EUDA
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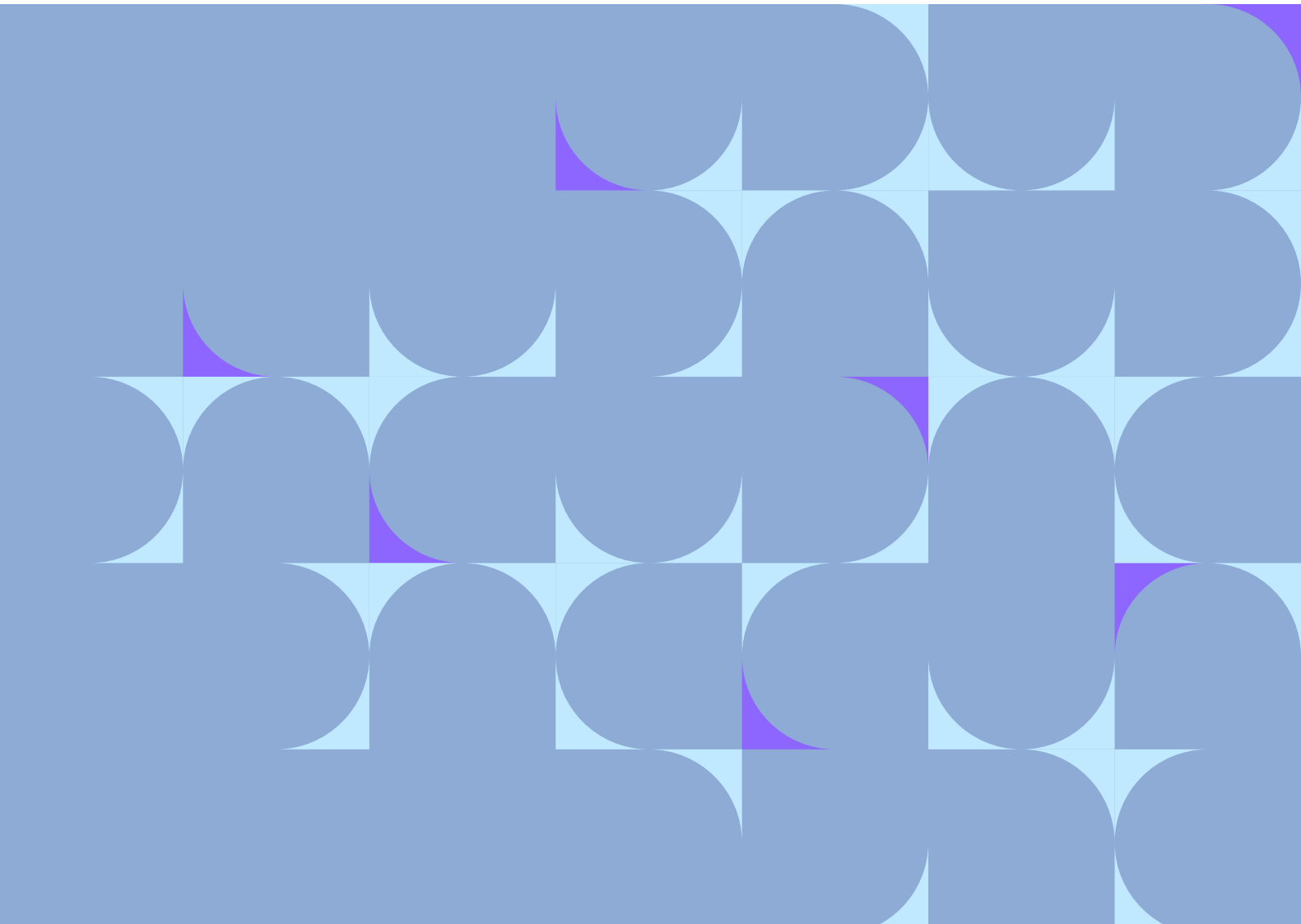
Addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks

Rapid evidence review



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Addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks

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Summary

Young people's recruitment into criminal drugs networks is a complex, multilevel phenomenon driven by individual vulnerabilities (e.g. trauma or substance misuse), social dynamics (e.g. peer or family influence) and structural conditions (e.g. poverty, community violence and weak social control). This review identifies promising interventions from international literature to inform a conceptual framework to address the complex challenge of young people's recruitment into criminal drugs networks. Using a rapid evidence review methodology, guided by Dobbins (2017), and the population, intervention, comparison and outcome (PICO) framework, searches were conducted across ProQuest, PsycINFO and grey literature, yielding 22 relevant evidence sources.

Along with drivers of recruitment and implementation lessons, the following eight intervention approaches were identified.

- **Network-informed disruption.** Methods such as social network analysis and agent-based modelling to target recruiters and leaders.
- **Family-centred responses.** Trauma-informed therapies (such as functional family therapy and multisystemic therapy) integrated with welfare and other appropriate services.
- **Rapid engagement and embedded support.** Immediate, co-located relational interventions to overcome referral delays and disengagement.
- **Place-based strategies.** Community mobilisation and collective efficacy to counter criminal influence in neighbourhoods over time.
- **Digital safety and counter-recruitment online.** Partnerships with tech platforms, awareness campaigns and digital literacy.
- **School-based responses.** Mentoring and relational models with culturally diverse approaches to strengthen attachment and resilience.
- **Justice-adjacent interventions.** Capitalising on 'reachable moments' in services like youth diversion and care settings.
- **Economic opportunity and prosocial identity building.** Programmes that enhance job prospects and focus on mentoring and prosocial identity development.

Evidence on what works to prevent recruitment into and participation in criminal drugs networks remains fragmented, with few rigorous impact evaluations in high-risk contexts. However, while gaps in causal evidence exist, the current review identified literature that demonstrates progression and promise in both conceptual and applied practice. These developments indicate a maturing evidence base that is becoming increasingly capable of addressing this complex issue.

Introduction

A new project led by the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice Team at the University of Limerick (UL), Ireland, has brought together policymakers, researchers, law enforcement agencies and practitioners from partnering European Union (EU) Member States ([1]) to address the issue of young people's ([2]) recruitment into and participation in criminal drugs networks in Europe.

The Safe Futures project aims to develop a conceptual framework to guide future responses to the issue. Utilising relevant literature and practice wisdom, and building on current initiatives, the overall project seeks to inform and design effective strategies, focusing on both prevention and intervention, to reduce young people's recruitment into and involvement in drug-related criminal activities.

Responding to young people's recruitment into and participation in criminal networks and drug markets is a complex challenge. Scientific evidence in this area is limited, despite numerous Member States identifying the growing involvement of young people in organised crime, and particularly the illicit drug trade, as a major concern (Luyten et al., 2025).

Context

The Safe Futures project is funded by the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) ([3]). The EUDA's mandate is to strengthen the EU's preparedness in relation to current and future drug problems and support Member States in addressing the illicit drug situation (European Union, 2024). As part of this mandate, the EUDA emphasises the need for evidence-informed responses to the complex challenge of young people's recruitment into criminal drug markets.

In the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime, the 2021–2025 EU drug strategy and action plan (Council of the European Union, 2021), complemented by the EU roadmap to fight drug trafficking and organised crime (European Commission: Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, 2023), identifies the prevention of young people's recruitment into organised drug crime and illicit drug markets as a key priority. This focus will continue in the comprehensive new EU drug strategy and action plan against drug trafficking. In a recent Europol intelligence notification, the growing recruitment and exploitation of minors (typically aged 13–17 years) by criminal networks across Europe was highlighted as an increasingly concerning tactic (Europol, 2024). Drawing on contributions from national law enforcement

([1]) The core group of members are from Ireland, the Netherlands and Sweden, along with Northern Ireland and the European Union Drugs Agency.
([2]) For the purposes of the Safe Futures project, young people are defined as those under the age of 24, similar to the United Nations recording for statistical purposes.
([3]) On 2 July 2024, the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) was established, replacing the European Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

authorities, Europol reports that minors are now implicated in over 70% of criminal networks, including those involved in cybercrime, fraud, drug trafficking, migrant smuggling and property crime. Criminal actors increasingly use social media and encrypted messaging to identify, groom and instruct young people, leveraging anonymity, self-destructing messages, closed groups, tailored slang, emojis and euphemisms to obscure intent and reduce detection risk (Europol, 2024).

In terms of drug trafficking, especially trafficking of cocaine and cannabis, minors undertake roles as local dealers, couriers, warehouse operators and drug extractors from shipping containers (Europol, 2024). Participation in 'rip off' activities, or stealing drugs from rival networks, now accounts for nearly 10 % of recorded incidents involving young people in some countries (Europol, 2024, p. 1). Violence is also outsourced to minors, with evidence suggesting that some are receiving substantial payments (up to EUR 20,000) for 'hit like' killings. These acts of 'violence as a service' are frequently arranged remotely by criminal service providers who coordinate tasks, supply weapons via 'runners' and transport perpetrators, limiting recruits' knowledge of higher-level organisers and lowering evidential risk upon arrest. Recruitment tactics include 'gamification' – framing crimes as challenges or missions – and emotional grooming to foster belonging and loyalty (Europol, 2024, p. 3). Europol calls for targeted prevention and intervention to disrupt these recruitment pipelines and protect vulnerable young people.

Existing systematic review evidence in the related area of organised crime has synthesised empirical studies on the risk and protective factors for entering or recruitment into organised crime ([4]) and suggests that entry into organised crime groups (OCGs) is a critical juncture in criminal careers, often associated with increased severity of offending and risk of victimisation (Adamse et al., 2024). Unlike general crime, OCG involvement requires trust, specialised skills and social capital, making entry pathways complex. The extant research as cited by Adamse et al. (2024) suggests three main mechanisms by which individuals can enter an OCG: (1) active recruitment, when a potential member is persuaded or forced by an OCG to join the group; (2) soliciting for membership, when individuals themselves request to join an OCG; and (3) growing into an OCG, when individuals gradually become part of an OCG without there being a clear initiator. The authors argue that understanding these pathways is essential for designing targeted prevention strategies.

The review identifies significant methodological and conceptual gaps. Most studies rely heavily on retrospective designs, limiting causal inference. Protective factors remain underexplored, and dynamic variables, like those that change over time, are rarely examined, with the literature disproportionately focusing on active recruitment, neglecting mechanisms like growing into crime, which may be more prevalent (Peeck et al., 2021, cited in Adamse et al., 2024). The authors call for longitudinal, prospective research to examine

([4]) It must be acknowledged that gangs, criminal networks, criminal drugs networks and OCGs are conceptually different. For example, not all criminal networks sell drugs, and not all drug-selling networks are OCGs. There is much debate in the literature around how to define all of these; however, for the purposes of this review, and in order to identify a wider range of promising interventions, these terms have been consolidated.

temporal elements and causal pathways, incorporating diverse offender profiles and OCG types. Expanding the scope to include transnational crime contexts is also recommended.

Evidence on interventions to prevent the recruitment of young people into organised crime and criminal drugs networks is fragmented and methodologically limited (see Boertien et al., 2024). Boertien et al. conducted a systematic review to examine interventions aimed at preventing or reducing youth involvement in organised crime. The authors argue that organised crime is characterised by complexity, planning and collaboration, often with transnational dimensions (Kleemans, 2007, cited in Boertien et al., 2024). In their review, out of 20 310 potential sources, only two qualitative studies met the inclusion criteria, highlighting the scarcity of solid empirical evidence on the topic of intervention. Within the studies, two interventions were identified. Project Engage (United Kingdom) targeted high-risk young people aged 13 to 18 years, identified using indicators such as prior criminal justice involvement, substance abuse and family ties to organised crime (Hurley et al., 2021). The intervention provided six months of individualised mentorship, aiming to create positive role models and facilitate access to education and employment. Mentors offered practical support, monitored progress and built trust-based relationships.

The second intervention, Pohna: Keepers of the Fire (Canada), focused on gang-involved indigenous young people aged 13 to 16 years (Erickson et al., 2011). Grounded in an Aboriginal-specific resilience framework, the intervention emphasised family and community connectedness. Participants set personal goals and received support from a ‘circle of support’, comprising coordinators and community agencies. The two interventions shared core elements: individualised approaches, trust building, family engagement and multi-agency collaboration. However, the authors underscore a critical gap in the rigorous scientific evaluation of interventions targeting organised crime involvement. They call for longitudinal, mixed-methods research to establish causal effects and identify effective components.

Reviews in related fields of research, for example the Youth Endowment Fund’s review on support available to young people to prevent serious violence (Clemmow et al., 2025), have found that preventing serious youth violence requires coordinated systems of support across education, health, social care, justice and community services. The authors also argue that there are gaps in evidence relating to criminal-network-oriented interventions and interventions that protect against child exploitation. Additionally, Walsh et al. (2023), in their review of public health approaches to youth violence prevention, found there to be significant gaps in knowledge of how to operationalise and implement evidence-based programmes in the area.

In the United Kingdom, ‘county lines’ is a term used to describe organised criminal networks involved in the trafficking of illegal drugs within England and Wales. The Home Office (2025) reports that this is facilitated by a growing business model that uses dedicated mobile phone lines or other forms of ‘deal lines’. The evidence from the United Kingdom suggests that gangs and organised criminal networks are likely to exploit children and vulnerable adults to move and store drugs and money, and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence and weapons (Home Office, 2025). While the county lines programme, an initiative

established to address the issue, has recently shown efficacy in reducing serious violence, recent reviews suggest that its adaptation in the form of digital and localised models means that policing and safeguarding responses remain uneven (Marshall, 2024; Atkinson-Sheppard et al., 2025; Home Office, 2025).

It is within this policy and scientific context that the EUDA, following the completion of a tendering process, commissioned the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice Team at UL to undertake the Safe Futures project. The aim is to address the knowledge gap and look to improve outcomes for young people through intervention development in this area.

Scope and objectives of this review

The initial objective of the Safe Futures project was to conduct a review of literature on promising approaches to address the recruitment of young people into and their participation in criminal drugs networks in Europe (the current review). In this instance, an exhaustive systematic evidence review was not feasible; therefore, a process for identifying intervention evidence in a timely fashion via a rapid evidence review (RER) was undertaken. An RER is 'a type of systematic review in which components of the systematic review process are simplified, omitted, or made more efficient in order to produce information in a shorter period of time, preferably with minimal impact on quality' (Haby et al., 2016, p. 8).

The RER aimed to provide initial evidence to inform a conceptual framework. Such a framework can be developed with the addition of qualitative data from predetermined partner jurisdictions where there is evidence of promising practice.

Phase two of the project adopted a deliberative strategy using a non-probability purposive sample, research exchanges and semi-structured expert interviews across partner jurisdictions: Belgium, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Northern Ireland and Sweden.

It is important that policy and programme decisions be informed by the findings of a reasonably large body of literature that can form the basis for generalisable conclusions. With this in mind, the *Rapid Review Guidebook* (Dobbins, 2017) was used as a reference point.

Research question

The research question for this review was 'From the extant literature, what interventions, approaches or initiatives can address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks?'

The next section of the report documents the methods used for developing a focused and answerable question, the search strategy applied, the data extraction approach and the analysis of the evidence sources.

Methods

Defining the question

Dobbins (2017) states that the research question for rapid reviews should be one that is relevant, focused, clearly articulated and answerable. To develop a focused and answerable question for this review, the PICO framework was used (Hoffman et al., 2017). PICO stands for population or problem, intervention, comparison (optional) and outcome. In the context of a rapid review, the PICO framework can be used to structure a research question that helps researchers clearly define the key elements of their review, making it more efficient and targeted (Hoffman et al., 2017). Hoffman et al. also note that PICO is primarily used for intervention-based questions.

Question refinement was applied using the PICO framework, as outlined below.

- **P (population).** Young people at risk of recruitment into criminal drugs networks.
- **I (intervention).** Existing prevention initiatives or intervention approaches (e.g. community-based, law enforcement and educational).
- **C (comparison).** Comparison group – not required for a rapid review but could be 'no comparator', for example.
- **O (outcome).** Evidence of reduced recruitment, disengagement from networks or improved protective factors.

The result was the question 'From the extant literature, what interventions, approaches or initiatives (I, C) can address the recruitment (O) of young people (P) into criminal drugs networks (P, O)?'.

Searching for evidence

Academic literature sources

Microsoft Copilot, UL's officially preferred generative AI platform for both students and staff ([5]), was used to aid the decision on which online academic databases to search for the review.

([5]) This preference is based on a contractual agreement with Microsoft, which ensures robust data protection and compliance with European data privacy standards.

The following prompt was used in June 2025: ‘What are the top online academic databases for interventions or initiatives that address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks?’

This was cross-referenced with a recent systematic review in a related area (see Adamse et al., 2024), and the following top two corresponding databases were selected.

1. **ProQuest Criminal Justice Database** (using ProQuest via UL Library searches 19 different but related databases). This offers comprehensive coverage of peer-reviewed criminal justice topics, including youth crime prevention, gang intervention programmes and drug trafficking, through a range of peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, policy papers and grey literature.

2. **PsycINFO** (using the platform EBSCOhost via UL Library searches 14 different but related databases). This includes peer-reviewed studies on risk factors, intervention efficacy and youth behaviour change models.

After selection and based on the literature, an initial brainstorming of terms, names, synonyms, alternate spellings and concepts was undertaken by the researcher, producing search terms including “intervention”, “initiative”, “program”, “programme”, “address”, “tackle”, “prevent”, “recruitment”, “exploit”, “young people”, “children”, “criminal gangs”, “drug”, “drugs gangs”, “criminal networks” and “drugs networks”.

Combinations of Boolean operators, for example using ‘AND’, ‘OR’ and ‘NOT’, were then applied to enhance the search.

