeneration and social development. One example of the developmental power of sport in this manner from the UK is the planned regeneration of the Lower Lea Valley in London into an urban environment fit for a modern and diverse multicultural inner-city community, which forms a key part of the 2012 Olympic legacy (Olympic Delivery Authority, 2008).

Given this broader background, it is perhaps unsurprising that SBIs are used worldwide by governments to tackle the problem of youth crime. An Australian study identified over 600 programmes nationally which used sport and physical activities to tackle

the problem of youth crime and anti-social behaviour (Morris, Sallybanks and Willis, 2003), while an American study identified 621 (Hartmann and Depro, 2006), a United Kingdom study 427 (Splash, 2002) and an Italian study identified over 200 (Caruso, 2011). It seems to be the case internationally that governments, criminal justice experts, youth workers and sporting bodies, hold that anti-social and criminal behaviour amongst young people are social problems which to some degree are responsive to SBI.

SBIs for young offenders can involve a variety of sporting experiences, ranging from athletics and track and field, to basketball, boxing, football and table tennis (Kelly, 2011). In this paper SBI is taken to cover sporting initiatives, organized and run by a mixture of criminal justice agencies, sporting professionals, charity organisations and community-based volunteers, which share in common the aim of providing young people with a diversionary pathway away from an adult criminal career. The paper is divided into four parts. In the first, the extent of the problem of youth offending in the United Kingdom is outlined. This provides a necessary contextual background to the second part of the paper, which explores the role of SBI in tackling anti-social behaviour and youth crime. A key element of this discussion relates to the strength of available evidence internationally for the positive role SBI can play in meeting the complex needs of young people. Leading on from this, the third part of the paper discusses the underlying assumptions about young people embedded within the discourse of SBI enthusiasts who advocate their usefulness for tackling the problem of youth crime and anti-social behaviour. In doing so the paper notes that young people are often viewed as if they were a homogenously dangerous group of deviants rather than being a collection of diverse individuals who possess a range of personal needs, who come from a variety of differing social and cultural backgrounds, as well as who frequently face at a day to day level of personal lived experience the harsh and alienating consequences of the structural class- gender- and race-based inequalities that permeate through neoliberal nation-states and western criminal justice systems (Goldson and Muncie, 2006).. In the final part, the paper concludes by reflecting on the implications of its preceding discussion for the future development of SBI in tackling the problem of youth crime.

The problem of youth crime

Youth crime is undoubtedly an important social issue that receives much attention. It is nigh on impossible to pick up a newspaper or watch the evening news on television without encountering a story which serves to reinforce the seemingly huge scale of the problem that is young people and crime. If the news media are not concerning themselves with youth gangs, knife crime and random acts of street violence and robbery, they are telling stories about young people who deal in drugs, shoplift, or like to put graffiti tags on anything from shop fronts to park benches. It can seem at times that today's youth, particularly those who live in inner-city estate areas, spend most of their time operating in wolf-like packs, hanging around street corners and local shopping centres, waiting for the right conditions to appear so they can commit a malicious anti-social or criminal act.

Self-report studies frequently show that a significant number of young people do engage in offending behaviour. One such study reported that *“over half of males and almost a third of females aged between 14 and 25 admitted to committing criminal offences at some*

point in their lives” (Maguire, Morgan and Reiner, 2012: pp 496). But it is important to note that offending behaviour amongst young people is arguably part and parcel of a normal and healthy transition into adulthood. Most teenagers commit non-violent, status-related crimes, such as underage smoking or drinking, and most do so once or only a few times. The vast majority of transgressive anti-social and criminal behaviour by young people does not result in their becoming formally involved in the criminal justice system.

It is precisely because of this that criminologists have long warned against treating young people as if they are an inherently deviant group responsible for many of the minor and not so minor day to day inconveniences and social ills that litter everyday contemporary life for the adult proportion of the population (Goldson and Muncie, 2006). It is when repeat offending behaviour occurs during the teenage years, or when such behaviour escalates into property crime or violent criminal activity, that patterns of behaviour can take hold which are likely to continue into adulthood, that is unless significant steps are taken to intervene and challenge and change such behaviour (Blyth and Solomon, 2008). Yet it is important to note that to some extent the focus of the media and social elites on the problem of young people and crime is to be expected. Indeed, it is arguably completely justifiable when the extent of the problem is considered.

