QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY BELFAST

Supporting Justice Involved Youth in Northern Ireland

The Potential Role of Educational Psychologists

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Abbreviation	Full Terminology
ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
BPS	British Psychological Society
CYP	Children and Young People
DoJ	Department of Justice
EP	Educational Psychologist
FCAMHS	Forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
JIY	Justice Involved Youth
MACR	Minimum Age of Criminal Responsibility
NI	Northern Ireland
PATHS	Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
PPS	Public Prosecution Service
SEBW	Social, Emotional, Behavioural, Wellbeing
SEN	Special Educational Need
UK	United Kingdom
YJP	Youth Justice Professional
YJA	Youth Justice Agency
YJS	Youth Justice System
YOI	Youth Offending Institution

Contents

01 Youth Justice System (YJS) Northern Ireland

Introduction

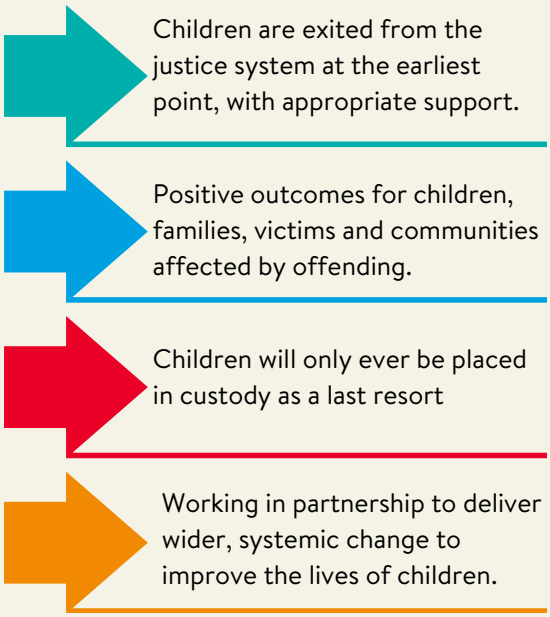
The Youth Justice Agency (YJA) was established in NI under the Criminal Justice (Children) (NI) Order 1998 and Justice (NI) Act 2002 to support children and young people (CYP) who are involved or are at risk of being involved with the criminal justice system (Brown, 2023). Approximately five in every 1,000 CYP are involved with the YJA, with less than one in every 1,000 attending Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre (Department of Justice [DoJ], 2022a). Responsibilities of the YJA include addressing offending behaviour, delivering interventions to divert from crime, assisting rehabilitation and reintegration, and supporting victims through restorative approaches (DoJ, 2012). CYP in NI can be held criminally responsible at age 10, meaning their first engagement with the YJA may occur while attending primary school. Recommendations suggest raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility (MACR) to 14 years (DoJ, 2022b) in recognition of Article 4 and 40(3) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989), which emphasises prioritising the best interests of JIY.

The YJA in NI has undergone significant review and reform since 2011 with one of the most recent development's being the YJA's 'Children First' model of practice being published in 2022 (DOJ, 2022a).

The Youth Justice Review (DoJ, 2011) brought about systemic change within NI towards a more holistic, community-based, and child-centred approach (Graham, 2021). This began with prioritising the child's needs and placing greater emphasis on understanding the risk factors underpinning offending behaviours (Carr & McAllister, 2021). The 2016 scoping study of youth justice led to the creation of the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice (2022), a five-year policy highlighting the need for interagency collaboration to improve positive outcomes and wellbeing (see Figure 1).

Consequently, all CYP have been removed from adult prisons, with focus shifting towards early intervention and restorative services, resulting in a 54% reduction of CYP entering the YJS between 2011 and 2020 (DoJ, 2022a). Diversionary initiatives such as youth conferencing have since been implemented, providing opportunities to make amends (McAra &McVie, 2007). A small number of JIY will experience a placement in a youth offending institution (YOI) with the focus being rehabilitation and providing professional support (Brown, 2023).

Figure 1
Strategic Framework for Youth Justice Outcomes



Rationale for EP involvement

The British Psychological Society's (BPS, 2024) definition of the role of the EP highlights responsibilities to support vulnerable young people with learning difficulties, social and emotional challenges, and complex needs, in addition to providing training and multi-agency collaboration. Considering the aims of the Strategic Framework for Youth Justice (DoJ, 2022a) and the prioritisation of wellbeing in the Children and Young People's Strategy 2020-2030 (NI Executive, 2021), EPs may be well placed to drive systemic change focusing on early intervention and wellbeing for JIY or those at risk of offending. Within educational settings, EPs, in their consultation role, can emphasise a holistic, child-focused approach, which focuses beyond offending behaviour to the needs of the child (Smith & Gray, 2019). A recent needs assessment of JIY residing in YOI revealed nearly 70% received support from the in-reach forensic child and adolescent mental health service (FCAMHS), while over 64% were not in any form of education before their arrest (DoJ, 2022). Additionally, 58% of JIY within YOIs are care experienced children (oft referred to as looked after children), with high needs and vulnerabilities (Brown, 2023).

The Special Educational Needs legislation in NI e.g. the SEN Code of Practice (Department of Education NI, 1998) and SEN Regulations (Department of Education NI, 2005) outlines the requirements for supporting those with identified SEN, statutory assessments and statements. There is clear applicability to those JIY with SEN and this emphasises the potential responsibility of EPs to advise on educational provision appropriate to the needs of JIY within custody and reintegration (Howarth-Lees & Woods, 2022). Previous research indicates that, within the YJS, there can be limited understanding of the presentation of learning difficulties and how this may impact engagement with intervention services (Taylor, 2016). Educational psychologists can contribute by providing training and support to practitioners, aiding in the early identification of young people's needs and adapting interventions. This aligns with the routine work of EPs in educational settings, reinforcing their suitability to support YJS with interventions.