After iterative testing of the search terms (based on knowledge of the literature and relevance to the research question) the following terms were used with sources in English only (see inclusion and exclusion criteria).

(“intervention” OR “program”)

AND

(“drug network” OR “criminal network”)

AND

(“youth” OR “adolescent” OR “young people” OR “teen” OR “young adult”)

The ProQuest (19 databases) search returned an initial 131 results. On initial review of the abstracts returned, the search was modified to include AND “Recruitment” AND “Gang”, with an inclusion date ranging from 2010 to the time of the search (July 2025). This modification returned more relevant results and reduced the number of related sources to 22.

The PsycINFO/EBSCOhost (14 databases) search returned an initial 294 sources, which reduced to 13 when modified to include AND “Recruitment” AND “Gang” (as this returned

more relevant results on review) and an inclusion date ranging from 2010 to the time of the search (July 2025) (see Appendix 1).

There were 2 duplicates identified at this stage among 35 sources (ProQuest – 22 and PsycINFO/EBSCOhost – 13), bringing the number to 33 academic sources in total.

On screening (reading of abstracts, introductions and/or conclusions), the number of relevant sources reduced to 7 in ProQuest and 3 in PsycINFO/EBSCOhost. This was based on relevance to the research question. All final source citations were saved in the reference management system EndNote.

Grey literature sources

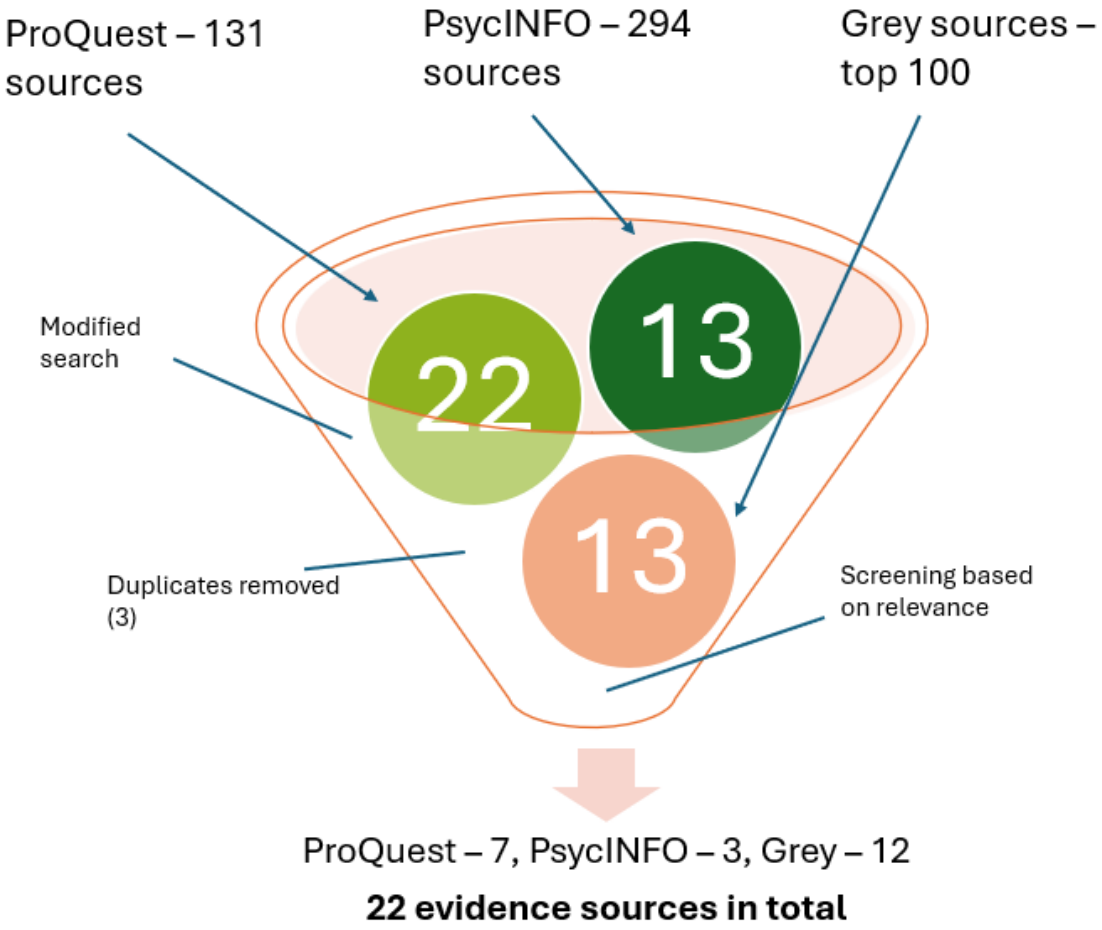
The search process established during the final academic literature search was repeated using two primary online search browsers/platforms – Google and Microsoft Edge. This enabled the finding of grey literature and materials produced outside traditional academic publishing channels but that had been published by a reliable source online. These documents are often not peer-reviewed or formally published but can be valuable sources of information, with context-specific information and reduced publication bias (Paez, 2017).

After reviewing the top 50 results returned by both Google and Microsoft Edge, an additional 13 sources (7 in Google and 6 in Microsoft Edge) were identified. Similarly to the academic source screening, the main focus was on relevance to the research question. There was 1 additional duplicate identified between the Google/Microsoft and ProQuest/PsycINFO results, meaning that 12 grey literature sources were used in the final review.

This resulted in 10 academic and 12 grey literature sources (or 22 overall) being used in the review. See Appendix 1 for snapshots of the searches completed using both academic databases and the initial return results.

Figure 1 presents a breakdown of the process from source identification to final inclusion.

Figure 1. Breakdown of the search process to final inclusion



Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

Sources were included in the review if they met the following criteria.

Population:

- focused on young people, including children, adolescents and young adults;
- addressed young people at risk of recruitment into or involvement in gangs, criminal networks, criminal drugs networks and OCGs.

Intervention/focus:

- examined interventions, initiatives, approaches or programmes designed to prevent recruitment, reduce involvement, promote disengagement or strengthen protective factors related to recruitment into criminal networks or organised drug crime;
- included community-based, educational, law enforcement, public health, safeguarding or multi-agency approaches in related areas to widen the net of intervention approaches (due to limited existing interventions in the specific area).

Outcomes:

- reported evidence related to reduced recruitment into criminal networks, disengagement from gangs or drugs networks, strengthened protective or resilience factors and prevention of initial involvement.

Study type:

- empirical studies, systematic or narrative reviews, feasibility studies, protocols, implementation case studies and network or modelling studies;
- relevant grey literature, including policy reports, government documents, needs assessments and evaluations from reputable organisations.

Publication characteristics:

- published between 2010 and July 2025;
- available in the English language;
- accessible as full texts.

Source quality and relevance:

- peer-reviewed academic sources; **or**
- grey literature published by a reputable organisation (e.g. government bodies, recognised non-governmental organisations and research institutions);
- demonstrated clear relevance to the review question, as determined through abstract and content screening.

Exclusion criteria

Sources were excluded if they met any of the following criteria.

Topic relevance:

- did not address recruitment into or involvement in gangs, criminal networks, criminal drugs networks or OCGs;
- focused solely on enforcement outcomes (e.g. arrests and sentencing) without relevance to prevention, safeguarding or disengagement.

Intervention:

- descriptive studies of gang or drug activity with no intervention, prevention or practice implications;
- theoretical or opinion pieces lacking empirical, evaluative or policy-relevant content.

Publication characteristics:

- published before 2010;
- not available in English;
- conference abstracts, editorials, media articles and commentary pieces without substantive evidence.

Quality and accessibility:

- duplicate sources;
- sources with insufficient methodological clarity or relevance after screening of abstracts, introductions and conclusions;
- grey literature from sources without clear authorship, credibility or transparency.

Data extraction

The purpose of data extraction is to conclude what is known about the question in the literature (Dobbins, 2017). In the current review this involved:

- extracting relevant information from the 22 sources under appropriate headings;
- summarising the overall findings from the sources under the relevant headings;
- analysing the results and forming conclusions.

A data extraction table created in a Excel document, based on guidance in Dobbins (2017), was used to aid data extraction, summary and analysis. Table 1 presents the headings used for data extraction, covering population and setting, or type of study, and implementation barriers and facilitators – all categories deemed relevant to answering the research question

by the researcher. This table was populated for each source. The populated data extraction table for each source can be found in Appendix 2 (and is available electronically on request from the researcher).

Table 1. Data extraction table categories

Study ID: authors, year, title, DOI	Population and setting	Summary (of resource)	Interventions/ initiatives (type and method)	Comparator : if any	Outcomes: measured?	Key themes/ results	Barriers to implementation	Facilitators of implementation

Analysis: narrative synthesis

Haby et al. (2016) suggest that an effective way to analyse rapid review data is to apply a narrative synthesis and summarise data using tables, for example. However, narrative synthesis goes beyond describing and summarising the evidence in the studies included to the exploration of relationships within the data to answer the specific review question (and then inform practice or policy) (Lisy et al., 2016). The narrative synthesis in the current review summarises cross-cutting patterns such as drivers of recruitment, promising approaches and implementation lessons. The evidence sources spanned feasibility studies, a protocol randomised controlled trial (RCT), network analyses studies, systematic reviews, local needs assessments, implementation case studies, empirical studies and an agent-based simulation.

The narrative synthesis was implemented by doing the following.

- Reading, summarising (with the aid of Microsoft Copilot) and highlighting sections of text in PDF documents for all sources. Highlighting was initially done with the available PDF highlighting tools in Adobe software, and summaries were checked for accuracy where Copilot was used.
- Populating the data extraction table for each source with the highlighted and/or summarised data.
- Concurrently, where patterns were recognised surrounding intervention approaches, grouping similar units of meaning together, firstly in the researcher's handwritten notes, before transferring headings and sections of text to a Word document for further review.
- Following a 'look alike, feel alike' approach to coding or grouping the intervention data, which led to the emergence of core messages or intervention categories (based on the constant comparative method in Maykut and Morehouse, 1994).

- In addition, actively looking for data to fit a priori or pre-established categories, such as drivers of recruitment or implementation lessons ([6]).

- Triangulating emergent results across sources to enhance plausibility (see Chapter 3 and Appendix 3).

Use of generative artificial intelligence

In addition to aiding in the targeting of relevant academic databases, generative AI was used to help summarise the 22 sources of evidence. For example, Microsoft Copilot aided in summarising sources and helped draw limited insights from the data as part of the research process. The technology was applied with human oversight and was reviewed and checked to ensure accuracy by going back to the original sources.

Ethical AI use, according to UL guidelines, involves responsible integration that respects intellectual property, safeguards privacy and upholds academic standards. Overall, the integration of generative AI into research, administrative, teaching, learning and assessment activities must be transparent and involve human oversight ([7]). It is important to acknowledge that AI retrieves information based on the exact wording used in prompts, which can narrow findings and contribute to conceptual biases. The use of AI in this instance was minimal and involved the appropriate human oversight.

Limitations

In an ideal situation, or if undertaking a full systematic review, the researcher would conduct an exhaustive search for all available evidence, both quantitative and qualitative, and published and grey literature (Dobbins, 2017). In this instance, an exhaustive review was not feasible, mainly due to time constraints ([8]). Being time-bound meant that a process for identifying reliable evidence quickly, via a RER, was the most appropriate approach.

There are limitations in the search strategy and terminology used. Relying on the top 50 results for grey literature in both Google and Microsoft Edge introduces algorithmic bias and risks overlooking nationally relevant non-English reports and publications. Additionally, the prompts and terminology used can be inconsistent across domains such as health, social policy and criminology, creating the possibility of information being excluded.

Critical appraisal is the process of assessing the quality of study methods to determine if findings are trustworthy and meaningful, with this helping to establish ‘Were the methods used good enough that I can be confident in the findings and apply these findings?’ (Dobbins, 2017, p. 17). In the current review a comprehensive critical appraisal was not

([6]) Because these are important categories to be considered for intervention design (see Adamse et al., 2024).
([7]) UL encourages innovation while ensuring that AI adoption remains secure, fair and aligned with professional and regulatory frameworks. For more information see the university’s generative AI principles (https://www.ul.ie/provost/functions-processes/academic-integrity-unit/generative-artificial-intelligence-principles).
([8]) The review was to take place within the first four months of the project, as per the funding agreement.

deemed appropriate by the researcher. This was mainly due to the expectant results, in particular that the existing literature suggests a gap in assessed intervention quality in this area, so applying a comprehensive appraisal framework with a focus on including evaluated approaches only would be problematic and severely limit the findings (see Boertien et al., 2024) ([9]). Therefore, a decision was made by the researcher to prioritise relevance to the research question; to include, as well as peer-reviewed articles (in the English language), grey material that had been published in an accessible format via a reputable source online; and to expand into related fields, for example programmes to reduce drug use. Appraisal in this instance was thus focused on the inclusion and exclusion criteria, with a view to the relevance of promising approaches in advance of the empirical work in phase two of the project.

Finally, there were no other reviewers or researchers involved in the overall process. This means there is the potential risk of researcher bias, mitigated in the current review by transparent and stepwise methods of data retrieval and analysis.

The findings from the combined review sources are presented in the next chapter.

([9]) In their review, out of 20 310 potential sources, only two qualitative studies met the inclusion criteria.

Findings

Study scope and landscape

The findings section of this report begins with the drivers and contexts of recruitment identified from the analysis of the 22 sources, then addresses the most relevant category to the research question, **approaches that can address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks** (see Appendix 3 for prevalence of intervention approaches across sources). Finally, implementation lessons, including key barriers and facilitators, are described. The evidence base spans academic research and policy / grey literature from across North America, Europe (especially the EU and the United Kingdom / Ireland) and low- and middle-income countries ([10]).

Drivers and contexts of recruitment

From the available evidence, recruitment into gangs and organised drug crime is shaped by intersecting individual, social and structural drivers. For example, individual vulnerabilities interact with peer dynamics, family structures, place-based disadvantage and an increasingly digitised criminal opportunity structure. Rather than being one ‘event’, entry unfolds through repeated contacts and escalating commitments within networks that normalise risk and provide perceived rewards (O’Meara Daly et al., 2020; Calderoni et al., 2022).

Individual-level risk factors

At the individual level, risk factors include offending behaviour, substance use and low self-control, often coupled with trauma and mental health challenges (Higginson et al., 2018; Garbarino et al., 2020; Calderoni et al., 2022). Many young people experience poverty, family disruption and limited parental monitoring, creating vulnerability to coercion or grooming (Garbarino et al., 2020; CSJ et al., 2024). These risks are not always decisive, but they can form points of leverage that criminal networks exploit when other social and structural conditions make prosocial pathways more difficult and/or less attractive.

Social context: peers, family and school

Peer influence, social networks and the environment are critical contexts. In organised crime, proximity to area-based networks, family-oriented networks and peer-based networks

([10]) Low- and middle-income countries as classified by the World Bank.

facilitates recruitment, especially when criminal norms are accepted (O'Meara Daly et al., 2020; Calderoni et al., 2022). Family systems shape exposure and intergenerational ties to criminal networks or actors increase recruitment risk (Higginson et al., 2018; Garbarino et al., 2020; O'Meara Daly, 2020).

The socioeconomic environment, community violence and weak social control can create fertile ground for recruitment (Geiran, 2021; EUCPN, 2024). In some EU contexts, drug market expansion drives demand for low-level drug network roles, while in Mexico, cartel recruitment thrives on school disruption and the glamorisation of the drug culture (Hochstetler, 2023). In terms of school, exclusion can unintentionally push young people towards criminal groups by severing prosocial ties, while positive teacher and student relationships and structured activities can support network disengagement (Gallupe et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2019). It is also evident that gang members are active in schools, creating recruitment potential (Gallupe et al., 2018).

A defining contemporary shift is online recruitment. Digital platforms now serve as major recruitment channels. Criminal actors use social media, encrypted messaging and gaming environments to identify, groom and direct minors. This is done using gamification and influencer-style tactics to attract minors (Europol, 2024; Luyten et al., 2025). In the United Kingdom, this pattern is framed under child criminal exploitation, where grooming, debt bondage and coercion blur distinctions between victimisation and offending (Maxwell et al., 2019; CSJ et al., 2024).

Structural-level conditions

Structural-level conditions such as poverty, housing, local drug markets, community violence and weak informal social control can create fertile ground for recruitment by reducing legitimate opportunities and increasing illicit opportunities (Geiran, 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024). Conversely, neighbourhoods with stronger informal social control, social cohesion, shared expectations for prosocial behaviour and mutual trust are better positioned to resist recruitment. Strong, resilient communities can protect young community members (Geiran, 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023). Qualitative network mapping of family-based hierarchies, peer-based gangs and drug-focused networks (in which trust, intimidation and perceived benefits sustain youth participation) can aid better understanding of the complex drivers of recruitment, which in turn can increase intervention success (O'Meara Daly et al., 2020).