The available research does show that a large number of young people engage in some sort of anti-social or criminal behaviour, albeit for a limited period of time and quite possibly without having any contact with criminal justice or youth services, before becoming law-abiding adults. But it also reinforces that a significant number of young people commit serious offences, and what is more, repeat such behaviour on numerous occasions. Latest statistics from the UK released by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) (Youth Justice Board, 2011) show there is a high level of criminal activity by young people that results in them coming into contact with the criminal justice system. The 2011 YJB report figures reveal that they were 198,449 criminal offences committed by young people aged between 10 and 17 which resulted in conviction and disposal into either detention or a supervised community sentence. 60 percent of all offences were committed by young men aged between 15 and 17 years. The most common offence committed was theft and the handling of stolen goods (41,702). The other most common offences were violence against the person (38,744) and criminal damage (23,611).

The reoffending rate for young offenders is officially measured by the Ministry of Justice as where someone who has received some form of criminal justice sanction (such as a conviction or a caution) subsequently goes on to commit another offence within a set time period. Worryingly, reoffending rates are high for young offenders. Known internationally as the recidivism rate, the reoffending rate after one-year for youth offenders in the UK is 75 percent for offenders released from custody and 68 percent for young people on community sentences (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Given the statistics, it should come as no surprise to learn that it is conservatively estimated that youth crime and anti-social behaviour cost somewhere in the region of four billion pounds per year (Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, 2011).

The problem of youth crime and sport for social development

These statistics reinforce that they are a significant number of criminal offences being committed by young people which do warrant some form of formal punishment. No matter how much one would prefer to divert young people away from the criminal justice system, in practice there will always be some individuals whose behaviour requires formal punishment i.e. imprisonment. But it is equally important to introduce targeted rehabilitatory interventions to address offending behaviour, in doing so giving young offenders the opportunity and support they need for positive change, as well as just as importantly, to introduce community-based programmes to as far as possible divert young people out of anti-social and criminal activity before it starts. Yes, some young people may well need to be imprisoned for a period of time, but the majority need to be diverted into community-based programmes which seek to provide essential skills, educational and work opportunities, positive role models and good peer relationships. Developing the self-esteem, life skills and support networks of the young people at risk of (re)offending, alongside promoting a sense of community belonging and social responsibility, must lie at the heart of youth work and youth criminal justice (Goldson and Muncie, 2006).

Sport is often promoted as a gateway into a better life for young people who may otherwise have turned to a life of crime. As Carmichael (2008, pp3) notes *'the organizing committee for the... Olympic games is.....promoting the importance of sport for 'at risk' youth. Many great athletes...have spoken publicly about how sport probably helped keep them away from criminal activities. Sebastian Coe....wants sport to be recognized as an effective mechanism for empowering and educating youth to tackle the problems they face and for building the social skills they need to succeed'*. It is argued that through participating in sporting activity programmes young people gain key life skills, employability skills and can even training and accreditations which can expand their social horizons. It is important to also remember that a significant number of young offenders have behavioural and learning difficulties; many are prone to aggressive and violent behaviour. Sporting activities often enable the release of such feelings and this could be a vital way for some young offenders to release their energy in a structured, channelled and above all lawful way. As Mutz and Baur (2009, pp 308) argue, *'sports activities are seen as a favourable, functional alternative to violent and aggressive behaviour. It is widely believed that physical activity allows a person to 'let off steam' without harming others. During sports, aggressive actions may only be displayed within a regulated context...the release of aggression can be achieved in a socially acceptable way'*.

Importantly, given that youth offenders often have few, if any, formal educational qualifications and poor self-esteem, *'sport provides an alternative to educational underachievement, blocked aspirations and low esteem'* (Faulkner and Taylor, 2005, pp 195). When young people have high self-esteem they see themselves more positively and have more belief in their own abilities. For many young offenders other areas of their life (school, home, work) may be difficult and limiting, but sport may allow them to demonstrate, not only to others but themselves too, that they are talented and worthy of respect and support. Young offenders are often brought up in broken, problematic homes. As a result, they frequently have no positive role models and authority figures to be able to look up to. In such circumstances they often look to others for guidance and support, unfortunately for some the role models they look up to are not positive and law abiding. Furthermore, some young

people may feel they have no choice but to turn to street gangs in order to satisfy their need for approval, belonging and self-worth (Carmichael, 2008). Professional sport undoubtedly provides a range of positive role models and charismatic authority figures for young people, which can encourage participation and a sense of belonging. Indeed, links have been made between the bonds of gang membership and the bonds that can be created in a sporting atmosphere. *'The key lies in the similarities of sport and gangs; both provide a sense of belonging, status and excitement. But, whilst sport also helps you develop control over your emotions and learn to respect certain boundaries, being in a gang can be much more destructive and sometimes even fatal'* (Laureus Sport for Social Good Foundation, 2011, pp 4). This brings the foreground the possibility for using sport creatively as a 'hook' to encourage young people to get involved through designing sporting programmes which are attractive to them, in part through replicating the sense of emotional belonging that gang membership can bring.