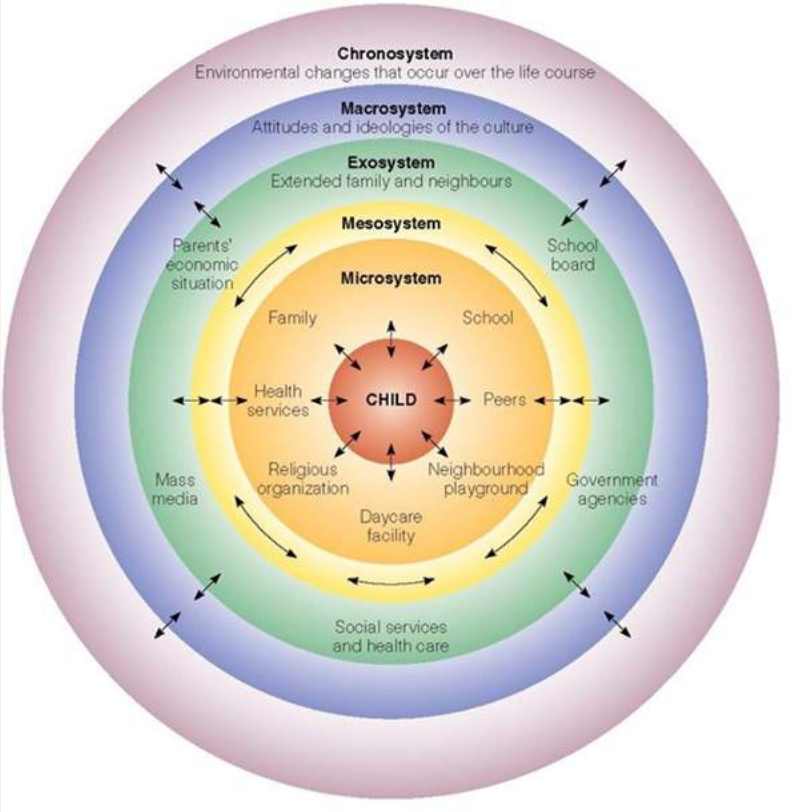
02 Risk and Protective Factors for Young Offending

Preventing youth offending behaviour necessitates addressing both risk and protective factors, where risk considers all aspects contributing to a higher likelihood of increased susceptibility to antisocial behaviour, violence and crime (Klien et al., 2023). Protective factors refer to skills and coping strategies which support CYP to manage stress and help to mitigate risks (Andres & Bonta, 2010). Reflecting on all factors throughout the process of psychological formulation is necessary for providing a comprehensive understanding of needs, strengths, and enhancing long-term intervention outcomes (deVries Robbé et al., 2020). Protective and risk factors influencing offending behaviour function at individual, family, school, peer, and community levels but do not necessarily weigh equally in importance (Augimeri et al., 2020). Research suggests external factors like poverty and social networks may play a crucial role for JIY, while protective factors, or dynamic and changeable risk factors such as self-control and coping skills, are effective target areas for positive intervention and prevention (deVreis Robbé et al., 2020). It is important to note that while certain specific risk factors may play a disproportionate role in offending behaviour, no single factor can predict it (Augimeri et al., 2020). Antisocial behaviour during childhood can serve as a warning sign for future criminal activity, yet only a small number of JIY continue to engage in offending behaviour into adulthood (Kleeven et al., 2022). For an overview of the theoretical models considering why persons engage in crime which are referenced throughout this section, see Appendix A.

The Socio-Ecological Model

To place contributing, mitigating and target areas of youth offending for intervention within psychological contexts, this document draws upon Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory and theories of social constructs such as 'Social GGRRaAaCCEeeSsS' (Burnham, 1992; Roper-Hall, 1998) and intersectionality (Collins & Bilge, 2020). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological model posits that individual psychological development is influenced by bi-directional and reciprocal relationships between the developing individual and those in the surrounding environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). These include the family and school (microsystem), local communities (mesosystem), and societal contexts (exosystem and macrosystem) (Birdsey & Kustner, 2021). As the model suggests that individuals are influenced by all levels of the ecological system, it is useful for considering the social connectedness of the CYP and how this may be underscored by social inequalities (Gross & Wilson, 2020) – see Figure 2 (Guy-Evans, 2020).

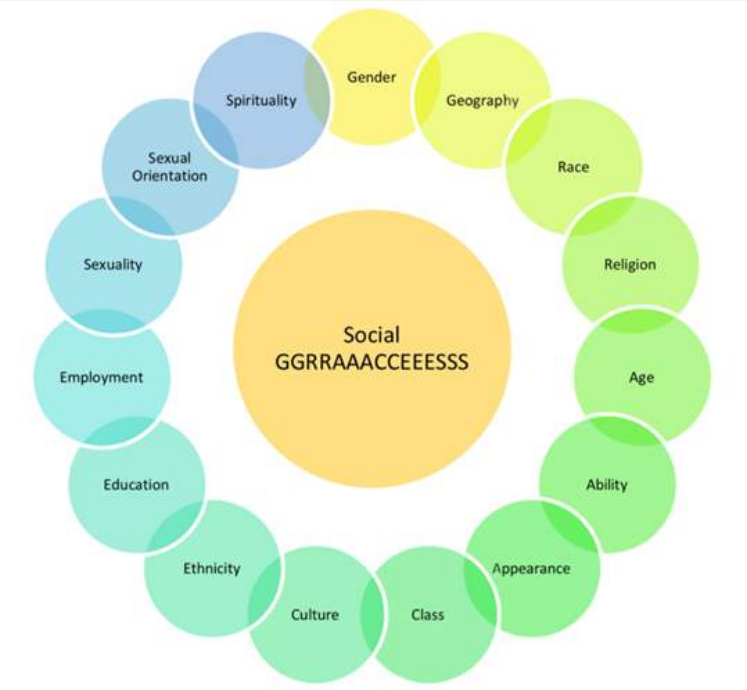
Figure 2
Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model



The term 'intersectionality' refers to how interconnecting aspects of our identity, including race, class, gender, ethnicity and age, among others can influence social relations through a means of privilege or discrimination (Collins & Bilge, 2022). To facilitate self-reflexivity in psychological practice, the acronym 'GGRRaAaCCEeeSsS' (see Figure 3) is applied to represent aspects of personal and social identity which afford people different levels of power and privilege (Burnham, 1992; Roper-Hall, 1998).

Considering the Social GGRRaAaCCEeeSsS as well as an individual's beliefs, the power structures around them, and their lifestyles is important for deconstructing power and exposing prejudice in relationships; it is important to consider all features, including those that are visible and invisible, as well as those that are voiced and unvoiced (Burnham, 2012).