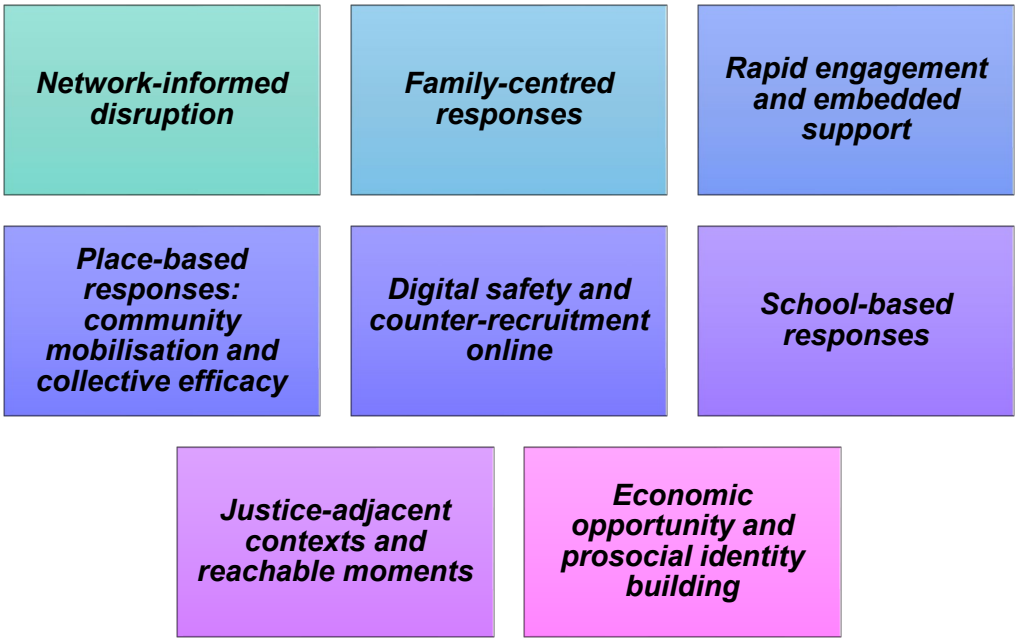
Overall, recruitment is rarely a single event; it reflects collective disadvantage, relational dynamics and adaptive criminal strategies. Effective prevention and intervention must therefore address root vulnerabilities, social influence pathways and emerging online systems.

Addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks

Intervention approaches

The evidence suggests complementary interventions, approaches and initiatives that can address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks. Figure 2 presents the intervention approaches (in no predefined order) identified from a cross-sectional narrative analysis of the 22 sources.

Figure 2. Intervention approaches identified across the 22 sources



Network-informed disruption ([11])

Network-aware strategies are recurrent in the evidence sources. In terms of disruption, social network analysis (SNA) helps identify influential people, for example high-status connectors or recruiters, while agent-based modelling (ABM) ([12]) calibrated to real contexts suggests that targeting leaders yields the largest short-term reductions in recruitment and total membership of networks. This can be as much as 18 % (Calderoni et al., 2022). Police enforcement combined with socialisation policies, for example family and school support

([11]) Evidence sources from the review: Malm et al. (2011); Gallupe et al. (2018); Alderson et al. (2020); O'Meara Daly et al. (2020); Calderoni et al. (2022) and EUCPN (2024).

([12]) Agent-based models are computational simulations with three basic components: agents, rules and an environment. Agents represent individuals with heterogeneous characteristics and decision-making rules, interacting dynamically within a simulated environment. These models allow researchers to reproduce actions and interactions of numerous agents, observe emergent macro-level dynamics from micro-level behaviours, and test the impact of policies in complex social systems without real-world experimentation (Calderoni et al., 2022, p. 201).

measures, can strengthen the long-term resilience of those who may usually be recruited to criminal networks (Malm et al., 2011; Calderoni et al., 2022). Complementary criminological SNA work recommends niche-specific disruption, for example repeated disruption in niche areas like production or retail, or removal of bridges like transport, supply or finance. These targeted disruption tactics can be more effective strategies than a more uniform or traditional approach (Malm et al., 2011).

In terms of gang membership and young people, evidence suggests that gang members in schools are not socially isolated; rather, some occupy central positions and maintain ties with non-gang peers, making them influential in terms of recruitment and normalisation of gang culture (Gallupe et al., 2018). Interventions targeting these influential young people, through mentoring, prosocial engagement or more relational approaches, can weaken recruitment dynamics without stigmatising entire peer groups.

Network disruption is not limited to police enforcement. Community-level strategies can dilute criminal influence by strengthening prosocial ties and collective efficacy ([13]), reducing the structural advantages of criminal networks in the areas they operate (O'Meara Daly, 2023). However, network-informed approaches, especially those that involve the community, require robust data governance, ethical safeguards and continuous adaptation to dynamic networks (O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024).

Table 2 ([14]) summarises examples of network-informed interventions relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 2. Examples of network-informed interventions

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
SNA in schools	Use SNA to identify high-status gang members who act as bridges between gang and non-gang peers, enabling targeted prevention.	Gallupe et al. (2018)
ABM	Simulate scenarios to target leaders/facilitators for short-term reductions; combine with socialisation and prosocial opportunities for long-term resilience.	Calderoni et al. (2022)
Niche-specific disruption	Focus enforcement on specific drug market niches (production, retail) or bridging roles (transport, finance) rather than uniform disruption.	Malm et al. (2011)
Integrated policing and social supports	Combine police intelligence on network structures with intensive, wrap-around supports at the individual, family and community levels to weaken recruitment pipelines.	O'Meara Daly et al. (2020)

([13]) Collective efficacy in criminological terms relates to the building of social cohesion and trust within a community that in turn can lead to resilience, responsibility and positive responses to crime from its residents (Sampson et al., 1997; Morenoff et al., 2001).

([14]) Each of the following tables of examples (Tables 2 to 9) contain a combination of individual models and approach types.

Family-centred responses ([15])

The evidence consistently points to family-centred responses that are trauma-informed and relational. This includes therapeutic work with the young person and the family system using trauma-informed models and family-based interventions (functional family therapy ([16]) (FFT) and multisystemic therapy ([17]) (MST)) (Garbarino et al., 2020), with culturally relevant and context-specific adaptation where needed. Garbarino et al. uses examples from the reintegration of child soldiers and comparisons with gang-involved young people, emphasising evidence-based family therapies (like FFT) and their combination with educational opportunities as useful interventions (Garbarino et al., 2020).

The literature also emphasises that family-centred strategies are most effective when integrated with broader systems, including child welfare, education, and mental health and substance misuse services. For example, the SOLID pilot trial ([18]) tested motivational enhancement therapy (MET) ([19]) and social behaviour and network therapy (SBNT) ([20]) for reduced substance misuse in looked-after children, or children in care, and care leavers, highlighting the importance of embedding supportive practitioners within social care teams to overcome engagement barriers (Alderson et al., 2020). Similarly, prevention frameworks for low- and middle-income countries stress parental monitoring and positive parenting and support as protective factors, recommending culturally adapted family interventions where appropriate (Higginson et al., 2018).

Family-centred responses also intersect with socioeconomic factors and community engagement, as families in high-risk contexts often face structural disadvantages. Combining therapeutic work with material support, such as micro-grants or housing stability, can enhance opportunities for change and increase intervention sustainability (Garbarino et al., 2020; Geiran, 2021).

Family support programmes such as the youth advocate programme (YAP) ([21]) and Souls Strong ([22]) adopt wrap-around models to keep young people in their communities while addressing risk factors through individualised, family-centred interventions. These initiatives integrate wrap-around models and the reclaiming youth at risk framework ([23]), which

([15]) Evidence sources from the review: Higginson et al. (2018); Alderson et al. (2020); Brisson et al. (2020); Garbarino et al. (2020); Geiran (2021); and O'Meara Daly (2023).

([16]) FFT is an evidence-based, short-term, family-focused intervention designed for young people (typically aged 11–18 years) exhibiting behavioural or emotional problems, including delinquency, substance misuse and family conflict (Garbarino et al., 2020).

([17]) MST is an intensive, family- and community-based intervention for young people (typically aged 12–17 years) with severe behavioural problems such as violence and substance misuse (Garbarino et al., 2020).

([18]) The 'Supporting looked after children and care leavers in decreasing drugs and alcohol' (SOLID) study was a pilot feasibility RCT of two behaviour change interventions compared with usual care to reduce substance misuse in looked after children and care leavers aged 12–20 years.

([19]) MET is a brief, client-centred intervention designed to enhance intrinsic motivation for behaviour change, particularly reducing substance misuse (Alderson et al., 2020).

([20]) SBNT is a structured, social-network-based intervention that mobilises support from family, friends and significant others to encourage and sustain positive behaviour change (Alderson et al., 2020).

([21]) Brisson et al. describe YAP as a community-based, wrap-around intervention designed to keep young people with complex needs in their homes and communities rather than in institutional placements.

([22]) Souls Strong is a community-based intervention programme implemented in North Preston, Nova Scotia, aimed at reducing gang involvement and violent behaviour among young men aged 15–20 years (Brisson et al., 2020).

([23]) This framework integrates Native American child-rearing philosophies with western developmental theory and emphasises four universal growth needs for positive youth development (Brisson et al., 2020).

emphasises meeting four developmental needs: belonging, mastery, independence and generosity (Brisson et al., 2020). YAP provides intensive advocacy and resource linkage, while Souls Strong combines cultural identity work with mentorship to reduce gang involvement. Both approaches aim to strengthen family functioning and resilience, aligning with strengths-based, trauma-informed principles to promote positive youth development and reduce violence (Brisson et al., 2020).

Table 3 summarises examples of family-centred responses relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 3. Examples of family-centred responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
Wrap-around models	Includes family support through programmes like YAP and Souls Strong and incorporates reclaiming youth at risk principles.	Brisson et al. (2020)
Trauma-informed family-based therapies	Evidence-based approaches such as FFT and MST are shown to reduce delinquency and support reintegration.	Garbarino et al. (2020); Alderson et al. (2020)
Substance misuse therapies	MET and SBNT, as per the SOLID study.	Alderson et al. (2020)
Greentown family support pillar	Family-focused interventions embedded within a broader complementary programme of intervention.	O'Meara Daly (2023)
Intensive wrap-around with diversion links	Combines wrap-around support with expanded diversion and probation pathways for high-risk young people.	Geiran (2021)

Rapid engagement and embedded support ([24])

Rapid engagement and support approaches aim to minimise delays between identification of network-involved young people and intervention, recognising that every 'wrong door' reduces uptake among high-risk individuals. Intervention should prioritise same-day or next-day contact, co-locating specialist practitioners within education, social care or diversion settings to support, build trust and reduce barriers (Alderson et al., 2020). Evidence from the SOLID pilot trial underscores this point, with uptake of substance misuse interventions among care-involved young people extremely low when delivered via complex referral pathways and multiple social workers (Alderson et al., 2020). The authors recommend enabling immediate engagement regardless of potential referrals or remit barriers.

([24]) Evidence sources from the review: Maxwell et al. (2019); Alderson et al. (2020); Geiran (2021); Villalobos et al. (2023); and Moody et al. (2024).

Moody et al. (2024) present an RCT protocol in the United Kingdom evaluating solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT) ([25]) for 10- to 17-year-olds presenting in police custody. The young people are at the police station following an arrest or a similar encounter with law enforcement, where they are then referred to liaison and diversion teams for assessment. The intervention, delivered by the liaison and diversion teams, consists of six manualised sessions over 12 weeks, emphasising solution building rather than problem analysis. Importantly, the SFBT sessions take place in the community after the initial assessment, not within long-term police custody. The design aims to provide rapid support and connection to community services before disengagement occurs (Moody et al., 2024). The intervention is designed to be brief, flexible and relationship-led, reducing the burden on young people with complex needs.

Rapid engagement and embedded support strategies can incorporate a risk-tiered focus to prioritise those with higher vulnerability. Integration with mental health and social care services is important, as young people can frequently perceive substance use or offending as secondary to broader psychosocial stressors or mental health difficulties (Alderson et al., 2020).

In summary, rapid engagement and embedded support with ‘no wrong door’ shift the emphasis from service availability to service immediacy and accessibility, reducing disengagement and improving accessibility for high-risk young people.

Table 4 summarises examples of rapid engagement and embedded support responses relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 4. Examples of rapid engagement and embedded support responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
SFBT	Brief, strengths-based intervention delivered promptly within liaison and diversion services for criminal justice-involved youth.	Moody et al. (2024)
Specialist practitioners embedded in response teams	Recommendation from the SOLID trial to co-locate substance misuse specialists within social care teams for rapid engagement.	Alderson et al. (2020)
Integrated wrap-around delivery in community safety plans	Combines multi-agency wrap-around support with diversion and probation pathways to address complex needs and reduce recruitment risk.	Geiran (2021)

([25]) SFBT is a goal-oriented, strengths-based therapeutic approach that emphasises building solutions rather than analysing problems. Developed by Steve de Shazer and Insoo Kim Berg in the 1980s, SFBT focuses on clients’ existing resources and preferred future rather than past difficulties (Moody et al., 2024).

Place-based responses: community mobilisation and collective efficacy ([26])

Community mobilisation and collective efficacy approaches aim to strengthen informal social control, social cohesion and trust within neighbourhoods affected by organised crime and gang activity. Grounded in collective efficacy theory (Sampson et al., 1997), these strategies assume that communities with strong internal networks and shared norms are better equipped to resist criminal influence and protect vulnerable young people (O'Meara Daly, 2023). Rather than focusing solely on individual risks, these interventions target structural and relational conditions that enable recruitment, such as fear, intimidation and lack of safe spaces or safe social networks.

Evidence from the Greentown programme in Ireland illustrates how resident-led initiatives, supported by inter-agency partnerships, can incrementally build capacity for collective efficacy (O'Meara Daly, 2023). Key actions include 'quick wins' that help to reclaim public spaces (for example environmental improvements), local messaging campaigns to counter the normalisation of crime and flexible engagement to empower and promote community champions (O'Meara Daly, 2023). Geiran's (2021) scoping review in Drogheda, Ireland, also recommends multilevel governance structures, community hubs and additional youth services as part of a holistic response to organised crime.

Internationally, prevention frameworks emphasise whole-of-community involvement, leveraging schools, non-governmental organisations, and local businesses to create prosocial opportunities and reduce the appeal of criminal networks in communities (EUCPN, 2024). These strategies often integrate situational measures, such as improving public amenities, with developmental supports, ensuring that interventions against criminal networks are balanced with community resilience building.

The Duarte Area Resource Team (DART) programme is a community-based youth development initiative in Duarte, California, designed to reduce delinquency risk by promoting community responsibility and career development. The programme emphasises community engagement, prosocial development, life skills and positive identity formation, aiming to strengthen protective factors and reduce vulnerability to gang involvement. Its holistic approach aligns with prevention strategies that integrate community engagement and personal empowerment (Villalobos and Torres, 2023).

Collective efficacy interventions are most effective when iterative and context-sensitive, allowing adaptation to local dynamics and sustained investment in trust building (O'Meara Daly, 2023; Villalobos and Torres, 2023). By mobilising communities as active partners rather than passive recipients, these approaches address the root causes of sustained organised crime in marginalised neighbourhoods.

([26]) Evidence sources from the review: Geiran (2021); Lawlor et al. (2021); O'Meara Daly (2023); Villalobos and Torres, (2023); CSJ et al. (2024); and EUCPN (2024).

Table 5 summarises examples of place-based responses relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 5. Examples of place-based responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
Greentown programme (community efficacy pillar)	One of four pillars in the Greentown intervention model, focusing on building community efficacy through resident engagement, quick wins and inter-agency collaboration.	O'Meara Daly (2023)
DART	Programme incorporating group mentoring, counselling, community service, job skills and strong school/police/city partnerships to reduce youth violence and gang involvement.	Villalobos and Torres, (2023)
Systemic, place-based responses	Recommendations for integrated, multi-agency, place-based strategies to address organised crime recruitment and community safety.	Geiran (2021); EUCPN (2024)

Digital safety and counter-recruitment online ([27])

Digital safety strategies can address the growing role of online platforms in young people's recruitment into organised crime and drugs networks. Criminal networks increasingly exploit social media, encrypted messaging apps and gaming environments to groom minors, using influencer-style language, gamification and promises of quick financial gain (Europol, 2024). These tactics blur the line between friendship and exploitation, making early detection and prevention critical.

Research highlights that online recruitment is not incidental but systematic, leveraging algorithms and peer-to-peer dynamics to normalise criminal behaviour (Luyten et al., 2025). Prevention frameworks therefore advocate for multilayered responses: (1) digital monitoring and takedown mechanisms in partnership with tech companies; (2) awareness campaigns targeting young people and parents to explain recruitment tactics; and (3) digital literacy education embedded in schools and community programmes (EUCPN, 2024). These measures aim to counteract the glamorisation of crime and equip young people with critical-thinking skills to resist manipulation.

Educational interventions can also play a protective role by combining self-regulation training and anti-propaganda with psychosocial support. For example, programmes like The Truth About Drugs and Catalyst emphasise media literacy and resilience against cartel narratives

([27]) Evidence sources from the review: Hochstetler (2023); EUCPN (2024); Europol (2024); and Luyten et al. (2025).

(Hochstetler, 2023). However, there are implementation challenges, including privacy concerns, the rapid evolution of platforms and the need for culturally relevant messaging.

Ultimately, digital safety approaches must integrate technological solutions with human-centred strategies, ensuring that online counter-recruitment efforts are reinforced by offline supports such as mentoring, education and community engagement.

Table 6 summarises examples of digital safety responses relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 6. Examples of digital safety responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
Platform partnerships and monitoring	Collaboration with social media and gaming platforms for monitoring, detection and youth/parent awareness campaigns to prevent online grooming and recruitment.	EUCPN (2024); Europol (2024)
Educational counter-propaganda programmes	Initiatives such as Truth About Drugs and Catalyst designed to counter the glamorisation of drug culture and criminal involvement through education and awareness.	Hochstetler (2023)
Cross-border cooperation and privacy-aware data practices	International collaboration and data-sharing protocols that respect privacy while enabling detection of organised crime recruitment online.	EUCPN (2024); Europol (2024); Luyten et al. (2025)

School-based responses ([28])

Schools are critical environments for both risk and protection in relation to youth gang involvement and organised crime recruitment. Evidence shows that gang-involved young people are often integrated into school social networks, with some occupying high-status positions that enable them to act as bridges between network-involved and prosocial peers (Gallupe et al., 2018). This challenges the assumption that gang members are socially isolated and reinforces the need for interventions within educational settings.