When dealing with anti-social and criminal behaviour amongst young people, SBIs are typically employed in one of two ways. Firstly, they can be used as post-offence as rehabilitatory tools, operating either in the prison environment prior to release, or as part of a community-based sentencing programme. Within the UK youth secure units, for example, sport and physical activity plays a big part in the resident's everyday lives (Andrews and Andrews, 2001). The focus is on using sport to develop young people's self-esteem, help them channel their energy constructively while acquiring team working, communication and life skills, as part of a broader programme designed to tackle a range of underlying issues. Including, behavioural and mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse, as well as poor education, training and communication skills. Such sporting initiatives are *'designed to engage young offenders, improve their behaviour, achievement, skills and attitudes...a number of pathways were introduced offering offenders' a variety of alternative opportunities on release from custody'* (Mapstone, 2011, pp 12).

Secondly, SBIs are also used pre-offence within communities through connecting 'at risk' young people to social- and job-skills training and educational programmes, with the aim of helping them pathway away from anti-social behaviour and a potential criminal career (Andrews and Andrews, 2003). In essence, the aim is to divert the target population - young people from deprived areas which possess a high level of social disorganisation indicators; including, high crime rates, long-term (often inter-generational) unemployment, poor public health and life expectancy indicators, as well as dependence on social welfare and voluntary services. Here diversionary sport programmes are used to establish relationships between young people and positive role models and authority figures, voluntary organisations and community groups, youth and social services, as well as training and educational providers. An example from the United Kingdom is the Tottenham boxing academy in London. The academy describes their approach as using sport as the hook *'to get young people re-engaged with education and away from crime'* (Laureus Sport for Social Good Foundation, 2011, pp 31). Although it is focused on working with young people from at risk areas before they become involved with the criminal justice system, some offenders on community-based sentences attend the academy. Similar programmes can be found internationally, including in the United States, (West and Crompton, 2001, Hartmann & Depro, 2006), Scotland (Coalter, 2005), Australia (Morris, Sallybanks, Willis & Makkai, 2003), the Netherlands (Rutten et al,

2007) and New Zealand (Begg et al 1996). These initiatives do not just focus on sport training, rather they use such activity as tool to help young people realise their potential, obtain training, as well as recognise the importance of the shared community bonds. The individuals involved in these programmes often have been excluded from school, are known to social and welfare services, and may well have been involved with criminal justice agencies, such as the police and community support officers (Laureus Sport for Good Foundation, 2011). Here, sport is being combined with targeted support to engage hard-to-reach young people to try and divert them away from crime - every student at the Tottenham academy is required to attend lessons in Maths and English, ultimately leading to them gaining GCSE qualifications in these subjects.

SBI and the problem of youth crime: do they really work?

Given such considerations, it is understandable why it is argued by SBI enthusiasts can indeed meet the needs of youth offenders and can be '*effective in early intervention, preventing youth crime and acting as a diversion for those already caught up in the criminal justice system*' (Sport for Change Project, 2011, pp 1). But it is nevertheless important to not accept at face value the claims made by SBI enthusiasts and examine the empirical evidence relating to their positive impact on the behaviour of young offenders. There are several issues which immediately come to light when this is done. The first of which is that the published research literature on the topic is not that extensive. Indeed, even though there is a commonly held assumption that sporting activity can be a positive developmental tool, it becomes immediately clear when the literature is examined more closely that this assumption has not in reality been as rigorously tested as one might expect (Donnelly and Coakley, 2004). Furthermore, key social categories such as gender and race and ethnicity have been left largely unexplored in favour of rhetorically promoting the need for SBIs to pay attention to a young offenders 'individual needs', which are typically expressed in the form of psychological and/or social needs, as part of a broader concern with establishing 'pathways to work' (Kelly, 2011). This is explored later in this paper when the role of sport as a mechanism for social control is examined. First of all it is necessary to examine the SBI literature in more detail as this will provide a necessary introduction to this issue.