Figure 3
The Social GGRRaAaCCEeeSsS



Note. Image taken from https://www.nationalelfservice.net/treatment/psychotherapy/social-ggrraaaccceeesss-self-reflection-for-family-therapists/ as adapted from Burnham (2012).

Individual Factors

Justice involved youth can present with various psychological traits that can include cognitive processing bias, executive functioning impairments, emotional regulation difficulties and poor impulse control (Robertson, 2022). Effective self-regulation skills, including impulse control and problem-solving, are considered important protective factors, as poor self-regulation is closely correlated with aggression, antisocial behaviours and recidivism (the tendency for someone to reoffend) (Robertson et al., 2022). In NI, the highest proportion of referrals to the YJS relate to offences of violence against a person (40.3%), followed by criminal damage/arson (17.2%) and theft (14.4%), while drug related (5.7%) and robbery (4%) are the lowest (Brown, 2023). Research indicates that there are disproportionately high levels of learning difficulties among JIY, including lower IQ and/or language difficulties and neurodevelopmental differences (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). Research suggests that there is a lack of screening and formal identification of SEN for JIY, although some estimates indicate 46% are rated as underachieving at school (Cosma & Mulcare, 2022). In the United Kingdom (UK), Tweels (2020) reports 25% of young people in the YJS are known to have an identified SEN, with over 54% in YOIs identified as having a learning difficulty and 17% with speech and language difficulties (Justice Committee, 2020).

- Age and Adolescence

The influence of specific risk factors can vary with age, where values are suggested to decrease from a peak at 12 or 13 years to a low point in early adulthood (17-23 years) (Spruit et al., 2017). This perhaps reflects the unstable nature of behaviour, attitudes, and relationships during this versatile developmental period, emphasising the importance of developing protective factors for wellbeing and avoidance of stigmatising labels such as 'deviant' or 'troublesome' as the CYP seeks to forge their identity (Kleeven et al., 2022). In NI, CYP 15 years and older represent the highest proportion of YJS referrals, although referrals at earlier ages of 14 years (15.2%) and 10-13 years (19.5%) are rising (Brown, 2023). Understanding adolescent trends of increased interest in peers, romantic relationships, emotional volatility, and risk-taking behaviours is essential when addressing behaviour issues (Lambert, 2021). If involved, EPs must consider whether the behaviours exhibited are harmful or a normative aspect of adolescent development, as CYP seek to develop their identity, autonomy and question societal expectations.

- Attitudes and Beliefs

Antisocial attitudes and maladaptive thoughts about right and wrong can co-occur with aggression and are significant risk factors for predisposing criminal behaviour (Logan-Greene et al., 2023). Furthermore, research suggests aspirations for positive future possibilities function as deterrents for antisocial behaviour, contingent on the adolescent's living context and ability to engage in long-term goal setting (De Vries Robbé et al., 2021).

- Exposure to Trauma and Adversity

Studies of the UK prison population suggest adults with four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a fourfold rate of being placed in a YOI (Ford et al., 2020). Given the high rates of ACEs among JIY, trauma-informed care is essential (Baglivio et al., 2014). In the classroom, the impact of ACEs can present as concentration difficulties, emotional outbursts, poor self-confidence, and poor internalisation of rules and vandalism (Van der Kolk, 2014). Over time, this may affect CYP self-concept and relationships, and the response they receive can often lead to a label of disruptive behaviour or special class assignment (Logan-Greene et al., 2023). Additionally, the largest proportion of CYP in custody in NI were care experienced children (42%) in 2022/2023 (Brown, 2023).

- Wellbeing

Mental health difficulties are often prevalent for JIY, with Roberston (2022) reporting 30% of JIY in UK institutions have mental health needs. JIY display increased risk of self-harm and suicide and can demonstrate pre-existing vulnerability to mental illness due to attachment difficulties, trauma and social deprivation (Neave & Glorney, 2023). Furthermore, JIY from ethnic minorities may be less likely to engage with mental health services and treatment outcomes may be poorer (Roberston, 2022).

- Sex Differences

The vast majority of CYP referred to the YJA in 2022/23 were male (75.2%) (Brown, 2023). Some research also suggests that females may be more prone to harsher sentencing and longer school expulsions for similar offences to their male counterparts (Sanders & Bibbs, 2020).

Family Factors

The family is often considered the most important source of nurturance and socialisation in a child's life, influencing a young person's beliefs, life goals, commitment to education, and vocational aspirations, which in turn, reduces the likelihood of engaging in offending behaviour (Choundhury et al., 2022). Considerable research suggests lack of parental support for education impacts CYP school problems, misconduct and engagement in offending behaviour (Sanders et al., 2020).

Positive parent-child relationships, frequent supervision and consistent discipline are highlighted as more important factors in steering a child away from offending behaviour than family structure (Lambert, 2021). CYP growing up in families marked by parental conflict, tension, absence, neglect or abuse are predisposed to factors promoting antisocial and violent behaviour (Burghart et al., 2023). This can be exacerbated by ineffective parenting styles, characterised by coercive tactics such as attempting to control through threats, guilt and criticism which can independently increase offending behaviour (Farrington & Welsh, 1999). CYP with poor parental attachments can also be more vulnerable to the temptations and pressures they face from peers and more likely to violate laws when they are with friends (Bouffard & Armstrong, 2021).

School Factors

Research suggests the education system has the potential to amplify or reduce the impact of risk and protective factors youth encounter in their home and community, through mechanisms such as social connectedness and positive future aspirations (Hirschfield, 2018).

- Socialisation

Schools play a pivotal role in the socialisation of young people, extending beyond academic skills (Sanders et al., 2020). Schools can play a crucial role in identifying at-risk children, providing interventions, and establishing referral pathways (Department for Education, 2017). Theories of social learning (Bandura, 1977) and social bond theory (Hirschi, 1969), theorise that strong social bonds are central to prosocial behaviours, the absence of which contributes to offending behaviour. Research places prosocial community involvement, attachment and bonds, commitment to education, social competence, future orientation, and positive peer influences as protective factors against young offending (Kleeven et al., 2022). Inclusive school practices foster positive relationships that promote prosocial behaviour, as students work to maintain these relationships and related expectations (O'Grady, 2017).