Effective school-based strategies have focused on strengthening attachment to school, promoting positive peer relationships and reducing exposure to violence. Research highlights that low school engagement, and negative school climates are significant predictors of gang membership, while strong teacher–student relationships and structured external activities serve as protective factors (Higginson et al., 2018). Interventions such as those using relational-cultural approaches, which emphasise empathy and authentic

([28]) Evidence sources from the review: Randell et al. (2015); Gallupe et al. (2018); Higginson et al. (2018); Maxwell et al. (2019); Hochstetler (2023); Moody et al. (2024); and Muir et al. (2024).

adult/youth connection, have demonstrated improvements in attendance, behaviour and prosocial outlook among at-risk students (Randell et al., 2015).

Preventive efforts also include mentoring programmes, social-emotional learning programmes, and after-school activities, which provide safe spaces and prosocial identity opportunities. However, punitive measures like zero-tolerance policies can exacerbate disconnection and increase vulnerability to gang recruitment (Randell et al., 2015). Instead, schools should adopt inclusive discipline practices and integrate contextual safeguarding principles to address risks within peer networks (Maxwell et al., 2019).

After-school mentoring and relational-cultural programmes, for example Project YES ([29]), suggest benefits for engagement, empathy and future aspirations (Randell et al., 2015). In addition, summer education programmes show modest academic gains like improved higher-education engagement, while summer employment tends to have limited employment effects but may reduce criminal justice involvement during programme months (Muir et al., 2024).

Overall, school-based responses are most effective when multi-component, combining academic support and relational mentoring with network-informed targeting and strong partnerships between schools, families and community organisations.

Table 7 summarises examples of school-based responses relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 7. Examples of school-based responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
Summer education programmes	Programmes designed to reduce learning loss, raise aspirations and support educational transitions while reducing opportunities for anti-social or criminal activity.	Muir et al. (2024)
Self-regulation / cognitive behavioural therapy-informed programmes and counter-propaganda education	Interventions incorporating cognitive behavioural strategies and educational content to counter cartel propaganda and strengthen self-regulation skills.	Hochstetler (2023)
Relational-cultural theory in after-school settings (Project YES)	After-school programmes based on relational-cultural theory to foster connection, agency and resilience among at-risk young people.	Randell et al. (2015)

([29]) Project YES ('YES' stands for 'youth empowerment support') is an after-school gang prevention programme grounded in relational-cultural theory (or relationships as core), designed to foster positive adult–youth relationships and reduce risk factors for gang involvement among low-income black young people (Randell et al., 2015).

Justice-adjacent contexts and reachable moments ([30])

Some contexts can provide ‘reachable moments’ when young people encounter services connected to the criminal justice system, such as diversion programmes or state residential or social care. Even brief contact can interrupt offending trajectories, address underlying needs and reduce the risk of deeper system involvement (Moody et al., 2024). Reachable moments can refer to critical time points when individuals are particularly receptive to intervention, often following a significant event or crisis. For example, SFBT delivered by liaison and diversion teams in police custody suites ([31]) refers to a ‘critical intervention window’ when young people can be more receptive to change (Moody et al., 2024). Largely, the six-session intervention focuses on building solutions using techniques to enhance agency and goal setting by embedding psychological support.

Broader justice-adjacent strategies include wrap-around and multi-agency programmes at critical times, which combine case management, family engagement and community supports. For example, the Drogheda safety and well-being plan recommends implementing a joint agency response to crime model to provide immediate and intensive, coordinated support for high-risk young people (Geiran, 2021). These approaches emphasise relationship-based practice, procedural fairness and integration with prosocial opportunities and mental health services.

Evidence suggests that justice-adjacent interventions are part of a whole-system response and are most effective when timely or early, voluntary and strengths-based, avoiding stigmatisation and criminalisation of vulnerable young people (particularly in terms of child criminal exploitation) (Maxwell et al., 2019). Multi-agency operations like Operation Cougar in Greater Manchester, United Kingdom, that combine police intelligence with social care to intervene early have been highlighted in the literature. However, while the operations practice suggests early intervention is key, there are no outcome data or evidence of effectiveness available (Maxwell et al., 2019).

Overall, embedding therapeutic and interventional responses, at the right time, within justice-adjacent pathways is a potentially effective approach, provided that they are adequately resourced and culturally responsive.

Table 8 summarises examples of justice-adjacent contexts and reachable moments relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

([30]) Evidence sources from the review: Maxwell et al. (2019); Geiran (2021); and Moody et al. (2024).
([31]) This is in reference to research in three police custody suites in Lancashire and South Cumbria through the NHS Foundation Trust (United Kingdom).

Table 8. Examples of justice-adjacent responses

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
SFBT in custody	Brief, strengths-based intervention delivered within critical intervention windows (in custody or diversion) when young people may be more receptive to change.	Moody et al. (2024)
Timely youth diversion approaches and joint agency response to crime	Diversionary models and joint agency frameworks designed to provide rapid, coordinated responses to youth offending and reduce escalation.	Geiran (2021)
Multi-agency operations	Operation Cougar in Greater Manchester – combining police intelligence with social care to intervene early and address child criminal exploitation risks.	Maxwell et al. (2019)

Economic opportunity and prosocial identity building ([32])

Economic opportunity and identity-building interventions aim to reduce the structural drivers of criminal recruitment by providing young people with viable alternatives to illicit economies and fostering a sense of belonging in prosocial networks. Research consistently links poverty, unemployment and social marginalisation to increased vulnerability to gang and organised crime involvement (Higginson et al., 2018; Garbarino et al., 2020). These conditions create a context where criminal groups can offer a status, income and identity that legitimate systems cannot provide.

Interventions in this area combine material supports, such as paid work placements and vocational training, with mentoring and social-emotional development to strengthen resilience and future orientation. Systematic reviews of summer employment programmes, for example, suggest that, while short-term job outcomes are limited, these initiatives can reduce criminal justice involvement during programme periods and improve educational engagement when paired with structured mentoring (Muir et al., 2024). Similarly, community-based programmes like DART integrate job skills training to reinforcing prosocial identity and civic responsibility (Villalobos and Torres, 2023).

Identity-focused approaches also feature in programmes grounded in relational-cultural theory, which works to foster relationships between adult mentors and young people, replacing the sense of belonging that gangs often provide (Randell et al., 2015). These strategies counteract the pull of criminal networks by offering alternative narratives of success and belonging.

([32]) Evidence sources from the review: Randell et al. (2015); Hager et al. (2017); Higginson et al. (2018); Garbarino et al. (2020); Geiran (2021); Muir et al. (2024); and Villalobos and Torres, (2023).

Overall, economic opportunity interventions are most effective when they combine financial incentives with relational supports and community engagement to sustain behavioural change and social integration.

Table 9 summarises examples of economic opportunity and prosocial identity-building approaches relevant to addressing the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks.

Table 9. Examples of economic opportunity and prosocial identity-building approaches

Example	Description	Illustrative source(s)
Job skills components within DART	Incorporates job skills training as part of a multi-component programme to reduce youth violence and gang involvement.	Villalobos and Torres, (2023)
Integrated employment pathways and housing support in Cornwall, United Kingdom	Combines employment support with housing stability and harm reduction to address structural vulnerabilities.	Hager et al. (2017)
Summer employment support programmes	Provides temporary employment opportunities aimed at reducing anti-social behaviour and supporting youth transitions.	Muir et al. (2024)
Relational-cultural theory (Project YES)	Programme fostering connection, agency and resilience through relational-cultural principles.	Randell et al. (2015)
Community hubs and apprenticeship pathways	Establishes local hubs and structured apprenticeship routes to create sustainable alternatives to illicit economies.	Geiran (2021)

Implementation lessons

Preventing youth recruitment into criminal drugs networks requires more than well-designed interventions; it depends on how well those interventions are implemented in complex, real-world contexts. Evidence from the sources in the current review highlights several cross-cutting lessons that can shape success or failure.

Cross-cutting barriers (what gets in the way)

Across the literature, several recurring barriers undermine the implementation and impact of the prevention and harm-reduction initiatives.

Engagement and retention. Low uptake and high attrition are common, particularly when interventions rely on multi-step referral pathways or social worker gatekeeping. Delays between screening and first contact significantly reduce participation (Alderson et al., 2020). Incentives for engagement often fail to offset the pull of illicit opportunities, especially among high-risk young people (Brisson et al., 2020).

Stigma, criminalisation and fear/intimidation. Community intimidation, fear of retaliation and stigma deter both young people and families from engaging with services. Criminalisation of drug use and punitive responses to exploited young people further discourage disclosure and help seeking (Lawlor et al., 2021; CSJ et al., 2024). Fear/intimidation impedes disclosure and community participation, and this is particularly evident in drug network-controlled areas (O'Meara Daly et al., 2020; Lawlor et al., 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023).

Data and privacy constraints. Fragmented data systems, inconsistent definitions and General Data Protection Regulation-related sharing hurdles delay early identification and coordinated responses. Under-reporting of offences and siloed agency practices widen these gaps (O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024; Luyten et al., 2025).

Resource and workforce constraints. Austerity measures, staff shortages and varying levels of training among staff compromise fidelity and sustainability. For example, the specialist skills required for trauma-informed care or the technology needed for digital monitoring can be lacking, and resource-intensive network analysis can be constrained. This can be coupled with structural issues such as limited housing or availability of mental health services (Hager et al., 2017; Moody et al., 2024; Muir et al., 2024).

Network adaptability. Recruiters can change tactics quickly and criminal networks can adapt rapidly, using encrypted apps and gamified recruitment, outpacing the authorities that are trying to restrict illicit use. Similarly, shifting drug markets with new and emerging substances challenge harm-reduction and public health strategies (Lawlor et al., 2021; Europol, 2024).

Contextual transferability. Cultural differences complicate direct programme importation (Higginson et al., 2018). Additionally, evaluation tools may not match adapted practice in a changing and complex environment (Alderson et al., 2020; Brisson et al., 2020).

Cross-cutting facilitators (what helps)

Several enabling factors consistently appear across interventions in the sources identified.

Rapid and accessible engagement. Programmes that offer same-day or immediate contact after identification achieve higher uptake but are scarce or limited. Co-location of intervention practitioners, for example, can reduce referral delays and build relationships and trust (Alderson et al., 2020; Villalobos and Torres, 2023; Moody et al., 2024).

Strong multi-agency partnerships. Effective initiatives rely on integrated structures, clear roles and shared accountability. Examples include inter-agency boards, risk panels and school/police/community collaborations that align resources and messaging (Geiran, 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024).

Trauma-informed and culturally competent practice. Interventions that acknowledge trauma histories and adapt to cultural contexts foster engagement and reduce resistance. This includes family-centred approaches, relational models and flexible delivery (Randell et al., 2015; Garbarino et al., 2020).

Peer-led and community-driven strategies. Peer networks and respected practitioners can enhance reach to hidden populations, while community involvement and mobilisation can be key to sustained success. Visible improvements can build trust in community services, enhance collective efficacy and counter the normalisation of crime (Lawlor et al., 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023).

Data-informed approaches and evaluation. Use of SNA, ABM and real-time monitoring enables targeted interventions and rapid response to evolving network-oriented risks. Ethical safeguards and iterative evaluation can strengthen sustainability (Gallupe et al., 2018; Calderoni et al., 2022).

Conclusion

The findings of the review aim to provide initial evidence to inform a prototype conceptual model that can be further developed using qualitative data from partner jurisdictions in Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.

It is evident that any conceptual model should address short-term disruption, targeting key network nodes like recruiters and leaders while protecting young people who are 'peripheral' participants (and avoiding further criminalisation). In the medium term, intervention should embed rapid, relationship-led supports that are family-centred and trauma-informed and have a multi-agency perspective. In the longer term, resilience building, collective efficacy, youth opportunity and digital safety, underpinned by prosocial identity building, can also play an important role.

In the next section, the findings are discussed in terms of implementation, implications and limitations.

Discussion

The findings

The review consolidates evidence on the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks and identifies emerging intervention approaches from 22 academic and grey literature sources. Recruitment into criminal drugs networks is driven by a complex interplay of individual, social and structural factors. At the individual level, risk factors include delinquency, substance misuse, trauma and mental health challenges. Social risk factors include peer influence, school networks and family influence, which can create vulnerability to recruitment. Structural drivers such as poverty, community violence and weak social control amplify the risks. Digital platforms now play a major role, with criminal networks using influencer-style tactics and gamification to groom minors. Recruitment is cumulative rather than a single event, requiring multilayered prevention and intervention strategies.

Eight broad approaches were identified to address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks, as follows.

- **Network-informed disruption.** SNA and ABM can be used to identify and disrupt key nodes such as recruiters and leaders. Evidence suggests that targeting these actors can reduce recruitment by up to 18 %. Combining enforcement with socialisation (e.g. family and school supports) strengthens resilience. Community-level strategies that build prosocial ties and collective efficacy also dilute criminal influence.

- **Family-centred responses.** Trauma-informed, relational approaches such as FFT and MST are effective when integrated with child welfare and mental health systems. Wrap-around models that combine therapeutic work with material supports (e.g. housing stability and micro-grants) enhance sustainability.

- **Rapid engagement and embedded support.** Immediate, co-located interventions reduce referral delays and improve service uptake. Evidence suggests that complex referral pathways significantly reduce participation. Rapid engagement models can prioritise same-day or next-day contact and embed supportive practitioners in schools, social care and diversion settings.

- **Place-based responses.** Community mobilisation and collective efficacy approaches strengthen informal social control and resilience. Programmes like Greentown in Ireland demonstrate the value of resident-led initiatives and inter-agency partnerships.

- **Digital safety and counter-recruitment online.** Criminal networks exploit social media and gaming platforms for recruitment. Countermeasures include partnerships

with tech companies for monitoring, awareness campaigns for young people and parents, and digital literacy education in schools. These strategies must balance privacy concerns with proactive prevention.

- **School-based responses.** Schools are critical for prevention, as gang-involved young people often occupy central social positions. Effective strategies include mentoring, social-emotional learning and relational-cultural approaches. Punitive zero-tolerance policies are often counterproductive, with inclusive discipline and contextual safeguarding recommended.

- **Justice-adjacent interventions.** Reachable moments in care or diversion settings offer opportunities for brief, strengths-based interventions such as SFBT. Multi-agency wrap-around models can provide intensive, coordinated support.

- **Economic opportunity and prosocial identity building.** Poverty and marginalisation drive recruitment. Interventions that combine vocational training, mentoring and relational supports offer alternatives to illicit income. Programmes that integrate job skills with community connection and mentoring to foster prosocial identity are recommended.

Overall, it can be argued that multifaceted interventions are more effective than singular approaches. The strongest overall approach seems to be a combined strategy, with short-, medium- and long-term intervention types, for example targeted disruption of key criminal network nodes, school/family/community socialisation that builds skills and belonging, trauma-informed wrap-around and harm-reduction programmes for high-risk cohorts, and diversion pathways with rapid engagement during reachable moments (Malm et al., 2011; Hager et al., 2017; Gallupe et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2019; Calderoni et al., 2022; O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024).

Why implementation matters

It is evident that adaptability is important. Rigid fidelity to original models can clash with local realities. Interventions that adopt flexible, developmental frameworks or are updated to reflect changing circumstances, for example, maintain relevance without losing their core principles (Brisson et al., 2020). Multi-agency governance, strong intersectoral partnerships and visible community quick wins can help counter fear and normalisation of crime, but the level of success can differ across community contexts (Geiran, 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023).

Data-driven approaches, such as SNA, can target high-impact nodes and anticipate emerging risks, provided ethical safeguards are in place (Gallupe et al., 2018; Calderoni et al., 2022). These implementation lessons converge on core principles of speed, trust, relationships and flexibility, with their combination seeming to matter as much as programme content. Trauma-informed and culturally competent practice can also foster better engagement and address underlying vulnerabilities among the most at risk (Garbarino et al., 2020).

Implementation refers to the process of integrating evidence-based practices into real-world settings, ensuring that interventions are delivered as intended and adapted appropriately to context (Fixsen et al., 2005). Implementation science has emerged to address the potential gap between the 'ought to' and the 'actual' by studying the methods and strategies that promote adoption, sustainability and scale-up of interventions (Eccles et al., 2006). Interventions that ignore cultural and contextual factors risk reinforcing inequalities rather than reducing them. Effective implementation requires adapting strategies to community needs, building trust and dismantling systemic barriers (Metz et al., 2021). Overall, any conceptual model to address the issue of young people's recruitment into and participation in criminal drugs networks would need to balance fidelity and adaptation to varying local contexts.

Limitations, gaps and implications

Evidence on what works to prevent recruitment into and participation in criminal drugs networks remains fragmented, with few rigorous impact evaluations in high-risk contexts and limited longitudinal data outside high-income countries (Higginson et al., 2018; Boertien et al., 2024). Causal evidence is patchy, with few large or definitive effectiveness trials in this exact space capable of dealing comprehensively with these problems as they present in real life. Many studies in this review are cross-sectional or descriptive, offering correlational insights rather than robust causal inference (Higginson et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2019). While some interventions have been tested in RCTs, such as motivational therapies for care-experienced young people, feasibility challenges, like low uptake, have constrained definitive trials (Alderson et al., 2020). This restricts confidence in generalising findings. In addition, areas like digital online recruitment represent an emerging blind spot. Criminal networks increasingly exploit social media and gaming platforms, as exemplified in the findings, yet empirical evaluations of digital counter-recruitment strategies are scarce, leaving practitioners without evidence-based guidance (Europol, 2024; Luyten et al., 2025).