There certainly is evidence available internationally from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Europe, which suggests that sports participation by young people can be positively associated with reduced rates of anti-social behaviour and crime within local community areas (see Cameron and MacDoughall 2000, West and Crompton 2001, Morris et al 2003, Mutz and Baur 2007, Laureus Sport for Good Foundation 2011). For example, Cameron and MacDougall (2000) examined a wilderness camp in the United States which provides a varied SBI based around swimming, hiking and other outdoor activities, for young offenders aged between twelve and seventeen who have been committed of crimes ranging from petty theft and burglary, to arson and murder. They found that 85 percent of participants from their programme did not reoffend in the first six months after completing it. The value of such results cannot be argued with.

Yet much of the data for the value of SBI is anecdotal in nature, consisting of relatively small sample sizes, as well as often omitting to track research participants past a

relatively short period of time. Indeed, Cameron and MacDougall (2000) themselves recognize that they were unable to identify the long-term effects of the programme they studied past the six month mark. Furthermore, the majority of studies are heavily reliant on qualitative case-studies or questionnaire-based self-reports of behavioural change, obtained directly from research participants, rather than on undertaking a rigorous analysis of hard statistical data pertaining to reoffending rates from which to measure change (Seefeldt and Ewing, 2002). For example, a study of the aforementioned Tottenham boxing academy in the UK argued that there was a 40 percent decrease in reconviction for the offenders who participated in the programme. It was also noted that this programme only needs to stop just over one in four hundred young people a year from reoffending to break even, while *'if it stops two young people from reoffending the return on a £1 investment is £1.90'* (Laureus Sport for Social Good Foundation, 2011: pp 43). Such figures and claims appear impressive until it is noted that the size of offenders in the sample was very small (n =8) and relied on qualitative self-reports from the individual offenders themselves, rather than the scrutiny of officially recorded reoffending data. This is not to underplay the value of such research. We must not fall into a positivist research trap whereby only the controlled experiment can be deemed to be a valid and reliable model for research. It is necessary to recognise the importance of both anecdotal evidence and rigorously conducted qualitative research for capturing *'the expression of local understandings and knowledge that are crucial to the assessment of the 'social impact' of sport in development contexts'* (Kay, 2012, pp 1190). The need to ensure that the voices and life stories of research participants are heard regardless of a researcher's methodological priorities and proclivities, lies at the heart of the history of narrative criminology, due to its overriding concern with the collection of the oral histories of the stigmatized, dispossessed and social excluded, which dates back to its origins in the early twentieth century 'Chicago school' of social science (Chamberlain, 2013).

But this point accepted, we are nevertheless confronted by the fact that, even when more statistically-driven research exists, the evidence is inconclusive and indeed demonstrates the problems which exist in seeking to link young people's participation in SBI with behavioural change through examining offending rates. For example, the swimming-based SBI 'Splash programme' in the United Kingdom appears to present pretty conclusive empirical evidence of the positive effect of SBI on youth offending behaviour (Splash, 2003). It reported that in the ten areas it operated in between June and August 2002, total crime reduced by 7.4 percent and anti-social behaviour increased by 0.1 percent, compared to an increase of 13.2 percent for the previous June to August period in 2001 (a period which coincides with summer school holidays). Such figures point out that perhaps the most effective method to reduce youth crime is to divert young people away from negative social activities using SBI before they become involved in crime (Hartmann and Depro, 2006). Yet it is not possible to claim that there is a direct link between the Splash programme and a reduction in the crime rate and anti-social behaviour, due in part to the fact that it is not known, firstly, who exactly participated in the programme, and secondly, what other possible diversionary activities were occurring at the same time during the school holiday period, including local events and festivals, day-trips and away days, family holidays, and so on. While perhaps most importantly, it should be noted that the local police force had adapted their street-level policing and crime prevention strategies in targeted areas in light of the

previous year's recorded crime data, which in itself may well account for much of the noted reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Another informative example which highlights some key problems in drawing a direct correlation between a sports programme and a reduction in youth offending, is the midnight basketball league from the United States. Its creator, Mr G. Van Standifer, *'had become convinced that one of the keys to the problems of poor, inner-city young men was the absence of safe, constructive activities during what he believed to be the high crime hours of 10:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.'* (Hartmaan, 2001, pp 342). So he created a basketball league which would run during these high crime hours. This example of a SBI was both simple and inexpensive. It operated only during summer months and had only three core components: firstly, that the target group was young men between the ages of 17 and 21; secondly, games began at 10:00 pm sharp and not before; and thirdly, that two uniformed police officers attended each game. This project based its reasoning on the assumption that crime occurs purely down to boredom and that an activity like this could steer potential offenders away from criminal behaviour. The results were remarkable – during the first 3 years of its operation there was a 30 percent reduction in late-night crime in the communities it ran in (Hartmann and Depro, 2006). The Maryland County corrections chief, for example, told Chicago reporters, *'I haven't seen one single one of these basketball players back in my jail since the program began'* (Hartmaan, 2001; pp 342).