- Academic Underachievement

Academic failure has long been associated with JIY and reoffending (Sanders et al., 2020). Factors such as academic difficulties, low self-esteem, and ability streaming are interrelated and significantly correlated with JIY (Crenna-Jenning, 2021). UK research also found that being placed in lower-performing streams in primary school had stigmatising effects, affecting self-esteem in males in later years (Crenna-Jennings, 2021). School failure is also correlated with a negative self-image, withdrawal, anger, and increased tendencies towards antisocial behaviour (Robertson, 2022).

- Exclusions and Discipline Practise

The 'School-to-Prison Pipeline' refers to the phenomenon by which CYP who experience punitive punishment in schools are increasingly at risk of entering the YJS (Hemez et al., 2019). Within the UK, Taylor (2016) reported almost 90% of JIY under 18 years in YOIs have no educational qualifications or had been excluded from school, with 40% not having attended since the age of 14. Research suggests exclusions and suspensions from school are linked to increases in youth offending, knife possession and premature disengagement from education (Timpson Review, 2019). Analysis of the 1% of children in the UK permanently excluded by the end of Key Stage 4 indicated that 7% to 18% of those who received multiple fixed period exclusions went on to pass English and Maths GCSEs, arguably essential qualifications for adulthood (Timpson, 2019). Intersecting forms of structural disadvantage and systemic discrimination can also feature in school exclusion which may further alienate already vulnerable groups (Arnez & Condry, 2021). In the UK, reported rates of school exclusion suggest disproportionate application to CYPs from ethnic minority groups, including Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller, and Black Caribbean (The Traveller Movement, 2022), where Gypsy, Roma and Irish Traveller pupils had the highest rate of permanent exclusion, 0.31% in 2021/2022 (DfE, 2024).

This can have significant impact, as participation in extracurricular school activities is associated with non-offending behaviour and decreased adult supervision. Additionally, exposure to community violence and unmet needs make CYP vulnerable to criminal exploitation (Just For Kids Law, 2020).

Educators' disciplinary strategies, intended to teach social skills, can inadvertently reinforce racial, class, and gender stereotypes (Sander & Bibbs, 2020). Morris (2005) highlighted the role cultural and class values may play in school misconduct in the UK as schools sought to mould students into middle-class, mono-cultural standards of punctuality, neatness, and aspirations of academic excellence. JIY often report feeling unfairly judged and marginalised in educational spaces, leading to behaviours that result in increased disruption and further exclusions (Arnez & Condry, 2021).

Peer Factors

Justice involved youth often face challenges in their relationships with peers and authority figures at school, resulting in negative labels, social isolation and rejection by peers (Sanders & Bibbs, 2020). A considerable number of JIY have had experiences of school bullying, either as victims or aggressors (Vaswani, 2019). Firmin (2020) challenges the binary construction of JIY accountability and victim-perpetrator categorisation, claiming JIY are often simultaneously engaged in crime, coerced into it and victims of offending and/or exploitation.

As youth disengage from school, their peer groups, particularly those who are also excluded, become crucial for emotional support, a sense of belonging, and group association (Sanders et al.,2020). This reliance on peer groups aligns with theories of differential oppression, which suggest that offending can result from oppressive relationships with authority figures who view them as troublemakers (Regoli & Hewitt, 1994). Labelling theory (Becker, 1963) emphasises that when society reacts to youth behaviour by stereotyping them as deviant, they may internalise this identity and act in ways consistent with their perceived deviance (Bernburg, 2019).

Community Factors

Several community factors relate to risk for JIY, which may include poverty, housing issues, lack of resources, weak community ties, 'street-corner' peer groups and drug distribution networks (Short, 2018). Short (2018) suggests that these factors are likely to interact, exacerbated by macrosocial variables, such as limited access to parental education and easier access to illegal substances. Anderson and Walerych (2019) found that exposure to violence was frequently described by JIY in terms of its intersectionality with other traumatic experiences, such as witnessing substance use and overdoses.

- Ethnic Disproportionality

Several reports in the UK have found structural inequalities in state institutions and the YJS (Joint Select Committee [JSC], 2020). Robertson (2022) reports that ethnic disproportionality is observed across the YJS, with JIY from groups considered to be minority ethnic groups in the UK context (also known as the global majority) being overrepresented (Robertson, 2022). An 88% reduction in the number of first-time offenders entering YJS was observed between 2009 and 2019, yet the numbers of JIY from minority ethnic groups had doubled (Justice Committee, 2020). In the UK, children and young people from minority ethnic groups are also being disproportionately remanded in custody until their hearing, with 57% of children in custody coming from a minority ethnic background despite making up only 18% of the general population. The experience of being treated unfairly because of one's racial or ethnic group is suggested to elicit strong, warranted negative emotions which is particularly significant for adolescents whose emotion management skills are not yet fully developed (Lammy, 2017).

- The impact of political conflict and violence in NI

It is well established that exposure to ethnic-political related violence can have serious and negative outcomes on wellbeing and adjustment (Dubow et al., 2019). The Commission for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI) (2015) estimated that over 200,000 adults in NI have mental ill health resulting from conflict in the country, many of whom are now parents. This suggests a potential inter-generational impact from the trauma experienced by one generation affecting the wellbeing and adjustment of subsequent generations (CVSNI, 2015).

Despite the formal resolution of 'The Troubles' with the 1998 Belfast Agreement, Cummings et al., (2019)'s longitudinal study, examining the bidirectional relations between political violence and sectarian antisocial behaviour, suggests that the impact of political conflict and violence on the wellbeing of CYP, and on radicalisation/violent extremism in NI, remains a significant, enduring issue. Byrne et al.'s (2016) report on Political Violence and Young People in NI suggests that engaging in violence within a political or ideological context involves elements of a social and cultural environment of tolerance and/or permission, personal history and opportunity and/or organisation. Factors affecting the radicalisation of CYP in NI, a process of increasing attraction to and enactment of violence, include gender (male), age (15-20 years), geography, and class. Byrne (2016) proposes that community-based opportunities for CYP to engage in political discussions, access to community role models and youth services offering alternative activities to divert from violence may serve as effective prevention and intervention measures.