However, while gaps in causal evidence and digital prevention research are acknowledged, the identified evidence demonstrates that promising approaches exist in both conceptual and applied practice. Methodological innovation is evident in studies such as Brisson et al. (2020) and Calderoni et al. (2022), which advance the science by recommending adaptive frameworks that move beyond traditional RCT constraints. Similarly, Gallupe et al. (2018) illustrate the utility of SNA for identifying recruitment dynamics, offering actionable insights for targeted interventions. Observational and community case studies (Project YES and Greentown) also show promising real-world signals that prioritise practice wisdom in a complex and under-evaluated space (Randell et al., 2015; O'Meara Daly, 2023; Villalobos and Torres, 2023).

Not all available interventions or approaches have been documented in the review. There are existing programmes and initiatives operating in EU jurisdictions that are known to be effectively intervening in this space, for example 'focused deterrence' initiatives in Sweden, projects such as EPIC (Explaining, Preventing, and Intervening in Organised Crime

involvement), Prevention with Authority in the Netherlands and the programme *limiter l'implication des mineurs dans les trafics de stupéfiants* (LIMITS) in France. The Greentown programme (Naughton et al., 2022), mentioned in part in the current review, is also the culmination of over a decade of research into young people's involvement in criminal networks in Ireland. It was the first 'deep dive' into these networks in Ireland using a mixed-methods approach called Twinsight.

The findings reveal that young people are often recruited through family ties, peer influence and exposure to pro-criminal norms, especially in areas marked by poverty, trauma and school exclusion. High-status crime families play a central role in network stability and recruitment, often grooming children for succession. In contrast, lower-status networks are more fragmented but still exploit vulnerable young people. The research and subsequent Greentown programme response highlights the importance of understanding network structure and dynamics to design effective interventions. It concludes that disrupting these networks is essential to prevent further exploitation and offending, and that interventions must be tailored to the specific context and structure of each network and the community it operates in (Naughton et al., 2022).

Overall, developments indicate a maturing evidence base that is becoming more capable of informing nuanced, context-sensitive responses to this complex issue.

Certainly, there is enough to build on in the literature to aid in the development of a conceptual framework, which is to be established in phase two of the Safe Futures project, following research exchanges and semi-structured expert interviews across the partner jurisdictions of Belgium, Ireland, France, the Netherlands and Sweden.

Conclusion

This review set out to identify and synthesise promising approaches and interventions to address the recruitment of young people into criminal drugs networks in Europe. Established rapid review guidance (Haby et al., 2016; Dobbins, 2017) and a PICO-informed question formulation (Hoffmann et al., 2017) were applied to search for evidence with transparency. Searches across multidisciplinary academic databases (ProQuest and PsycINFO/EBSCOhost) and targeted grey literature platforms (Google and Microsoft Edge) produced 22 sources spanning feasibility and protocol RCTs, cross-sectional and network analyses, simulation modelling, systematic reviews, needs assessments, implementation case studies and policy syntheses. Data were extracted using a structured template and synthesised to identify cross-study patterns, drawing on guidance for narrative synthesis (Lisy et al., 2016).

Overall, key messages emerge. Recruitment is typically a multi-level process, influenced by various factors, rather than a single event. Individual vulnerabilities (delinquency, substance use and trauma) intersect with social-level drivers (peer networks and school/educational contexts) and are amplified by structural conditions (poverty, community violence and weak social control) (Malm et al., 2011; Hager et al., 2017; Gallupe et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2019; Calderoni et al., 2022; O'Meara Daly, 2023; EUCPN, 2024). The contemporary recruitment landscape in the EU is increasingly digital, with social media, encrypted messaging and gamified tasks normalising involvement in some jurisdictions (Europol, 2024; Luyten et al., 2025). These dynamics mean that interventions focused solely on individual behaviour change are unlikely to succeed without attention to social-level influence pathways and structural-level changes.

The most credible prevention and intervention approaches are multi-component and complementary. Eight intervention approaches emerge across the evidence, as follows.

- **Network-informed disruption.** Methods such as SNA and ABM to target recruiters and leaders (Malm et al., 2011; Calderoni et al., 2022).
- **Family-centred responses.** Trauma-informed therapies (FFT and MST) integrated with welfare and other appropriate services (Higginson et al., 2018; Garbarino et al., 2020).
- **Rapid engagement and embedded delivery.** Immediate, co-located relational interventions to overcome referral delays and disengagement (Alderson et al., 2020; Moody et al., 2024).
- **Place-based strategies.** Community mobilisation and collective efficacy to counter criminal influence in neighbourhoods over time (Geiran, 2021; O'Meara Daly, 2023).

- **Digital safety and counter-recruitment online.** Partnerships with tech platforms, awareness campaigns and digital literacy (EUCPN, 2024; Europol, 2024).

- **School-based responses.** Mentoring and relational models with culturally diverse approaches to strengthen attachment and resilience (Randell et al., 2015; Gallupe et al., 2018).

- **Justice-adjacent interventions.** Capitalising on reachable moments in services like youth diversion and care settings (Maxwell et al., 2019; Moody et al., 2024).

- **Economic opportunity and prosocial identity building.** Programmes that enhance job prospects and focus on mentoring and prosocial identity development (Villalobos and Torres, 2023; Muir et al., 2024).

Notably, modelling suggests short-term gains from the targeted disruption of leaders, facilitators and recruiters, while durable reductions depend on simultaneous investment in family, school and community socialisation (Malm et al., 2011; Calderoni et al., 2022). Across studies, the primary failure mode is not the underlying theory of an intervention itself but effective engagement. This highlights that multi-step referrals, gatekeeping and delays negatively affect uptake among those most at risk (Alderson et al., 2020; Brisson et al., 2020). To counter this, the evidence suggests immediate or next-day contact and co-located practitioners to reduce disengagement (Alderson et al., 2020; Moody et al., 2024). Across studies, trauma-informed, relational and contextually adapted practice is advised (Randell et al., 2015; Garbarino et al., 2020). Stable, multi-agency governance and shared accountability that can consolidate the effort is encouraged (Geiran, 2021; EUCPN, 2024), and adaptation or flexibility that can account for local contexts is preferred (Fixsen et al., 2005; Brisson et al., 2020). Overall, **how** programmes are implemented matters as much as **what** is implemented (Eccles et al., 2006; Metz et al., 2021).

The review's limitations are typical of rapid reviews and of the field's evidence base. Time-bound scoping and relevance precluded exhaustive searching and evaluation-focused critical appraisal. Available evaluations were few, and many designs were cross-sectional or descriptive (Higginson et al., 2018; Maxwell et al., 2019). Feasibility issues also constrained definitive trials with high-risk cohorts of young people (Alderson et al., 2020). Digital counter-recruitment remains under-evaluated (Europol, 2024; Luyten et al., 2025), and these constraints challenge causal claims. However, the current literature demonstrates progress in both conceptual and applied practice. These developments indicate a maturing evidence base that is becoming more capable of addressing the complex issue of young people's recruitment into criminal drugs networks.

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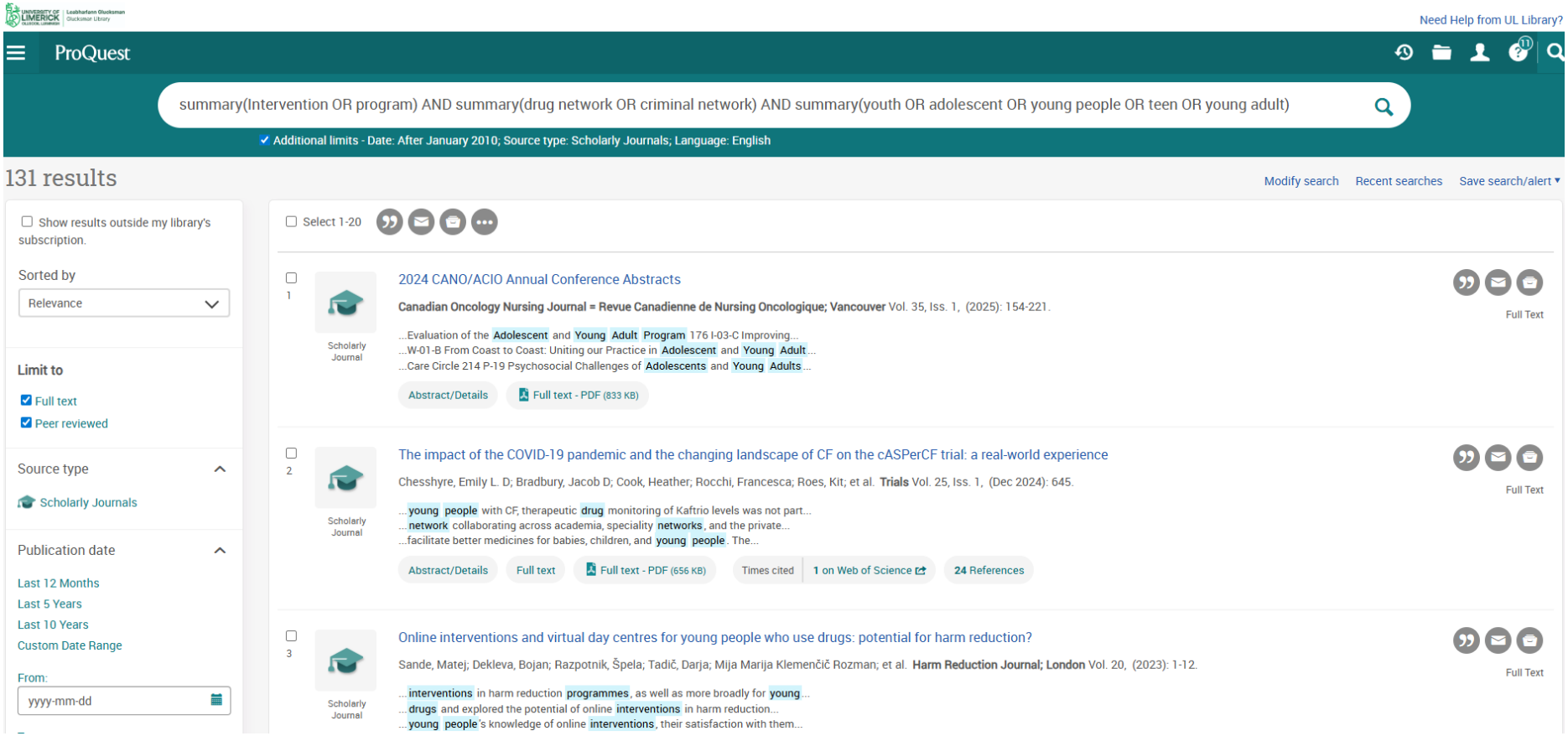
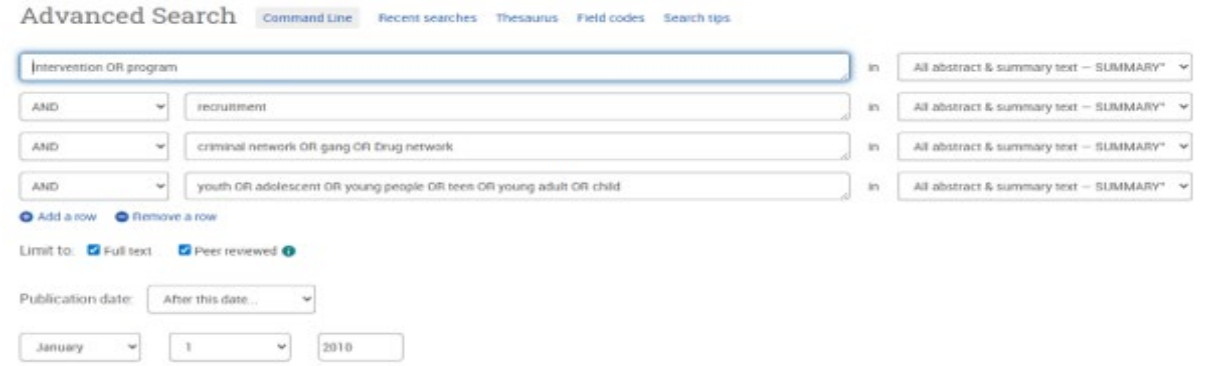
Appendices

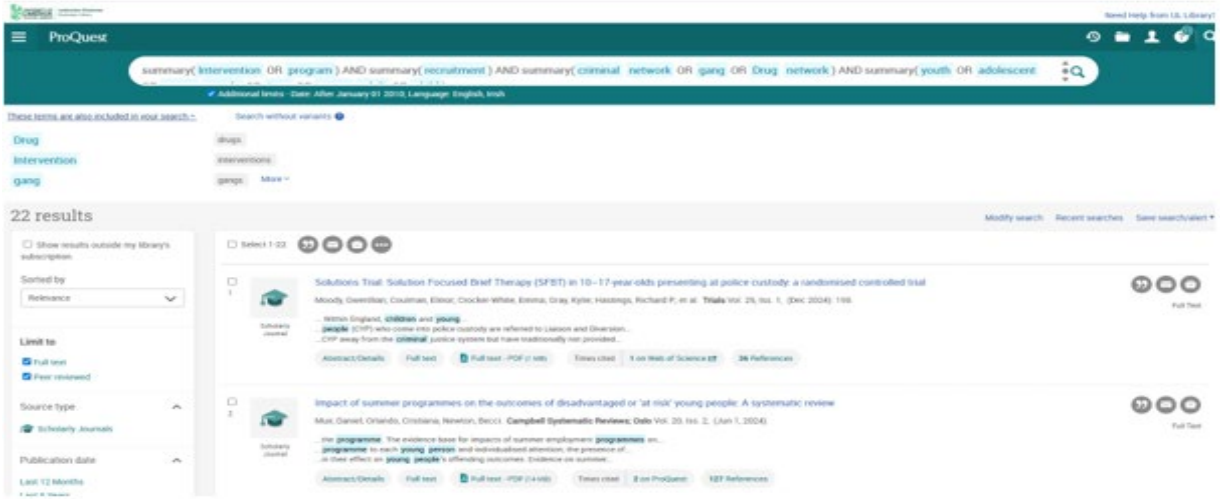
Appendix 1. Snapshots of searches on academic databases

Original search on ProQuest (131 results)

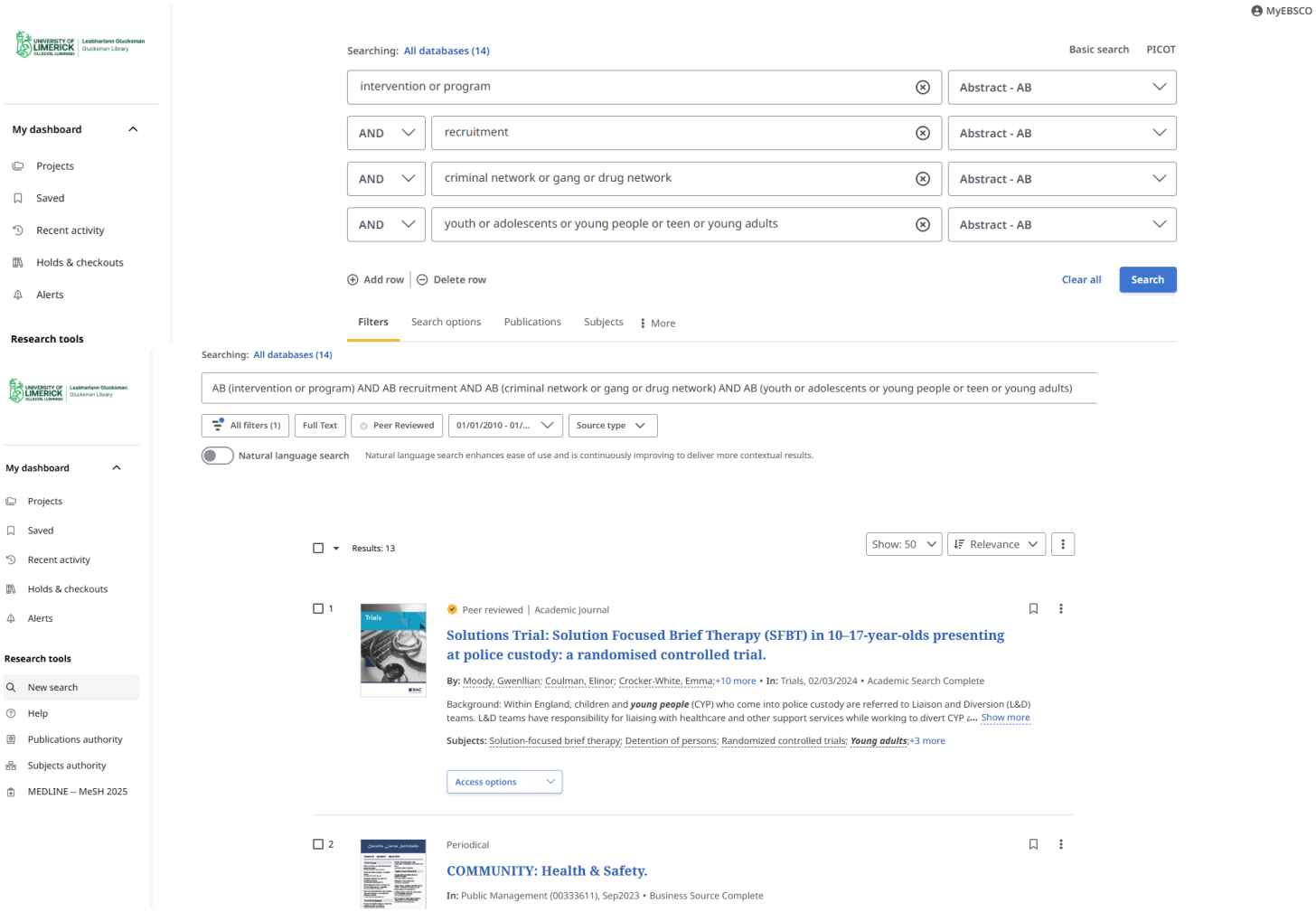


Search with AND “Recruitment” AND “Gang” with a date range of 2010 to present (22 results)