Although such early indicators of success seemed to provide evidence for the value of midnight basketball in tackling crime, it was later established that crime rates dropped rapidly at a national level during this period, a point which made it difficult to accept the programme organiser's claims to success (Hartmann and Depro, 2006). This said, matching cities who adopted the midnight basketball programme with those that did not offer it, did reveal that there was a reduction of property crimes running at around 5 percent (Hartmann and Depro, 2006). Importantly, the midnight basketball programme could not be held to have directly responsible for reducing property crime as it was not possible to say if was the young people playing basketball who were responsible for this isolated crime drop – it is highly unlikely that all midnight basketball participants committed crime, let alone exclusively engaged in property crime. Indeed, Hartmann and Depro (2006 pp.192) argued that the extensive political and media interest generated by the midnight basketball programme brought positive attention to stigmatized and marginalized communities, which served to *'send a more positive, proactive message to community members, one that puts a new emphasis on community outreach and builds trust, commitment and solidarity'*. This, it is claimed, had a knock on effect on property crime rates due to the closer social bonds created within the communities in question.

The Splash programme and the midnight basketball programme together remind us that sporting activity can influence at a broader level the lives of community members. But they also reinforce that problems exist in measuring what impact SBIs actually have. West and Compton (2001) draw a similar conclusion as a result of their meta-analysis of the effectiveness of SBI. Drawing on over twenty studies from the United States, they point out that although there is some supportive data for the benefit of SBI in tackling the problem of youth crime and anti-social behaviour, it is nevertheless difficult to claim that any reduction in crime is the direct result of sporting activity alone. Not least of all because there is often a

lack of consistency in the type of offence analysed – i.e. not all studies they analysed included offenders who had committed more serious types of violent crime – and there is also often a difference in the reoffending rate used by studies – i.e. some studies analysed if reoffending had occurred after one year while others looked at a shorter or longer period of time. Furthermore, West and Compton (2001) note that a range of external factors are likely to intervene in any apparent relationship between SBI activity and a young person's offending or anti-social behaviour. The most important of which are their personal circumstances, home environment, family relationships, alongside the nature of their peer networks. Similarly, extensive studies from Australia (Morris et al, 2003), Scotland (Coalter, 1999) and Germany (Mutz and Baur, 2007) all concluded that when compared to powerful primary agents of socialisation and social integration (notably family, school, peers, and the media) participation in sporting activities seem to be of marginal influence on young people's behaviour.

Finally, it is important to note that contradictory evidence for the impact of SBI does exist. Begg et al (2007), studied participation in varsity sports in the United States. They found that sports participation in young people was in some cases associated with an increase in anti-social and criminal behaviours associated with aggression and risk taking during adulthood; including, speeding, drunk driving and violent behaviour. It is important to note that contrary studies such as these suffer from the same already noted problems as the positive supportive studies just discussed. Hence, they should be treated with equal caution. But the work of Begg et al (2007) does bring to the foreground the question of appropriateness – often there is an assumption that all sporting activity, regardless of type, is beneficial when dealing with the problem of youth crime, when this may well not be the case. A Norwegian study by Endresen and Olweus (2005) is particularly informative here. They undertook a longitudinal analysis of five hundred 11-13 year old males in 37 schools in Bergen. The aim was to examine the possible relationships between participation in power sports (boxing, weightlifting, wrestling and oriental martial arts) and violent and anti-social behaviour. A strong correlation was found between violent and anti-social behaviour and participation in boxing and weightlifting. A finding they put down to the presence of a 'macho culture' in these sports. Although they are suitably cautious about their findings, they note that they do raise the possibility that some sports may not be appropriate for SBI programmes which are seeking to challenge and change violent and anti-social behaviours.