See Figures 3 and 4 for risk and resilience factors for Justice Involved Youth.

Figure 4
Risk Factors for Justice Involved Youth

Figure 5
Protective Factors for Justice Involved Youth

03 The Role of the Educational Psychologist within the Youth Justice System

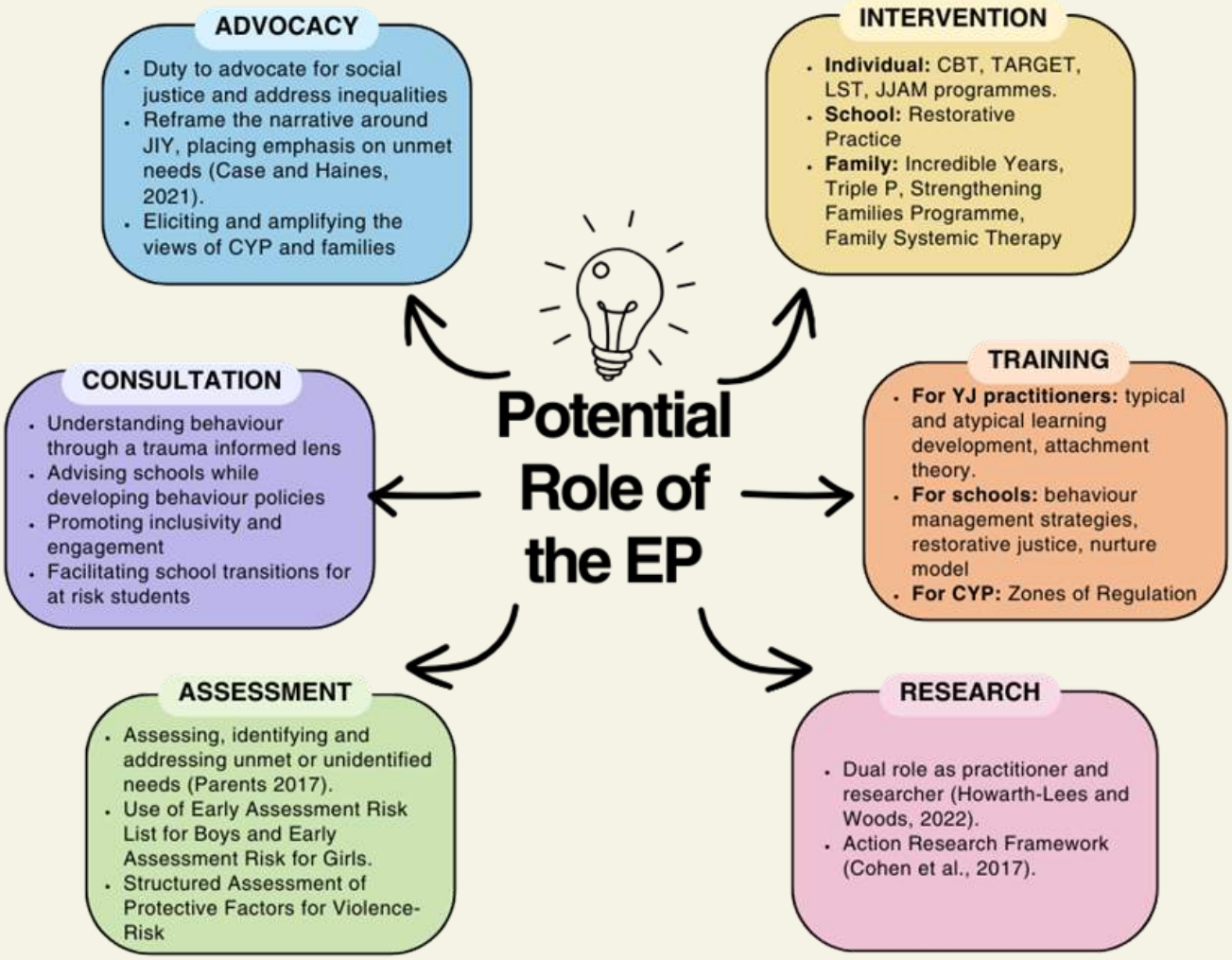
While in custody, JIY come under the authority of forensic psychology and can be referred to FCAMHS which is implemented in YOI such as Woodlands Juvenile Justice Centre. Forensic psychology is a field of study within the systems for criminal and civil justice which interacts with and may overlap with the role of EPs in the following ways:

- Work to identify and moderate the behaviours or triggers of JIY;
- Enhance awareness and investigations of the origins of offending behaviour, many of which lie within the field of developmental psychology;
- Highlight awareness of the role of social, cognitive, and environmental factors in youth offending (Needs & Shell, 2021).

Considering the overlap of psychological domains, EPs are positioned to play a more substantial role in prevention and early intervention for youths prior to custodial sentencing (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2022). Historically, EPs collaborated closely with alternative education provisions and YOIs in NI. However, in recent years, most involvements with at-risk or JIY are within mainstream education settings, responding to school concerns regarding the Social, Behavioural, Emotional and Wellbeing (SBEW) of CYP. Howarth-Lees & Woods (2022) systematic literature review advocates for extending EP participation with YJS, focusing on mental health, and providing training in learning and child development for Youth Justice Professionals (YJP) (MOJ, 2016). The current and potential extended role of EP involvement with JIY and YJA will be explored under EP core functions of advocacy, consultation, assessment, intervention, research, and training that spans individual, group and organisational levels (BPS, 2024).

See Figure 6 the Potential Role of the Educational Psychologist.

Figure 6
Potential Role of the Educational Psychologist



Advocacy

It is often argued EPs have a role and an ethical duty to advocate for social justice and address inequalities in established systems (Mercieca & Mercieca, 2022). JIY often present with complex needs and experience enduring systemic barriers to accessing support, resulting from marginalisation and school exclusion (Choudhury, 2022). Given the elevated likelihood of unidentified language difficulties among JIY and their guardians, the consequential significance of effective language proficiency within the YJS, where communication skills are essential for interactions and interventions, JIY may encounter substantial limitations in capacity to engage effectively with services (Anderson et al., 2016). In the role of advocacy, Case and Haines (2021) recommend reframing the narrative around JIY, placing an emphasis on the unmet needs that underlie their behaviours.