Final search on PsycINFO/EBSCOhost with AND “Recruitment” AND “Gang” and a date range of 2010 to present (from 294 to 13 results)


MyEBSCO
Searching: All databases (14)
Basic search
PICOT
intervention or program
Abstract - AB
AND
recruitment
Abstract - AB
AND
criminal network or gang or drug network
Abstract - AB
AND
youth or adolescents or young people or teen or young adults
Abstract - AB
Add row
Delete row
Clear all
Search
Filters
Search options
Publications
Subjects
More
Searching: All databases (14)
AB (intervention or program) AND AB recruitment AND AB (criminal network or gang or drug network) AND AB (youth or adolescents or young people or teen or young adults)
All filters (1)
Full Text
Peer Reviewed
01/01/2010 - 01/...
Source type
Natural language search
Natural language search enhances ease of use and is continuously improving to deliver more contextual results.
My dashboard
Projects
Saved
Recent activity
Holds & checkouts
Alerts
Research tools
New search
Help
Publications authority
Subjects authority
MEDLINE -- MeSH 2025
Results: 13
Show: 50
Relevance
1
Peer reviewed | Academic Journal
Solutions Trial: Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in 10–17-year-olds presenting at police custody: a randomised controlled trial.
By: Moody, Gwenllian; Coulman, Elinor; Crocker-White, Emma;+10 more • In: Trials, 02/03/2024 • Academic Search Complete
Background: Within England, children and young people (CYP) who come into police custody are referred to Liaison and Diversion (L&D) teams. L&D teams have responsibility for liaising with healthcare and other support services while working to divert CYP ... Show more
Subjects: Solution-focused brief therapy; Detention of persons; Randomized controlled trials; Young adults;+3 more
Access options
2
Periodical
COMMUNITY: Health & Safety.
In: Public Management (00333611), Sep2023 • Business Source Complete

Appendix 2. Populated data extraction table (available electronically on request from the researcher)

Study ID: Authors, Year, Title, DOI	Population and Setting	Summary (of resource)	Interventions/Initiatives (type and method)	Comparator: if any	Outcomes: Measured?	Key themes/results	Barriers to implementation	Facilitators to implementation
Brisson, J., Pekelny, I., & Ungar, M. (2020). Methodological strategies for evaluating youth gang prevention programs. Evaluation and Program Planning, 79, 101747. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2019.101747	Discusses methodological strategies and challenges in evaluating youth gang prevention programs. Based on three Canadian case studies: 1. Youth Advocate Program (YAP) - Wraparound model for ages 9–14. 2. Souls Strong - Afrocentric principles, Wraparound + Reclaiming Youth at Risk, ages 15–20. 3. CeaseFire – Adaptation of Cure Violence model, ages 16–24.	This article examines evaluation challenges in three Canadian youth gang prevention programs (Youth Advocate Program, Souls Strong, and CeaseFire). It highlights difficulties with quasi-experimental designs, model fidelity, documentation, and participant recruitment/retention. The authors recommend alternative approaches such as Most Significant Change (MSC) and comparative case studies, emphasize the need for flexible evaluation frameworks, and stress the importance of adapting logic models to local contexts. Key implications include tailoring evaluation tools to program adaptations, budgeting for staff training, and using mixed methods to	Wraparound model: individualized case management, family engagement, team-based planning. Reclaiming Youth at Risk: focuses on modifying environments, building courage, and responsibility. Cure Violence model: public health approach, violence interruption, outreach, community mobilization.	Evaluation Feasibility: Randomized controlled trials (RCTs) were not feasible due to ethical concerns and small target populations. Quasi-experimental designs also faced major barriers (e.g., no viable comparison groups, recruitment issues).	The paper does not report quantitative effect sizes or outcome metrics because its focus is on methodological challenges and lessons learned rather than program impact	Program Adaptation & Fidelity: All three programs (Youth Advocate Program, Souls Strong, CeaseFire) deviated from original U.S. models due to contextual differences. Adaptations often improved cultural relevance but made fidelity assessment difficult. Evaluation tools initially misaligned with actual program activities, leading to little measurable change on original outcomes until tools were revised. Evaluations should use flexible, developmental frameworks. Logic models must be updated regularly to reflect real-world adaptations. Mixed-methods approaches are essential for capturing both intended and emergent outcomes. The paper concludes that traditional experimental	Recruitment & Retention: Recruiting and retaining high-risk youth was extremely challenging. Many participants were medium- to low-risk, which influenced outcome expectations. Incentives ($25 gift cards) were often insufficient for engagement.	Most Significant Change (MSC) stories and comparative case studies were employed to capture program impact qualitatively. These methods helped identify unexpected positive outcomes and participant-defined changes.
Gallupe, O., & Gravel, J. (2018). Social network position of gang members in schools: Implications for recruitment and gang prevention. Justice Quarterly, 35(3), 505–525. https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2017.1323114	Examined whether gang members in schools occupy high social status positions in peer networks, which could make them effective recruiters. Data: Add Health (Wave 2), two large U.S. high schools (n = 1,822; gang members = 123).	This study analyzed social network data from two U.S. high schools (Add Health dataset, n = 1,822) to examine whether gang members occupy influential positions in school peer networks. The authors compared high-status gang members (based on in-degree centrality) with low-status members and non-gang peers. Gang vs. Non-Gang Members: No significant difference in overall popularity or centrality; gang members were not isolated but integrated into school networks. High-Status Gang Members: Received significantly more friendship nominations (in-degree = 2.87 vs. 0.76 for low-status). Had greater network reach and brokerage (Bonacich centrality, effective size). Maintained more ties with non-gang peers (2.52 vs. 0.53), positioning them as bridges between gangs and prosocial networks. Delinquency: High-status gang members were less delinquent than low-status members, suggesting weaker gang embeddedness. Recruitment Implication: High-status gang members' visibility	Schools are critical contexts for gang influence—both risk and protective factors coexist. Targeting high-status gang members in school-based interventions could disrupt recruitment pathways. Social network analysis can help identify influential individuals for prevention strategies. Implications for prevention: Target high-status gang members in school-based interventions to disrupt recruitment pathways. Use social network analysis (SNA) to identify influential individuals for tailored prevention strategies. Prevention programs should leverage prosocial ties and reduce the appeal of gang-connected high-status peers.	The study used non-gang members as the comparator group when analyzing overall network position and social status. (1) Gang vs. non-gang students; (2) High-status vs. low-status gang members (status = ±1 SD above gang mean on in-degree).	The study focused on social network position indicators to assess gang members' influence potential in school network	Gang members are not socially isolated in schools: Contrary to assumptions, gang members were not peripheral in school networks; some held positions of influence similar to non-gang peers. High-status gang members act as bridges: A subset of gang members were highly popular, centrally located, and connected to many non-gang peers, giving them strong potential to influence others. Recruitment risk is linked to network position, not just gang presence: High-status gang members' visibility and popularity may make gang membership appear attractive, even without active recruitment. Schools are "double-edged swords": They provide both protective influences (teachers, prosocial peers) and opportunities for gang influence, depending on how students navigate these networks.	Visibility of high-status gang members: Their popularity and integration into school networks can normalize gang involvement and make prevention messaging harder. Risk of stigmatization: Targeting high-status gang members for intervention could backfire if it isolates them or reinforces gang identity. Resource and expertise requirements: Implementing SNA-based targeting requires technical skills, data access, and ethical safeguards (privacy concerns). Dynamic nature of networks: Peer networks change rapidly; interventions must adapt quickly to remain relevant. Potential unintended consequences: Removing or isolating influential gang members could disrupt social balance and create new vulnerabilities.	Schools as key intervention points: Schools provide a structured environment where gang and non-gang youth interact, making them ideal for prevention efforts. Social Network Analysis (SNA) as a tool: SNA can identify high-status gang members who are influential and connected to non-gang peers, allowing targeted interventions. Existing prosocial ties: Many gang members maintain friendships with non-gang peers, which can be leveraged to strengthen protective factors.
Garbarino, J., Governale, A., & Neci, D. (2020). Vulnerable children: Protection and social reintegration of child soldiers and youth members of gangs. Child Abuse & Neglect, 110, 104415. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104415	The article is a conceptual and narrative review, not an empirical study with a single sample. The population focus is: Child soldiers: Children and adolescents (under 18) recruited into armed groups, often forcibly, in conflict zones (e.g., Sub-Saharan Africa, Middle East). Youth gang members: Adolescents involved in street gangs, primarily in the United States and other high-violence contexts (e.g., Central America, South Africa). The paper draws parallels between these two groups	Explores parallels between child soldiers and youth gang members using the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) framework. Argues that gang-involved youth should receive similar protections and reintegration support as child soldiers. Reviews risk factors, trauma impacts, and reintegration challenges for both groups. Shared Risk Factors: Poverty, family disruption, low parental supervision, exposure to violence, and marginalization increase vulnerability for both child soldiers and gang-involved youth. Recruitment often occurs under conditions of limited alternatives for safety, food, or social status. Similar Harms and Trauma: Both groups experience high levels of violence as victims and perpetrators.	Prevention & Intervention Strategies Prevention: Address cumulative risk factors (poverty, family dysfunction, community violence). Strengthen community collective efficacy (e.g., Strong Communities for Children program). Reintegration: Trauma-focused therapies (e.g., Narrative Exposure Therapy, Trauma-Focused CBT). Family-based interventions (e.g., Functional Family Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy). Economic empowerment (micro-grants), education, and community engagement programs. Cultural Adaptation: Interventions must be culturally relevant and context-specific	The paper draws parallels between these two groups in terms of: Risk factors (poverty, family disruption, marginalization, exposure to violence). Experiences (victimization, perpetration of violence, trauma). Post-involvement challenges (stigma, reintegration difficulties, mental health issues).	Not primary data: The paper does not collect or analyze new data; it reviews literature on child soldiers and gang-involved youth. Focus: Identifies psychosocial, developmental, and reintegration outcomes from prior studies and links them to prevention and intervention strategies.	Mental Health & Trauma PTSD, anxiety, depression, and moral injury (perpetration-induced trauma). Evidence cited from prior studies (e.g., Betancourt et al., 2013; Boothby et al., 2006). Social Reintegration Community acceptance vs. stigma as predictors of successful reintegration. Outcomes include social behaviors, emotional distress, and recidivism risk. Program Effectiveness Summarizes evidence for interventions: Narrative Exposure Therapy and Trauma-Focused CBT for trauma reduction. Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for reducing delinquency and recidivism. Economic empowerment programs (micro-grants) and community-based	Reintegration Challenges Stigma and discrimination from communities exacerbate trauma and hinder reintegration. Lack of education, employment opportunities, and social support increases recidivism risk. Limited evidence-based gang prevention programs, especially in low- and middle-income countries.	Facilitators Community-based programs that build social support and collective responsibility. Trauma-informed, family-centered approaches. Economic and educational opportunities to reduce vulnerability and support reintegration.
Alderson, H., Kaner, E., McColl, E., Howel, D., Fouweather, T., McGovern, R., Copello, A., Brown, H., McArdle, P., Smart, D., Brown, R., & Lingam, R. (2020). A pilot feasibility randomised controlled trial of two behaviour change interventions compared to usual care to reduce substance misuse in looked after children and care leavers aged 12–20 years: The SOLID study. PLOS ONE, 15(9), e0238286. https://doi.org/10.1371/journa	Design & setting: 3-arm pilot feasibility RCT across 6 local authorities in NE England. Population: Looked after children & care leavers, 12–20 y, with any self-reported substance use in prior 12 months (CRAFFT ≥1). n=112 randomized (MET=38; SBNT=38; usual care=36) from 860 screened of 1,450 eligible on caseloads. Who engaged? 60% of those who attended any sessions had screened at higher risk under the original criterion (CRAFFT ≥2), suggesting greater salience among higher risk youth. (Fidelity/attendance: p. 13.)	Test the feasibility of a definitive RCT comparing Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) and Social Behaviour & Network Therapy (SBNT) versus usual care for reducing risky substance use and improving mental health among looked after children and care leavers (12–20 y).	MET / SBNT: Up to 6 × 1 hour sessions over 12 weeks, delivered by trained youth drug & alcohol practitioners, at convenient locations. Usual care: Social worker support with signposting/referral to local services. The SOLID study tested two adapted behaviour change interventions for young people in care aged 12–20: Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET) and Social Behaviour and Network Therapy (SBNT). Both are evidence-based approaches for reducing substance misuse in adolescents. MET is a client-centred counselling method designed to enhance intrinsic motivation for change, while SBNT uses cognitive and behavioural strategies to strengthen positive social networks that support recovery. Each intervention offered up to six one-hour sessions over 12 weeks, delivered by trained drug and alcohol practitioners in community settings. Despite strong theoretical underpinnings, uptake was extremely low—only 20% of participants attended any session, and fewer than 10% completed the planned dose. The study concluded that a definitive trial was not feasible under current pathways, which relied on social workers	Screened: 860/1,450 (59%) on caseloads; eligible: 211 (24.5%); randomized: 112 (53% of eligible; amber). Intervention uptake: 15/76 (20%) attended any session; ~3% attended ≥60% of sessions (red). Retention at 12 months: 60/112 (54%) completed follow-up (amber). Fidelity: Inadequate recordings/logs to assess (youth/practitioner discomfort with audio). Economic VOI: Insufficient data.	Feasibility not established. Consent, uptake, retention, and fidelity fell short of pre-specified thresholds—definitive trial not viable in current format. Pathway friction (multi-step reliance on social workers to screen/refer) and time delays led to low intervention uptake. Engagement skewed to higher-risk youth: 80% of attendees met the original higher-risk criterion (CRAFFT ≥ 2), suggesting risk-tiering may improve salience/uptake. Trauma & competing needs: Many participants perceived substance use as secondary to broader stressors and mental health difficulties—stand-alone substance interventions had limited pull.	Speed & simplicity win: Immediate or same-day first contact after identification is critical; every handoff loses participants. Trust & relationships matter: Co-location of specialist practitioners and embedded research capacity within social care teams can reduce barriers and build rapport. Target where need is salient: Prioritise higher-risk screens (e.g., CRAFFT ≥ 2) or polysubstance use to improve engagement. Fit the context: Integrate substance use work with mental health, placement stability, and social needs rather than offering it in isolation. Adapt fidelity & follow up: Use brief fidelity checklists/supervision instead of audio; flexible, multi-modal retention (text, social apps, consented secondary contacts, incentives). The authors recommend embedding specialist practitioners within care teams, enabling immediate or same-day intervention after screening. They also suggest risk-tiered targeting (e.g., focusing on higher CRAFFT scores), integrating substance use support with mental health and social care, and adopting person-centred, flexible delivery models to address the complex needs of this	Do not proceed to a full RCT without redesigning recruitment and delivery. Conducted during austerity/organisational churn; heavy dependence on social work gatekeeping; high mobility; not powered for clinical effectiveness; incomplete fidelity and economic data.	Actionable changes for a relaunch: Embed & co-locate: Place a substance use practitioner and a research associate within residential units/teams to screen, consent, and start sessions immediately. Adopt a tiered, person-centred model (e.g., THRIVE): Offer risk-stratified support from brief opportunistic interventions to more intensive therapy, integrated with CAMHS and social care. Eligibility refinement: Use CRAFFT ≥ 2 (or similar composite risk) to focus on those most likely to engage and benefit. Measurement upgrades: Consider adolescent-appropriate QoL (e.g., SF-6D alongside EQ-5D-5L) and mental health-specific utility; simplify data burden. Retention strategy: Small incentives per touchpoint, flexible session venues/times, digital check-ins, and pre-authorised alternative contacts. Fidelity without audio: Short session checklists, peer supervision, periodic observation acceptable to youth/practitioners.