Andrews and Andrews (2003) say the same in their study of the role played by SBI in secure youth offending units in the United Kingdom. Although they recognise the positive role sport can play in young people's lives, they also note that not all sports are appropriate when dealing with young offenders who often have complex needs. They argue that a more person-centred approach to the provision of sports opportunities is key to its success in alleviating anti-social and criminal behaviour. Activities must be purposeful for the individual and tailored to their individual needs, rather than being constructed for mass participation in a one-size-fits-all fashion, as is often the case. The most prolific young offenders often possess a range of problems and issues which make it difficult to prescribe a one size fits all approach, including, trauma and aggressive behaviour resulting from being a victim of childhood neglect or physical or sexual abuse; a lack of opportunity and social mobility; substance and alcohol abuse problems; high levels of disengagement from

educational pathways; poor communication and life skills; dysfunctional family relationships; a lack of positive male and female role models; a distrust of authority figures; and finally, feelings of isolation and social exclusion (Millie et al 2005). For Andrews and Andrews (2003) experience shows that the complex needs of young offenders means that sporting activities can only ever be one small element of any rehabilitative programme. They place significantly more emphasis on professionally-led counselling, mentoring, life skills training and educational programmes, for supporting young people to change their offending behaviour and connect with a pathway to work. While when sporting activities are provided, it is argued that they must be careful to de-emphasise competition and winning, be tailored to individual need, while also emphasizing choice for participants and positive feedback.

Sport for development, sport for social control

So far this paper has discussed the potential for SBI to address the problem of youth crime. In doing so, it has noted that although there is evidence for the positive impact of SBI on youth offending and anti-social behaviour, the evidence not conclusive, and indeed, they are a range of factors which reinforce that any relationship between sport participation and crime is too complex as to be reducible to a simple causal relationship. But this is only half the story. There is a broader issue here pertaining to how young people are viewed and treated within the criminal justice system in western nation-states (Kelly, 2011). Underpinning much of the discussion of young people and crime is a particular set of somewhat familiar negative imagery. There is a tendency for the media, criminal justice agencies and political elites, to propagate the well-worn caricature of the rebellious youth, with all its associated transgressive discursive imagery, and this undoubtedly accounts for much of the successful folk devilling of young people that has occurred over the last several decades, and in doing so shaped much of the contemporary discourse surrounding the problem of youth crime and how to solve it. Indeed, it has been argued that the last two decades in particular have witnessed the emergence of an actuarial-managerial penal policy for dealing with the problem of dangerous offenders and unruly youths (Garland, 2001). Here *'the management of risks and resources has displaced rehabilitation as the central organisational aim of the criminal justice system'* (Garland, 2001, pp 177). The aim now is for criminal behaviour to be increasingly profiled and predicted, as the penal emphasis shifts to containment and control, as opposed to offender treatment and rehabilitation. Evidence for this position can be found in the prison statistics – the prison population has dramatically risen in most western countries over the last two decades. For example, in the UK in 1984 they were 43,295 individuals in prison, by 1994 it had risen slightly to 48,621, in 2004 it stood at 74,658, while by 2011 it stood at 84,812 (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Such a dramatic increase cannot be put down to fluxes in crime-rate patterns. It can only be the result of a deliberate shift in penal policy (Chamberlain, 2013).

This new actuarial-managerial penal policy is not solely concerned with containing crime through 'warehousing' a growing number of offenders, both young and old, in penal institutions. Its focus remains on managing instead of solving the problem of crime and this has led, in turn, to a widening of the surveillance net, in part through the intensification in community-based surveillance and profiling of young people deemed to be 'at risk' (Garland,

2001). Hence, the shift in emphasis to managing the problem of crime through risk profiling and assessment means that diversionary and rehabilitative programmes intensify, in part through establishing a broader range of partnerships between criminal justice agencies and community stakeholders i.e. community leaders, voluntary and charity groups, business leaders, and so on. In the UK criminologists have noted that the new labour government of the mid-1990s onwards oversaw the rapid expansion of community-based interventions for youth offenders, with the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act establishing Youth Offending Teams (YOTs) in addition to Youth Justice Boards (YJBs) to oversee them. The creation of YOTs extended the responsibility of youth intervention and supervision past probation and social workers alone. A wide range of criminal justice and welfare agencies – the police, the probation service, educational providers, benefit, housing and health agencies - were joined by local community voluntary groups and youth group organizations. Bound up with this was the introduction of Youth Inclusion and Support Panels (YISPs) to target young people under the age of thirteen who were at risk of offending and introduce preventative strategies at a local level to tackle both offending and reoffending behaviour. This in turn led to an increase in the role of ‘alternative’ programmes, involving a range of voluntary and statutory organizations with local community groups, to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour and youth offending. The steady growth in the number of SBIs in the UK in the 1990s was somewhat a natural outcome of this state of affairs (Carmichael, 2008).