- Voice of the Child – The Child First Principle

The child first principle aligns closely with the pivotal roles of EPs in eliciting and amplifying the views of CYP and their families. Swift (2014) highlighted EPs are skilfully trained at employing psychological tools, such as narrative-orientated inquiry and personal construct frameworks, to ensure these viewpoints are acknowledged and contribute to positive outcomes (Newton, 2016). Various approaches including psychodynamic, cognitive behavioural or therapeutic play techniques have been utilised to elicit the voice of the child (Howarth-Lees & Woods, 2022).

The Power Threat Meaning Framework (PTMF), introduced by the BPS in 2018, comprehensively explores emotional distress and challenging behaviour and considers power dynamics, threats, subjective meaning, and adaptive responses (Johnstone & Boyle, 2018). This framework proves valuable for examining the impact of significant experiences on individuals, fostering reflection on power differentials and their effects on psychologist-client dynamics (Willmott, 2023). Advocates endorse the PTMF as an alternative to biomedical-based frameworks, citing its potential to enhance personal agency, construct new narratives, and facilitate meaning making, as evidenced in research with adult and female offenders (Gallagher et al., 2023).

Consultation

- Understanding Behaviour

Robertson (2022) describes JIY as 'high risk, high harm, high vulnerability', constituting a complex and vulnerable population. A trauma-informed approach is essential, whereby EPs promote an awareness of factors beyond the offending behaviour, relevant to wellbeing, psychosocial functioning, coping mechanisms, communication, and future aspirations (Neave & Glorney, 2022). Adopting a singular focus on presenting issues risks a reductionist understanding of JIY circumstances and overlooking crucial vulnerabilities that impact functioning in school and society (Lambert, 2021). EPs should communicate that problematic or harmful behaviours serve as coping mechanisms for the internal or external challenges faced by the CYP, emphasising the need for a comprehensive understanding of behaviour (Choundry et al., 2022). Educational psychologists collaborating on school-based interventions should raise awareness of the CYPs' 'window of tolerance', ensuring interventions strike a balance that avoids overwhelming or reactivating trauma (Beyond Youth Custody, 2016).

- Developing Behaviour Policies

Educational psychologists can work with schools to advise behavioural policies that shift their focus from punitive measures towards promoting resilience, prosocial behaviour, pupil and parental engagement and inclusive practises (Roffey, 2015). Schools should regularly review their behaviour policy in line with the evolving needs of the school. Seligman's (2018) PERMA (Positive emotions, Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment) theory and model are useful as they encompass multiple key areas for consideration in relation to wellbeing.

- Building Inclusivity and Engagement

Creating connections and a sense of belonging is essential for school engagement and success where relationship-building strategies have proven to yield positive outcomes, particularly in encouraging teacher-child and teacher-family relationships (Wilson-Ching & Berger, 2023).
Preparing for School Transitions

The transition from primary to secondary school or between schools is challenging, particularly for vulnerable children such as care experienced children and those at risk of disengagement. This shift may heighten the risk of disengagement, and EPs can play a vital role in facilitating school transitions for at-risk students to maintain a consistent and appropriate provision across schools (Parnes, 2017).

Assessment

- SEN Identification

Educational possess the expertise to conduct comprehensive, systemic assessments to gain a deeper understanding of CYP needs (BPS, 2024). The prevalence of unidentified SEN among JIY underscores the importance of EPs in assessing, identifying, and addressing unmet needs (Parnes, 2017). Early identification facilitates better understanding, enabling the implementation of appropriate support, intervention, and reintegration efforts pitched at the correct level (Howarth-Lees &Woods, 2022).

- Risk Assessment

Early age of first offenses can strongly predict reoffending risks (Dickson et al., 2022), however we must recognise this as a predictor and that it is not definitive. Timely identification and targeted interventions are considered key in assisting CYP exhibiting early harmful behaviours and their families with proactive and preventative approaches (Augimeri et al., 2020). Some research suggests the early years (6 to 12 years) are critical periods for responsive intervention and prevention efforts (Piquero et al., 2016). Assessment tools, such as the Early Assessment Risk List for Boys (EARL-20; Augimeri et al., 2005) and the Early Assessment Risk List for Girls (EARL-21G; Levene et al., 2001), focus on family, child, and barriers to intervention factors for children aged 6 to 12 years (see Figure 7).

Figure 7
Items in the EARL for Boys (EARL-20B) and Girls (EARL-2IG)

Family (F) Items	*Child (C) Items*	*Responsivity (R) Items*
Household Circumstances	Developmental Problems	Family Responsivity
Caregiver Continuity	Onset of Behavioral Difficulties	Child Responsivity
Supports	Abuse/Neglect/Trauma	
Stressors	Hyperactivity/Impulsivity/Attention Deficits (HIA)	
Parenting Style	Likeability	
Antisocial Values and Conduct	Peer Socialization	
Caregiver-Daughter Interaction (*)	Academic Performance	
	Neighborhood	
	Authority Contact (*)	
	Antisocial Attitudes	
	Antisocial Behavior	
	Coping Ability	
	Sexual Development (*)	

For 17 years and upwards, the Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk-Youth Version (SAPROF-YV) evaluates protective factors across resilience, motivation, relational, and external factors (de Vries Robbé et al., 2021). See Figure 8 for overview.

Figure 8
SAPROF-YV Structured Assessment of Protective Factors for Violence Risk

Resilience items	**Relational items**
1. Social competence	11. Parents/guardians
2. Coping	12. Peers
3. Self-control	13. Other relationships
4. Perseverance	**External items**
Motivational items	14. Pedagogical climate
5. Future orientation	15. Professional care
6. Motivation for treatment	16. Court order
7. Attitude towards agreements and conditions	
8. Medication	
9. School/work	
10. Leisure activities	

The SAPROF-YV demonstrates strong psychometric properties based on various validation studies (Burghart et al., 2023 meta-analysis). In the UK, an additional version, SAPROF-Intellectual Disabilities (SAPROF-ID), has also been developed.