Calderoni, F., Campedelli, G. M., Szekely, A., Paolucci, M., & Andrighetto, G. (2022). Recruitment into organized crime: An agent-based approach testing the impact of different policies. Journal of Quantitative Criminology, 38(1), 197–237. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-020-09483-z	Test the impact of four policy scenarios on recruitment into organized crime (OC) and total OC membership using an agent-based model (ABM) calibrated to Palermo, Sicily. (pp. 198–201) Type: Agent-based simulation (NetLogo); 3,000 agents; 360 monthly steps (=30 years); each scenario replicated 60 times. (pp. 211–214) Setting/data: Palermo, Italy; calibration from ISTAT/Eurostat/Bank of Italy; OC prevalence from judicial sources. (pp. 210–211; Table 3) Multiplex networks: Household, kinship, school, work, friendship, co-offending. (pp. 204–210) Recruitment rule: A non-member is recruited when co-offending with an OC member who initiates the crime; probability of crime (C) and OC embeddedness (R) drive interactions. (pp. 206–214)	Calderoni et al. (2022) used an agent-based model (ABM) to simulate recruitment into organized crime (OC) and test the impact of four policy interventions compared to a no-intervention baseline. The model, calibrated with real demographic, socio-economic, and criminal data from Palermo, Italy, embedded 3,000 agents in multiplex social networks (household, kinship, school, work, friendship, co-offending) and ran for 30 simulated years.	Targeting OC leaders is the most effective single measure, reducing new recruits by ~11–16% and total membership by ~8–9%. Removing central figures disrupts recruitment channels and group cohesion. Targeting facilitators (specialists like accountants or chemists) also works, though less strongly (12–14% fewer recruits; 3–5% fewer members). It raises the cost and complexity of organized crime operations. Primary socialization (removing children from OC-involved fathers and providing welfare/education) reduces overall membership but has little immediate effect on new recruitment because it addresses only family-based pathways and takes time to show results. Secondary socialization (school-based support and pro-social ties for at-risk youth) can significantly reduce recruitment, but its effect depends on network structure and becomes statistically significant only when controlling for network density. It also improves education outcomes, which may have broader benefits. Combined approach recommended: Enforcement against key nodes (leaders, facilitators) for short-term impact, plus preventive socialization policies for long-term resilience.	evaluate the impact of four policy interventions on recruitment into organized crime using an agent-based model (ABM) calibrated with real-world data from Palermo, Sicily. They used Generalized Estimating Equations (GEE) to analyze the simulation data: 60 simulation runs per policy scenario. Each run lasted 360 time steps (months). GEE allowed for population-level inference across longitudinal data..	The study used Agent-Based Modeling (ABM) to simulate recruitment into organized crime over a 30-year period in a synthetic population based on real-world data from Palermo, Italy. Two key outcome variables were measured: Number of newly recruited individuals into organized crime. Total number of active organized crime members at each time step. These were tracked across: A baseline scenario (no intervention). Four policy scenarios: Targeting organized crime leaders. Targeting facilitators (individuals with specialized skills). Primary socialization (intervening in families with criminal parents). Secondary socialization (supporting at-risk schoolchildren).	Findings: Targeting leaders produced the largest and most consistent reductions: ~11–16% fewer new recruits and ~8–9% fewer total members. Targeting facilitators reduced new recruits by 12–14% and total members by 3–5%. Secondary socialization significantly reduced recruitment only after controlling for network density; it also lowered total membership. Primary socialization reduced overall membership but had no significant effect on new recruits. The model integrates multiple criminological theories: Differential Association & Social Learning: Crime is learned through social relationships. Social Embeddedness: Individuals are embedded in multiple overlapping social networks. General Theory of Crime: Individual traits like low self-control influence criminal behavior.	Single-Group Focus: The model simulates only one organized crime group. It does not account for competition or interaction between multiple groups. Simplified Recruitment Mechanism: Recruitment is defined as co-offending with an existing member who initiates the crime. This may oversimplify real-world recruitment processes that involve vetting, loyalty tests, or gradual integration.	The simulation accounted for social networks (family, school, work, friends, co-offending) and individual traits (e.g., age, criminal history). Combines multiple criminological theories: Differential Association Social Learning Social Embeddedness General Theory of Crime This allows for a nuanced simulation of both individual and social drivers of criminal behavior. Provides quantitative estimates of policy effectiveness. Helps identify which interventions are most impactful in reducing recruitment and membership.
Higginson, A., Benier, K., Shenderovich, Y., Bedford, L., Mazerolle, L., & Murray, J. (2018). Factors associated with youth gang membership in low- and middle-income countries: A systematic review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 14(1), 1–131. https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.11	The population and setting for Higginson et al. (2018) are: Population- Youth aged 10–23 years (as defined by the included studies). Participants were from school-based samples and some community samples. Both male and female youth, though most gang members were male. Setting- Low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as classified by the World Bank. Studies included in the review came from: Turkey, Trinidad & Tobago, Caribbean region, El Salvador, China, Brazil All studies were conducted in urban or semi-urban environments with high exposure to violence and social disadvantage.	Higginson et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of factors associated with youth gang membership in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Drawing on eight cross-sectional studies from countries including Brazil, China, El Salvador, and Turkey, the review examined five domains: individual, peer, family, school, and community. Key risk factors included delinquent behavior, substance use, association with delinquent peers, low school attachment, and exposure to violence at home, school, or in neighborhoods. Protective factors included parental monitoring and strong moral beliefs. Evidence was limited by small sample sizes and lack of longitudinal data, highlighting the need for further research.	Family-Based Interventions- Strengthen parental monitoring and positive parenting practices. Reduce family conflict and improve family cohesion. School-Based Programs- Increase school attachment and engagement. Address school violence and create safer learning environments. Community-Level Strategies- Reduce exposure to neighborhood violence through community policing and safe spaces. Provide pro-social opportunities for youth in high-risk areas. Individual and Peer-Focused Approaches- Target delinquent peer influence through mentoring and structured activities. Address substance use and promote healthy coping strategies. Integrated, Multi-Domain Approaches- Combine family, school, and community interventions for greater impact. Adapt evidence-based programs from high-income countries to LMIC contexts, with cultural sensitivity.	Higginson et al. (2018), all included studies were observational and cross-sectional, so there were no experimental interventions or randomized controlled trials. However, most studies did include a comparison group: Gang members were compared to non-gang youth (sometimes further divided into delinquent vs. non-delinquent non-gang youth). This allowed the authors to calculate odds ratios (ORs) for risk and protective factors across the five domains (individual, peer, family, school, community). So, the comparator was typically youth of similar age in the same setting who were not gang members.	Primary Outcome Gang membership status (yes/no), usually self-reported by participants. How It Was Used This outcome was compared against various risk and protective factors across five domains (individual, peer, family, school, community). The review reports odds ratios (ORs) showing the strength of association between each factor and gang membership. No Additional Outcomes The review did not measure intervention effects, crime rates, or long-term behavioral outcomes because all included studies were cross-sectional correlational studies, not intervention trials.	Higginson et al. (2018) found that youth gang membership in LMICs is strongly associated with individual and social risk factors. The most significant correlates include violent and non-violent delinquency, substance use, and sexual risk behaviors. Peer influence, especially association with delinquent peers, is a major predictor. Family risk factors include poor parental monitoring and negative home environments, while low school attachment and exposure to school violence increase risk. Community-level risks include neighborhood violence. Protective factors include strong parental monitoring and moral beliefs. Evidence is limited by cross-sectional designs and geographic gaps, highlighting the need for longitudinal research.	Higginson et al. (2018) do not test interventions, but they discuss barriers to implementing prevention strategies in LMICs based on the evidence gaps and contextual challenges. Key barriers include: 1. Limited Evidence Base; Few studies from LMICs and mostly cross-sectional → hard to design evidence-based programs. Lack of longitudinal data makes it difficult to identify causal risk factors. 2. Resource Constraints; Financial and human resource limitations in LMICs hinder large-scale, multi-domain interventions. Limited access to trained professionals for family or school-based programs. 3. Contextual and Cultural Differences; Programs developed in high-income countries may not translate well without adaptation. Cultural norms around family roles, gender, and authority can affect program acceptance. 4. Structural and Safety Issues; High levels of community violence and weak institutional capacity can undermine implementation. Schools and communities may lack safe spaces for program delivery. 5. Policy and Governance Challenges; Weak policy frameworks and fragmented services reduce sustainability.	Higginson et al. (2018) highlight several facilitators that can support the implementation of gang-prevention initiatives in LMICs, even though the review focuses on risk factors rather than interventions. These facilitators are inferred from their recommendations and contextual analysis: Existing Community Structures; Leveraging schools, faith-based organizations, and local NGOs as delivery platforms for programs. Family and Cultural Strengths; Strong family ties and community cohesion in many LMICs can be harnessed for parental engagement and monitoring. Global Evidence Base; Proven interventions from high-income countries (e.g., family-based, school-based programs) can be adapted with cultural sensitivity. Policy Momentum; Growing recognition of youth violence as a public health issue in LMICs creates opportunities for funding and policy support. Youth Engagement; Involving young people in program design
Lawlor, C., Gogia, M., Kirtadze, I., Sivilla, K., Jikia, G., & Zurashvili, T. (2021). Hidden populations: Risk behaviours in drug using populations in the Republic of Georgia through subsequent peer driven interventions. Harm Reduction Journal, 18, 76. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12954-021-00527-y	Population: People who inject drugs (PWID) in Georgia; adults (≥18). NSP group: Clients engaged ≥6 months in needle-syringe programs (n=987). PDI group: Peer recruited PWID not engaged with HIV prevention in the prior year; verified by injection track marks (n=1,820). Setting: 11 Georgian cities via harm reduction NGOs (e.g., Tbilisi, Batumi, Kutaisi, Zugdidi, Telavi, Ozurgeti, Samtredia, Poti, Borjomi, Akhaltsikhe, Rustavi).	This multi-site cross-sectional study compared PWID already engaged with harm reduction needle-syringe programs (NSP) to PWID newly reached through peer-driven intervention (PDI) using respondent-driven sampling. Among 2,807 participants, PDI successfully recruited more young people and women. Peer recruited participants reported markedly higher injecting risk (e.g., syringe and equipment sharing) and dramatically lower lifetime HIV testing, yet similar point-of-care HIV positivity compared with NSP clients. Risk Assessment Battery scores showed younger age and location associated with higher overall risk. Findings support PDIs as an ongoing strategy to reach hidden, higher risk PWID and underscore the need for tailored education, testing uptake, overdose	Sustain and repeat PDIs (with RDS) to continuously reach hidden PWID cohorts as risks evolve. Targeted recruitment incentives for younger PWID and women. Peer education on HIV risk, safer injection, overdose response/first aid, STIs, TB, and hepatitis. On site VCT (HIV testing/counselling) with facilitated linkage and emphasis on first-time testers. Tailored harm reduction services (NSP supply, condom promotion) guided by updated risk profiles. Ongoing monitoring of drug trends (e.g., diverted methadone/buprenorphine, fentanyl) to adapt services. Retention and re-engagement strategies for prior drop-outs using peer networks.	Yes. The study compares PWID known to harm-reduction services (NSP clients) versus previously unengaged PWID recruited via PDI.	Risk behaviours via Risk Assessment Battery (RAB): drug related, sex related, and overall risk scores. Injecting practices: sharing syringes/equipment/instruments; group size; injection frequency/days. HIV/HCV testing history and point-of-care HIV test result at interview. Drug profile: substances used in last 30 days (heroin, diverted methadone/buprenorphine, fentanyl, etc.). Overdose in last 30 days. Demographics & service exposure	PDIs reached a younger (25.1% <25 vs 3.2% NSP) and more female cohort (6.3% vs 2.0%) by design. PDI participants reported higher injecting risk—e.g., syringe sharing 33.6% vs 15.3%, equipment sharing 53.2% vs 35.2%—and double recent overdose (6.4% vs 3.6%). Critically, 61% of PDI participants had never been HIV tested versus 0.6% in NSP, yet point-of-care HIV positivity was similar (0.4% vs 0.8%). Younger age and city were associated with higher overall risk (β_age = −0.173). Drug patterns differed: more diverted opioids and fentanyl in PDI; more heroin and some stimulants in NSP. Findings validate repeated, peer led recruitment and call for tailored risk reduction and testing scale-up.	Criminalisation of drug use and stigma impede engagement and truthful reporting. Hidden/under served subpopulations, including under reporting of sexual orientation. Low syringe coverage nationally (76 per client/year vs WHO 300 benchmark). Resource constraints (budget/time), incomplete data, and modest coupon return (~33%). Retention challenges—drop-out from services requiring re-engagement. Dynamic drug markets (e.g., diverted medications, emerging fentanyl) outpacing static programs.	Peer networks build trust, reduce stigma, and access peripheral/hidden PWID. RDS with incentives effectively recruits youth and women. On site education + VCT during recruitment streamlines testing uptake. Multi-city NGO collaboration broadens reach and diversity. Data-driven tailoring (using RAB and drug trend monitoring) to adapt services. Potential spillover of knowledge via peer diffusion and contact with OST/online platforms.
Moody, G., Coulman, E., Crocker-White, E., Gray, K., Hastings, R. P., Longman, A., Lugg-Widger, F., Playle, R., Segrott, J., Thompson, P., Badger, J., Langdon, P. E., & Flynn, S. (2024). Solutions Trial: Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in 10–11-year-olds presenting at police custody: A randomised controlled trial protocol. Trials, 25(159).	Population: Children and young people (CYP) aged 10–17 years who present at police custody suites and are referred to Liaison and Diversion (L&D) teams. Setting: Three police custody suites in the region served by Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust (UK).	This randomized controlled trial evaluates the effectiveness of Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT) in reducing offending behaviors among 10–17-year-olds presenting at police custody. Participants (n= 446) are randomized to receive either service as usual (SAU) or SAU plus SFBT, a six-session manualized intervention delivered by trained Liaison and Diversion practitioners. The primary outcome is self-reported offending behavior at 12 months, with secondary outcomes including police-recorded offenses, emotional and behavioral difficulties, and gang affiliation. A process evaluation will assess fidelity, acceptability, and implementation barriers. The trial aims to inform scalable early interventions for at-risk youth within criminal justice pathways.	Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT): Six sessions over 12 weeks, focusing on building solutions rather than problems, using techniques like the "miracle question" and scaling. Delivered by trained L&D practitioners within community settings.	Service as Usual (SAU): Standard L&D practice, including assessment, signposting, and referrals to health and social care services.	Primary: Self-Report Delinquency Measure (SRDM) at 12 months. Secondary: Police-recorded arrests, cautions, convictions. Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) for emotional/behavioral issues. Gang Affiliation Measure (T-GARM). Moderators: Callous-unemotional traits, intellectual disability status.	This is a protocol paper, so no outcome data yet. The trial hypothesizes that SFBT will reduce offending behaviors compared to SAU alone. It anticipates improvements in emotional and behavioral functioning and reduced gang affiliation. The process evaluation will explore fidelity, acceptability, and scalability. Findings will inform whether SFBT can be integrated into L&D services as an early intervention for at-risk youth. The study addresses a gap in evidence for psychological interventions delivered in police custody contexts and aims to support policy goals for timely mental health support and crime prevention.	Limited prior experience of L&D teams delivering psychological interventions. Potential resistance to audio/video recording for fidelity checks. Engagement challenges with CYP in custody settings. Variability in SAU across sites. Risk of attrition and difficulties in follow-up.	Training for practitioners (36 hours SFBT training). Flexible delivery (community settings, session length, family involvement). Incentives for participation (shopping vouchers). Co-production with youth advisory groups for materials and acceptability. Process evaluation to refine implementation strategies.