The growing role of SBI over the last two decades has arguably been the result of the shift towards a more surveillance heavy ‘risk aware’ punitive system of criminal justice in the UK (Andrews and Andrews 2003). Not least of all because SBIs undoubted ability to attract young people allows state crime control agencies to legitimately pursue a diversionary and rehabilitatory programme while at the same time extending their knowledge of the nature of the social problem that is youth offending and anti-social behaviour, so they can (in theory) be more effectively profile and risk-manage the phenomenon at both the local and national levels (Nichols and Taylor 1996). Furthermore, the current conservative and liberal-democratic coalition government, in announcing their future plans for youth justice in 2010, signalled their intention to continue to promote alternative crime prevention strategies, such as SBI (Independent Commission, 2010). Although undoubtedly critical of their new labour predecessors in many ways, the coalition government nevertheless is continuing to pursue an actuarial-managerial penal policy. They intend to do this through emphasising ‘restorative justice’, with youth offenders being required to participate in ‘community payback’ programmes that promote *‘the tough discipline of regular work, tougher curfews [and] paying back the debt they owe society’* (Ministry for Justice, 2010 pp 14). This development is underpinned by a series of ‘payment by results’ pathfinding projects, which are designed and run by a mixture of private and publically funded bodies operating at a local level to reduce the number of youth offenders in custody by diverting them into less costly community-based alternatives. Bonuses are awarded and profits ensured through a reduction in reoffending behaviour. Whether this strategy works or not is a matter for long-term analysis and debate, as such programmes continue to be piloted and rolled out across the country, over the next few years (Maguire, Morgan and Reiner, 2012). There is even the possibility that SBIs may become an integral part of these pathfinder initiatives, not least of

all because of their synergy with the 2012 Olympic legacy (i.e. see Olympic Delivery Authority, 2008).

The ties that exist between the emergence of SBI to tackle the problem of youth crime and broader shifts in criminal justice policy and practice, should not come as too much of a surprise given the assumptions about the nature of youth offending they share in common. I am not just talking here about the academic position– which echoes the commonsense discourse of the SBI enthusiast – that youth offending and anti-social behaviour are likely to occur when young people are inadequately socialised into commonly held norms for appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, with sporting activity providing a mechanism through which these norms can be both taught and learned (Coalter, 2005). There is also the broader issue of the structural inequalities that arguably shape the very social landscape that young people are born into and grow up in. Coakley (2002) and Donnelly and Coakley (2004) point out that the use of recreational sporting activity by governments to monitor and control what are held to be problem behaviours, such as violence and aggression, is tied up with broader exclusory social categories and processes that tend to operate in neoliberal western societies. Indeed, they note how in the United States sports programmes can be divided into two types: sport for ‘social opportunity’ and sport for ‘social control’. Furthermore, they argue that the former is by and large targeted at the socially mobile white middle classes and the latter the less mobile working class, poor and socially excluded. Sport as social opportunity emphasizes sport as an opportunity for the personal development, growth and social mobility, while sport as social control focuses on young people from inner-city areas and ‘at risk’ housing estates and views them somewhat homogenously as a potentially dangerous group who are likely to get into trouble if they are not in structured settings participating in activities controlled by responsible adults (teachers, social workers, youth justice workers, etc), not least of all because their parents are (allegedly) uninvolved and/or seemingly unable to control them. Here, particular ‘types’ of groups of young people are seen as being inclined toward anti-social and criminal behaviour. Hence, they are in need of protection, from both their environment and themselves. Not least of all because the community will be safer if they are controlled and socialized through leisure and sporting activity (Seefeldt and Ewing, 2002).

Both Coakley (2002) and Coakley and Donnelly (2004) note the class-, gender- and race- based inequalities which permeate through the sport as social control model. Not least of all because the majority of young people involved in them come from inner-city areas where young people from middle-class white backgrounds tend to not ‘hang-out’. Kelly (2011) discovered the same in her analysis of SBI as a mechanism to promote social inclusion in the UK. She notes that SBIs often serve to conceal or obscure broader social inequalities through individualizing the problem of youth offending and anti-social behaviour. In part they do this through their incorporation of a ‘pathways to work’ discourse, such as those promoted by Andrews and Andrews (2003), where individualised counselling, mentoring, life skills training and educational programmes are bound up with organised sporting activity, to support young people to change their anti-social and offending behaviour. For Kelly (2011) such initiatives, no matter how beneficial for some of their participants, by and large do not work because they deemphasize the very structural inequalities that she argues bring about the behaviour they are seeking to change in the first