Intervention

Contact with the YJS has been shown to potentially heighten re-offending rates (de Vreis Robbé et al., 2021), and in NI, Hayden (2024) suggests that early preventative behaviour intervention is seen as the responsibility of mainstream education and other services. EPs can support schools in implementing evidenced-based interventions for those at risk of offending at an individual, peer, or family level (Howarth-Lees & Woods, 2022). Effective interventions address established risk factors that predict offending behaviour or reinforce protective factors which safeguard CYP from engaging in criminal activities (Logan-Greene et al., 2023).

- Individual

Educational psychologists can help CYP address their unmet needs, through a variety of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) programmes targeted to reducing offending behaviour (Parnes, 2017). Individual Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT) and Mindfulness-based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) aim to increase prosocial skills, problem solving abilities and self-control, to reduce risk of re-offending (Larden et al, 2021). MBCT interventions can also reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, and lead to a reduction in hyperarousal states (Maroney et al., 2021). Other approaches, such as Trauma Affect Regulation: Guide for Education and Therapy (TARGET), provide psychoeducation and support for self-regulation, in response to trauma (Baskin-Sommers et al., 2022).

Programmes to enhance self-regulation and control, factors that contribute to aggressive behaviour and substance misuse, may include Life Skills Training (LST) and Juvenile Justice Anger Management (JJAM) programmes (Botvin & Griffen, 2014). LST is a universal school-based intervention which involves pupils taking part in group discussions, teachers acting as role models and providing 'homework' on effective communication, goal setting, anger management and conflict resolution (Botvin & Griffen, 2014). JJAM is specifically designed for reducing aggression in female JIS by improving emotional regulation, problem solving skills and to support cognitive restructuring of negative attributions (Goldstein et al., 2018).

- Schools

Restorative practices in schools aim to reduce ineffective 'command and control approaches' to behaviour management by emphasising repairing harm and fostering relationships (Burnett & Thorsborne, 2024). It is positive to note that in the Education Authority NI there is a restorative practice team. In the literature, reports of varying degrees of successful outcomes exist in respect of restorative justice programmes reducing rates of suspensions and school exclusions, partially explained by the differing needs and profiles of CYP (Bergseth & Bouffard, 2012). Educational Psychologists are well placed to facilitate the implementation of approaches focusing on repairing harm, resolving conflicts, and mending relationships for CYP who present challenging behaviours in schools (BPS, 2024).

- Peers and Social Groups

Antisocial behaviour rarely occurs in isolation and the role of peers is often overlooked when implementing interventions. EPs can advocate for schools to invest in social and emotional learning, promoting decision making, self-concept, and effective interactions among students. Focusing on social skills interventions during transitions can be particularly beneficial (Pollak et al., 2023).

For CYP within YJA, the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) programme and Stop Now And Plan (SNAP) are widely delivered in NI by Barnardo's. PATHS focuses on social skills development, such as self-control, emotional awareness and interpersonal problem solving (PATHS Education, 2024) while SNAP addresses emotional responses triggering aggressive behaviour to make better choices (Augimeri et al., 2018).

- Family
    - Parenting

Little et al. (2012) identified The Incredible Years, Triple P and Strengthening Families Programme (SFP) as effective parenting skills programmes for JIY. The Odyssey Parenting Your Teen is also commonly delivered through the volunteer organisation Parenting NI. The Incredible Years series (0-12 years) has a number of aims including reducing antisocial behaviour and improving parental mental health (Morpeth et al., 2017) while SFP (3-16 years) centres on enhancing family protective factors of communication, resistance to peers, family organisation, and attachment (Kumpfer et al., 1996). Triple P attempts to provide simple and practical strategies to parents for building healthy relationships to confidently manage their children's behaviour (Sanders et al., 2014). The Odyssey Parenting Your Teen Programme by Parenting NI (2010) has demonstrated moderate success in improving communication and relationships between parents and CYP (O'Hara et al., 2014).

    - Family Systemic Therapy

Family systemic therapy offering home-based therapeutic interventions has shown success in reducing antisocial behaviours, substance misuse and challenging behaviour (Local Government Association, 2022). A large-scale study comparing multisystemic therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) found similar positive outcomes for both intervention modalities with MST focusing on enhancing positive behaviour through systemic support (Baglivio et al., 2014). Tighe et al., (2012) intervention with MST reported positive outcomes including increased parental confidence, consistent discipline, and greater use of rewards, while for CYP, multisystemic therapy contributed to enhanced self-belief, increased engagement in prosocial activities, and a higher likelihood of returning to education.

Training

Educational could address any YJP gaps in knowledge by providing training in areas such as typical and atypical development, attachment theory and evidence-based interventions for reading and communication skills (Parnes, 2017). Within schools, EPs could provide training in challenging behaviour strategies, restorative justice approaches and the nurture model promoting prosocial behaviour and positive relationships (Cunningham & Kearney, 2023). Training in the Zones of Regulation curriculum can benefit CYP by teaching self-regulation skills, improving emotional literacy, and fostering a consistent understanding of feelings in the classroom (Romanowycz et al., 2021). This multifaceted training approach aligns with EPs' potential to enhance the competence of YJPs and educators alike, contributing to a more effective youth justice system (Howarth-Lees & Wood, 2022).

Research

The literature on EPs working with JIY strongly supports a dual role for EPs, as both a practitioner and a researcher (Howarth-Lees & Woods, 2022). We propose this may include disseminating information from research to key stakeholders or collating information through action research. Under the scientist practitioner model, EPs have a responsibility to remain informed about the latest research, follow evidence-based approaches, and disseminate knowledge through training and consultation. This aims to build capacity among all stakeholders working with CYP (BPS, 2024). McAteer's (2011) Action Research (AR) framework suggests an approach to bridge the gap between research and practice. In this framework, practitioners conduct their own research to understand the situation. EPs can apply this framework in their daily practise, involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting to understand and address issues in their work with CYP and JIY (Cohen et al., 2017).

Conclusion

It is crucial to consider the complex interplay of potential risk and protective factors to identify appropriate support for at-risk or JIY (de Vries Robbe et al., 2015). Engaging in antisocial behaviour during childhood serves as a warning sign for future offending. Addressing these factors collectively offers a comprehensive approach to intervention (Howell et al., 2019). Justice involved youth often present with complex needs and encounter persistent systemic barriers hindering access to appropriate support due to marginalisation and school exclusion (Choudhury, 2022). Educational psychologists can uniquely drive change through advocacy, consultation, assessment, intervention, research, and training across individual, group and organisational levels.