place. The core problem for the young person is that the SBI programme is failing to fully account for their lived experience, which to no small degree is the practical outcome of overarching structural inequalities i.e. blocked social opportunity, poverty, stigmatization, racial and class tension, gender-based violence, and so on (Goldson and Muncie, 2006). Criminological research has repeatedly shown that ethnic minority groups and individuals from working class backgrounds are disproportionately overrepresented in the criminal justice system; that black, asian and mixed-raced youths are more often subject to formal criminal justice processes and frequently get higher penal tariffs than their white counterparts; as well as that young female offenders are similarly often treated more punitively than their male counterparts (white or otherwise) while at the same time often being the victims of gender-based violence (Feilzer and Hood 2004, May 2010). If such research is not engaged with by SBI promoters and enthusiasts, then SBIs run the risk of serving to further exclude the already excluded as the young people involved disengage with programme activities which they instinctively feel is not 'in-tune' with their everyday lived experience. This is why Kelly (2011, pp 126) concludes that the impact of SBI on changing behaviour '*is inevitably limited. Moreover, sports-based interventions risk legitimating a reductive analysis of these complex processes, highlighting individual deficits and de-emphasizing structural inequalities*'.

Conclusion

This paper began by noting that the transformative power of sport to change lives for the better should not be underestimated. It discussed how SBIs are used internationally to connect 'at risk' young people to youth services, community networks and job-skills training and education programmes, as criminal justice agencies, social services, youth workers voluntary organizations and community groups, together seek to address anti-social and offending behaviour amongst young people. It was noted that research evidence exists that reinforces the positive role sport can play in changing for the better the lives of some young people (Seefeldt and Ewing, 2002). But the limitations of the available literature to conclusively support SBIs claims to success were also noted. There is a lack of methodologically robust evidence to support the argument that participation in sporting activity can directly lead to a reduction in anti-social and offending behaviour (West and Compton, 2001). Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, it was noted how SBIs can act as a social control mechanism and in doing so may serve to mask the broader structural inequalities which often shape a young offender's lived experience of growing up in marginalized and stigmatized communities (Kelly, 2011). This point is particularly important given the race- gender- and class-based inequalities that permeate through neoliberal nation-states, western criminal justice systems and official recorded crime statistics (Maguire, Morgan and Reiner, 2012).

But what does this all mean for SBI enthusiasts and sport and leisure managers seeking to promote a critical re-evaluation of existing practices? Clearly, although many young people do benefit on one way or another from participating in sport, it is nevertheless necessary to acknowledge the limitations of SBIs alone to address offending and anti-social behaviour. SBI programmes work best when they form part of a broader targeted strategy for dealing with the problem of youth crime. But it is arguably most important to enlarge the

definition of what is meant by diversity in SBI and as part of this perhaps move beyond the more traditional choices of athletics, football, swimming and basketball, in order to connect with a broader range of role models, community leaders and coaching volunteers who are sensitive to the diverse needs of minority groups as well as the broader social forces and structural inequalities that can impact on their lives (Kelly, 2012). There is a need to pursue a more inclusive approach to partnership development through seeking to include non-traditional stakeholders, including perhaps most importantly, community representatives and cultural leaders from minority groups whose needs are not currently being fully catered for, such as for example, Muslim, Hindu and Polish community leaders. All too often SBIs seem to be focused primarily on the interests and needs of young people from white or black working class backgrounds. In doing so, they run the risk of not paying enough attention to the diverse interests and needs of other minority groups, including asian and more recently, middle eastern and eastern European groups. The asian male prison population grew by 261 percent between 1985 and 2009, while the last ten years have seen a gradual increase in the number of middle eastern and eastern European offenders entering the UK criminal justice system (Maguire, Morgan and Reiner 2012). It is important SBIs be more sensitive to such trends. Yet perhaps the most under represented group, certainly in terms of targeted research, remains teenage girls. The majority of published literature details the outcomes of SBIs interventions that primarily cater to the interests and needs teenage boys, who are by and large positioned as dangerous and inherently 'risky subjects', often on the grounds of nothing more than where they live or who they associate with (Coakley and Donnelly, 2004). It is only by seeking to challenge such stereotypes and enlarging the concept of diversity currently employed within the SBI literature, that sporting activities can be made more relevant to the lived experience of the young people whose behaviour they are seeking to influence.

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