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Appendix A
Theoretical Underpinnings of Youth Engagement in Crime

The diversity of theories that attempt to explain crime and delinquency attests to the complexity of the problem and its variation among subcultures and social classes and across gender, ethnic and racial lines (Augimeri et al., 2020). The nature versus nurture debate on the determinants of youth engaging in crime continues (Roberston, 2022). No single theory can adequately explain all the reasons behind offending behaviour in youth, but the predominant theories when considered together, are able to explain most delinquent behaviour (de Vries Robbé et al., 2020). Explanations of crime and youth offending fall into one of two broad categories; rational or classical theories and positivist or determinist theories.

Rational Choice Theory

Rational choice theory receives wide support from those who believe that the offending behaviours occur when the offender decides that the probable gain from illegal behaviour outweighs the possible costs of getting caught, convicted and punished. Within this, routine activity theory purports such rational crimes are loosely related to interaction of three variables associated with the "routine activities" of everyday life; the availability of suitable targets of crime, the absence of capable guardians and the presence of motivated offenders (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Rational choice theory assumes that since crime is a rational choice, criminal offenders could be deterred by punishment and punishment is justified as a practical measure for preventing crime. The effectiveness of punishment as a deterrent depends on three factors; certainty, speed and severity, when offenders believe they are likely to be caught (certainty), convicted (speed) and punished (severity).

Positivist Theories

In contrast, positivist theories purport that external conditions beyond the individual's control affect the decision to engage in criminal behaviour. Positivist theories have developed explanations of delinquency based on individual factors such as heredity, intelligence, and psychological characteristics; on social structures within society and on social processes within groups of persons; and on political and economic structures in society. These theorists are critical of an over-reliance on punishment to deter crime and believe the individual and social factors that cause crime must be addressed through educational programmes and social reform.

Individual Explanations

Individual explanations of crime in youth have focused primarily on intelligence, learning difficulties, psychological characteristics and biochemical factors. It is posited that these individual factors enhance the probability of school failure and susceptibility to misconduct and crime.

Structural Strain Theories (e.g. Cohen, 1955; McKay, 1942; Miller, 1958)

Strain theory was first proposed by Merton (1938). Simply put, it postulates that the pursuit of monetary success or middle-class status is desired by everyone, but some individuals and groups within society are unable to achieve this status legitimately (Agnew, 2011).This theory focuses on the social and cultural environment in which adolescents grow up or on subcultural groups in which they become involved. Social structure and strain theory explanations claim that offending behaviours are often an expression of frustration resulting from limited educational and employment opportunities, particularly for low income and disadvantaged youth (Winter, 2020). Whether or not there is outright discrimination, the verbal and social skills, family reputation, and social contracts necessary to complete educationally and vocational opportunities often exclude children from poor or ethnic minority families.

General strain theory suggests young offending develops from having negative relationships with others, which inhibits development of positive goals, the removal of positive interactions with those close to the individual, or when crime may appear more appealing than experiencing environmental stressors. Research suggests that multiple strains often can have a strong causal effect on development of youth offending or criminal behaviour (Kubrin et al, 2009). Agnew (1992; 2011) stated that some associated risk factors for general strain theory include:

- Economic factors; poverty and/or homelessness,
- Family factors; poor parental supervision, parental rejection, harsh and/or inconsistent discipline, and child maltreatment and/or abuse,
- Neighbourhood factors; lack of resources and/or high rates of violence in area of residence.

Subculture explanations of Structural Strain

Subcultural explanations suggest youths from poorer neighbourhoods and communities characterised by poverty, social problems and crime develop different values and attitudes towards the law, violations and means of resolving conflict. Most young people accept and aspire towards a middle-class lifestyle and dominant middle-class values of punctuality, neatness, drive and ambition for success in the school system. Delinquent acts are viewed as reactions to the frustrations of blocked opportunities and a means of gaining positive self-concept.

Social process explanations

Social process explanations focus on social interactions between individuals and environmental influences that may lead to delinquent behaviour. Social process explanations that are specifically included in school experiences can be linked with control theory (delinquency evolves from the nature of juvenile's social interactions) and labelling theory (delinquency because of societal reactions to deviant behaviour of some youth). Control theories differ from structural strain explanations in the emphasis on sociopsychological differences, including individual differences in personality and self-image. They posit internal factors of self-control and external factors of parental supervision, discipline, and social institutions help to "contain" or "insulate" persons from crime (Reckless, 1961). The emphasis in social process explanations is on how behaviour is learned through influences in an individual's environment, especially the home and family.

Social Bond Theory

Social bond theory was developed from Hirschi's Causes of Delinquency (1969), which explained offending behaviour in youths through the four elements of attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Ties of affection youth have towards parents, teachers and friends help steer a child away from offending behaviour through nurturing parenting, consistent discipline practises and positive parenting relationships (Liu & Miller, 2020). Liu & Miller (2020) explain this simply claiming 1) a CYP is less likely to engage in delinquency if they are bonded to their society and effectively socialised, 2) they have internalised the conventional values and norms, 3) have 'conventional' aspirations of success, and 4) have secure attachments to parents/caregivers. This leads to the achievement of 'conformity' through socialisation, and those who fail to develop prosocial bonds are at increased risk of delinquency (Liu & Miller, 2020).

Differential Oppression Theory

Differential oppression theory suggests juvenile delinquency often results as children react to oppressive relationships with parents and other authority figures who perceive them as inferior, subordinate or as troublemakers (Regoli & Hewitt, 1996).

Labelling Theory

Social reaction or labelling refers to the process of stereotyping youth and fostering a self-image of delinquency. Becker (1963) proposed that those in society who make and enforce the rules "create" deviants by labelling persons, who in turn tend to act out the deviant behaviours consistent with their new identity. Labelling theory also has important applications in school practises as it is common to classify students according to their learning ability and place them into groups and tracks with other students. Critics of school tracking claim it has a stigmatising effect on youths and that teachers, peers and parents come to expect less in behaviour and academic standards from students in low-ability tracks while more is expected of students in high-ability tracks (Kelly & Pink, 1982).

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