Muir, D., Orlando, C., & Newton, B. (2024). Impact of summer programmes on the outcomes of disadvantaged or 'at risk' young people: A systematic review. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 20, e1406. https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1406[1]	Population: Disadvantaged or 'at risk' young people aged 10–25 years. This includes those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, ethnic minorities, care-experienced youth, students with special educational needs, health conditions, or prior involvement in the criminal justice system. Setting: High-income countries, primarily the UK and USA	This systematic review synthesizes evidence from 68 studies on summer education and employment programmes for disadvantaged youth aged 10–25 in high-income countries. Using mixed methods, it evaluates impacts across education, employment, violence/offending, socio-emotional, and health outcomes. Findings suggest summer education programmes modestly improve educational engagement, English scores, and higher education completion, with some positive effects on STEM progression. Summer employment programmes show limited or no impact on employment outcomes but may reduce criminal justice involvement during programme months. Evidence quality is generally low, with high heterogeneity and implementation challenges. Recommendations emphasize	Summer Education Programmes: Catch-up programmes (address attainment gaps in core subjects like English and math). Transition support programmes (support moves between educational stages, e.g., primary to secondary, secondary to higher education). Raising aspirations programmes (expose students to higher education and careers). Summer Employment Programmes: Paid work placements or subsidized jobs, often combined with pre-work training, mentoring, and employability skills development.	Yes. Eligible studies included a valid comparison group that did not participate in a summer programme, typically using randomized controlled trials (RCTs) or quasi-experimental designs with matched controls	Five main domains: Education: Test scores, attendance, engagement, progression and completion of education. Employment: Job entry, earnings, job readiness. Violence and Offending: Likelihood and number of criminal justice outcomes. Socio-emotional: Confidence, resilience, social skills, community engagement. Health: Understanding health issues, well-being, access to health services.	Summer education programmes show modest positive impacts on English scores (SMD +0.07), overall test scores (SMD +0.14), and higher education completion (OR 1.46), with some evidence of improved STEM outcomes. They have little effect on reading or math scores. Summer employment programmes generally have no significant impact on employment outcomes and may negatively affect short-term job entry, though some evidence suggests reductions in criminal justice involvement during programme months. Socio-emotional and health outcomes are under-researched. Evidence quality is low, with high heterogeneity and attrition issues. Overall, education-focused programmes outperform employment-focused ones in achieving measurable academic gains.	Insufficient or delayed funding and poor governance. Recruitment challenges and limited reach to target groups. Variability in teaching quality and inadequate staff preparation. Misalignment between student needs and programme content. Employer recruitment difficulties and inconsistent training quality in employment programmes. Large caseloads and insufficient monitoring capacity	Clear programme delivery guidance and strong governance. High-quality academic instruction and structured curriculum. Engaged mentors and supportive staff relationships. Effective job matching and pre-work training for employment programmes. Strong partnerships with schools, employers, and community organizations. Incentives (monetary and non-monetary), social activities, and personalized support to boost engagement
Flandell, S. T., Smith, A. E., & Steinman, B. A. (2015). Creating opportunities for mutual affiliation: Gang prevention and relational-cultural theory in Project YES. Afterschool Matters, 22, 13–23. http://www.niost.org/images/pdf/afterschoolmatters/asm_2015_fall/asm_f2015_Creating_Opportunities.pdf	Population: 30–35 middle-school boys (ages 12–14), predominantly youth of color from low-income households, identified as at risk for gang involvement. Setting: Project YES, an afterschool program at Thurgood Marshall Middle School in Lynn, Massachusetts, operating during the school year (2×/week) and for six summer weeks (3×/week).	Flandell, Smith, and Steinman (2015) present a qualitative case study of Project YES, an afterschool gang-prevention program serving predominantly low-income boys at Thurgood Marshall Middle School in Lynn, Massachusetts. Using relational-cultural theory (RCT) as an analytic lens, the authors examine how growth-fostering adult–youth relationships shape participants' engagement and development. Interviews with staff and parents reveal evidence of RCT's "five good things": increased zest, clarity, capacity for action, empathy, and desire for relationships. Reported outcomes include improved attendance, grades, behavior, and college aspirations. The authors recommend integrating RCT into training, strengthening parent engagement, and rejecting harmful zero-tolerance discipline policies	Program-level practices- Center adult–youth relationships on mutuality and authenticity (share "real selves," emphasize bidirectional influence). Provide academic support, life skills (conflict resolution, SEL, communication), mentoring, recreation/fitness, and college/career exposure (e.g., campus visits). Use predictable structures and weekly celebrations of student achievements to build efficacy. Explicitly train staff to apply Relational-Cultural Theory (RCT); teach social/communication skills so youth grasp their impact on others. Shift from "parent involvement" to vital parent engagement (bidirectional respect, roles for parents as contributors). Policy/system-level- Broaden goals for afterschool programs beyond narrow academics (include arts, food, recreation, leadership, field trips). End zero-tolerance/exclusionary discipline; create appeals and tutoring	None. This is a qualitative single-program case study with interviews (parents, staff) and document review; the authors note that no control/comparison group was used, limiting causal inference	Evidence of RCT's "five good things" in youth: zest, clarity, ability to take action, empathy, and desire for relationships. Academic/behavioral indicators improved (examples: better attendance, grades, behavior; striving for selective high schools). Aspirations expanded (e.g., talk and planning around college). Social integration gains (reduced stigma around the program; greater trust, "family" feel; helping peers/siblings). Parent–staff alignment on goals improved, though parent empowerment outcomes were mixed	The case study finds evidence that Project YES fosters relational-cultural growth among high-risk middle school boys. Parents and staff reported "five good things": greater energy for schoolwork, clearer future orientation (including college aspirations), increased empowerment (better attendance, grades, and behavior), heightened empathy, and a desire for stronger ties with family, peers, and staff. Staff described mutual, authentic relationships that humanized both adults and youth, aided by predictable routines, weekly recognition, field trips, and social-emotional skill building. Parent engagement benefits were uneven; roles were unclear. The study lacked a control group, limiting causal claims, but suggests RCT-guided training may amplify impact.	Exclusionary discipline (suspensions; "zero tolerance") that disproportionately affects boys of color. Parent time/income constraints limiting consistent engagement; unclear parent roles in the program. Cultural/power differences and the "central relational paradox" (youth avoid connection to prevent hurt), plus male socialization toward disconnection. No explicit RCT training at baseline; potential staff competency gaps around culture-based disconnections.	Embedded school staff (teachers) and mentor volunteers creating continuity and trust. Safe, predictable environment with celebration of achievements and authentic adult self-disclosure building mutuality. Field trips/college exposure expanding horizons and clarity about futures. Structured SEL/communication skills to help youth understand effects on others.
Grey Literature								
European Union Crime Prevention Network. (2024). Preventing youth recruitment into organised crime: Insights from a multinational perspective [Recommendation paper]	Population: Children and young people involved in—or at risk of—recruitment to organised crime, most commonly in the drug trade (frequent reference to minors and youth roughly 15–25). Includes boys/young men (often in violent/high risk roles) and girls/young women (often overlooked; roles in concealment, money muling, and higher vulnerability to exploitation). Setting: EU Member States, with examples from Sweden, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Greece, Latvia, etc. Concentration in socio-economically deprived neighbourhoods, expansion from major hubs to smaller cities/towns, and hotspots tied to port logistics (e.g.,	Based on a 2024 EUCPN expert meeting across 15 EU Member States, this recommendation paper maps youth recruitment into organised crime, especially drug trafficking. It describes expansion beyond traditional hubs, rising violence, and social media-enabled recruitment. Risk factors cluster at individual (conduct disorders, low prosocial skills), familial (instability, crime in family), and structural levels (deprivation, limited jobs, proximity to networks). Data are fragmented, with underreporting for minors and inconsistent definitions of organised crime. The paper urges integrated primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention, stronger multi-agency data systems, and community-based, developmental responses, alongside rehabilitation and reintegration to curb long-term criminal trajectories effectively.	The meeting focused on Intelligence (first "I" of the 5Is), but the paper points to actionable directions: Primary prevention: Build community resilience and awareness; improve public safety and health in drug-affected areas; counter glamorization of crime/drugs (including social media narratives). Secondary prevention: Identify at risk youth early using integrated, multi-agency data; supplement police data with frontline qualitative insights; develop targeted community/developmental programmes in high-risk neighbourhoods. Tertiary prevention: Strengthen rehabilitation and reintegration, with long-term support structures to prevent persistent offending. System/policy measures: Better data systems and shared definitions/indicators for youth involvement. Administrative approaches that raise barriers to organised crime activity. Address supply side enablers (e.g., designer precursors) and protect	None. This is a multinational expert synthesis and recommendation paper, not an experimental or quasi-experimental evaluation. There is no comparator group.	No measured outcomes are reported (no intervention trial). Intended outcomes/targets include: reduced youth recruitment, violence, and criminal exploitation; improved community safety and well-being; enhanced data quality and trend visibility; better identification of at risk youth; and increased effectiveness of primary/secondary/tertiary prevention.	Drug markets, notably cocaine, are growing and increasingly normalised, creating demand for low-barrier roles filled by youth. Recruitment draws heavily from deprived neighbourhoods and youth gangs; girls participate more than often recognised, often in non-violent or exploited roles. Organised crime structures are shifting from hierarchies to looser cells, reducing reluctance to use minors. Recruitment frequently occurs via social media and peer ties. Evidence is patchy: legal definitions and juvenile data protections hinder cross-country comparability; dark figures are substantial. Harms include high public costs, heightened violence, fear, and creation of no-go zones. Prevention requires coordinated, multi-level, multi-agency strategies, with sustained investment.	Fragmented data/definitions of "organised crime" and youth across jurisdictions; underreporting for minors. Juvenile data protections and siloed systems that impede data sharing and trend detection. Normalization of drug use (especially cocaine) and social media recruitment sustaining demand and supply of roles. Socio-economic deprivation, limited labour market access, and family instability that heighten vulnerability. Resource competition (e.g., with health services) and public fear undermining local capacity. Blind spots regarding girls/young women in enforcement and services.	Use of structured models like the 5Is to plan and document prevention. Multi-agency data integration (e.g., Latvia's central database) and qualitative frontline intelligence (e.g., Netherlands) to close knowledge gaps. Whole-of-community partnerships (schools, businesses, civil society) to create pro-social opportunities. Administrative barriers against organised crime operations and targeted situational measures in high-risk locales (e.g., ports, transit). Policy momentum (EU level roadmaps/priorities) enabling coordination and funding for primary/secondary/tertiary prevention and rehabilitation/reintegration.
Hagar, K., Andrews, A., Bayes, J., Burton, M., Willett, S., Sorensen, E., Arthur, A., Butler, J., Roberts, S., & Harris, P. (2017). Cornwall & Isles of Scilly drug needs assessment 2016/17 (Version 1.1, Final). Cornwall Council / Safer Cornwall (Drug & Alcohol Action Team and Amethyst Community Safety Intelligence Team).	Population: Residents of Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly affected by drug use across the life course, including adults, young people/young adults (18–24), people who inject drugs, people with dual diagnosis, offenders, homeless/rough sleepers, families (parental/children), and specific groups (e.g., Gypsy & Traveller communities, people engaging in chemsex/IPED use). Setting: A whole system, local authority area encompassing community drug and alcohol services, primary care/shared care, pharmacies/needle exchange, residential detox/rehab (Bosvenn/Bosvenn), criminal justice (police, courts, prisons, probation/CRC), housing and supported accommodation, acute hospitals, and public health/community safety partnerships. (All from the report.)	This needs assessment (May 2017) reviews drug use, harms and service performance across Cornwall & the Isles of Scilly to inform 2018 commissioning. It finds rising availability of high purity heroin and increasing crack use among opiate users, contributing to elevated injecting risks and one of the region's highest drug related death rates. Services are cost-effective, engage complex opiate users and achieve early retention and housing outcomes, but successful completions are falling. Key drivers include aging cohorts, dual diagnosis, homelessness, and welfare changes. The report recommends integrated, trauma-informed, whole system responses spanning treatment, mental health, housing, employment, harm reduction and justice partnerships. (Report.)	Treatment & recovery- Integrated, recovery-oriented system that addresses harm reduction, social integration and abstinence; intensify first 6 months of care. Trauma-informed counselling; use Outcome Rating Scales/Session Rating Scales to strengthen therapeutic alliance. Separate indicators for new vs. entrenched opiate cohorts; maintain realistic ambitions for ageing heroin users. Expand community detox; step-wise "motivated stepped care" for OST; consider injectables or MST for non-responders (per ACMD guidance cited). Harm reduction & physical health- Naloxone continuation/expansion; needle & syringe programmes (including disposal bins/drop boxes) and targeted support to IPED users and chemsex/slamsex participants. BBV prevention: maintain high HCV testing; improve HBV vaccination. Preventative strategy for drug interactions with CCG/hospitals; ASIST suicide prevention training; embed MECC (smoking, alcohol, activity, sexual health). Mental health & dual diagnosis- Embed joint pathways and routine mental health assessment across services; workforce training (MHFA, MI, dual diagnosis). Families & children-	This is a population needs assessment, not a controlled study. However, it benchmarks Cornwall against: National averages (e.g., successful completion rates, injecting abstinence, waiting times, HCV/HBV metrics, drug related deaths). "Most similar authorities" and Public Health England DOMES outcome/comparator groups. National cost-effectiveness benchmarks (PHE Commissioning Tool). (Report.)	Treatment outcomes: successful completions (and 6-month non-representation), early unplanned exits, abstinence/reduced use at 6/12 months (opiates/crack/cocaine), injecting abstinence, retention/engagement, time in treatment, treatment penetration, waiting times ≤3 weeks. Health outcomes: drug related deaths (29 in 2016), BBV testing/vaccination (HCV high; HBV needs improvement), overdoses prevented by naloxone ("46 over two years), hospital admissions, suicide prevention. Social outcomes: housing status at exit (~35% no need among successful exits), employment (≥10 days paid work in last 28 days before exit), crime/reoffending reductions, family functioning/parenting, ACE-mitigation, value for money. (Report.)	Drug use prevalence has fallen nationally, but Cornwall faces rising harm: higher-purity heroin, resurgent crack and escalating injecting are linked to an increase in drug-related deaths. Demand for treatment is growing beyond contracted capacity. The system is cost-effective and achieves early engagement, Hepatitis C testing and housing outcomes, yet successful completions are declining—driven by aging cohorts, crack-related complexity, sustained injecting, dual diagnosis, homelessness and welfare reform. County Lines exploitation and rough sleeping are increasing. Priority actions include integrated dual-diagnosis pathways, expanded harm reduction (needle exchange, naloxone), trauma-informed counselling, intensive first six months, family/ACE-focused work, and longer-term housing and employment support. (Report.)	Resource constraints: continuing Public Health Grant cuts; pressure on housing/support budgets. System fragmentation: siloed working, data sharing gaps (esp. with CRC/NPS), unclear dual-diagnosis pathways. Capacity & access: limited supported housing (notably female-only Stage 1), transport costs/rurality, childcare barriers, counselling wait times. Rising complexity: crack-related injecting, entrenched cohorts, rough sleeping, NPS in prisons. Workforce/operations: recording burden, poor connectivity in remote areas, variable uptake of training in children's/adult social care. Welfare reforms and stigma undermining stability and engagement. (Report.)	Demonstrated cost-effectiveness and high early engagement/retention. Strong harm-reduction foundations: excellent HCV testing, active naloxone rollout, expanding needle exchange. Multi-agency infrastructure: Safer Cornwall partnerships, intelligence-led outreach, established CJS pathways, community hubs potential. Workforce development: DASH, MHFA, Motivational Interviewing; shared training offer. Recovery assets: Mutual Aid Programme (MAP), AA availability, volunteering/peer mentoring, new Bosvenn young people & family unit, high Tier 4 success. Clear commissioning roadmap with specific, actionable recommendations (screening, dual diagnosis integration, housing/employment support, ACE-focused work). (Report.)

Villalobos, B., & Torres, A. (2023, September). Duarte Area Resource Team (DART) Program—Duarte, California. Public Management, 25–26.	Population: At-risk youth ages 14–19 identified by schools, law enforcement, or social services; many face poverty, limited parental monitoring, negative peer groups, and/or substance use challenges. Setting: City of Duarte, California; program housed in the Public Safety Department/LA County Sheriff's Substation in close partnership with Duarte Unified School District and community organizations. (Villalobos & Torres, 2023)	Duarte's Area Resource Team (DART) is a prevention and intervention program serving at-risk youth ages 14–19 in Duarte, California. Launched in 2010 within Public Safety, DART partners with the school district and L.A. County Sheriff's Department to divert youth from gangs and the juvenile justice system. Services include group mentoring, counseling, educational support, job skills training, and community service such as graffiti removal and cleanups. An independent three-year evaluation by Azusa Pacific University found reductions in juvenile arrests and improvements in prosocial behavior, safety perceptions, and school commitment. The program has evolved to address vaping.	Group mentoring led by city staff and sheriff's deputies. Counseling and educational mentorship. Job skills development and employability support. Structured community service (e.g., graffiti removal, park/area cleanups, volunteering at city events). Positive peer group building and pro-social network formation. Trauma informed, culturally competent practice. Issue-specific modules added over time (e.g., vaping, cyberbullying, post COVID mental health). Strong school–city–law enforcement partnerships with college interns supporting delivery.	No formal control or randomized comparison group is reported. Outcomes are presented as pre–post and time trend changes in juvenile arrests (e.g., over 3- and 10-year periods) plus self-reported survey and focus group findings.	Quantitative- DART associated with a 57.3% contribution to the overall decline in juvenile arrests. 38% decline over 10 years; 62% decline over the three-year evaluation period. (Villalobos & Torres, 2023; Azusa Pacific University evaluation as cited in article) Qualitative / self-reported- Less deviant behavior, more pro-social behaviors. Stronger commitment to school and collective efficacy.	Independent evaluation indicates DART substantially reduces juvenile arrests and enhances youth wellbeing. Azusa Pacific University attributed 57.3% of the overall decline in juvenile arrests to DART, including a 38% reduction over a 10-year time frame and 62% over three years. Surveys and focus groups showed less deviant behavior, stronger commitment to school, higher collective efficacy, and improved perceptions of safety. Youth reported feeling protected, included, and part of something larger. The program's group mentoring, community service, and trauma informed, culturally competent staff created pro-social networks. DART's agility allowed it to address emerging issues like vaping, cyberbullying, and pandemic related mental health needs.	Funding sustainability: Early state grants ended; program relies on a modest general fund budget ("$25,000/year) and needs consistent funding. Complex needs of participants: Youth often face multi-domain challenges (academics, supervision, peers, substance use). Coordination demands: Success hinges on robust cross-sector relationships (schools, public safety, parks & recreation, community orgs). Evolving risk landscape: Need to adapt to issues like vaping, cyberbullying, and pandemic related mental health impacts.	Strong interagency partnerships: Public Safety, Duarte Unified, LA County Sheriff's, Parks & Recreation, Boys & Girls Club, and community groups. Mentorship by deputies and city staff with trauma-informed and culturally competent approaches. Community service integration building pride, ownership, and pro-social identity. Stable organizational home within Public Safety and intern support from local colleges. Civic leadership support prioritizing prevention/intervention over punitive tactics; visible alumni success reinforcing buy-in.
O'Meara Daly, E. (2023). Community, collective efficacy and youth crime intervention: An implementation case study of the community efficacy pillar of the Greentown programme, an intervention for young people caught up in serious crime [Doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick].	Setting: "Whitetown" (an anonymised, socio-economically disadvantaged Irish community affected by local criminal networks). Population of interest: Young people recruited into or affected by adult criminal networks; their families; community residents. Implementation actors/informants: Project manager and staff from the programme partner; advisory committee members from An Garda Síochána, Probation Service, Tusla (Child and Family Agency), community organisations, Dept. of Justice; researchers. Design/timeframe: Year 1 implementation case study (documents, orientation &	This PhD examines how the community efficacy pillar of Ireland's Greentown programme was implemented in "Whitetown" during its first year. Grounded in collective efficacy theory, the pillar aimed to strengthen informal social control, social cohesion and trust to counter youth recruitment into criminal networks. Using a qualitative case study, the research analysed planning documents, observed orientation and advisory meetings, and conducted semi-structured interviews with implementers and stakeholders. Seven intentions guided implementation (e.g., community readiness, flexibility, supportive environment), while five facilitators and five barriers shaped delivery. Findings highlight tensions between intended and on-the-ground realities, and emphasize incremental capacity-building through inputs, outputs and community engagement.	From the literature (practice model): Community mobilisation (resident leadership/"old heads," civic engagement). Research-driven approaches (local problem diagnosis; data-informed action; monitoring). Network & individual-level responses (family and youth supports alongside community actions). Safety, security & trust in police (procedural fairness; partnership policing). Building the physical environment (revitalising "anchor points," visible improvements). (Ch. 2; Fig. 5.2) From Year 1 implementation in Whitetown: Establishing community enhancement fund principles (11 principles). Funding/part-funding a local messaging initiative to counter normalisation of crime. Quick wins and physical improvements where feasible. Interagency cooperation and contribution to local fora.	No. This is an implementation case study (single site, first year). There is no control/comparator group or impact counterfactual; the focus is on intentions, processes, outputs, facilitators/barriers, and perceived progress. (Ch. 3; design description)	Outputs & activities: Creation of principles; approval and launch of a local messaging campaign; interagency meetings/partnerships; early "quick win" actions. Implementation quality: Evidence of flexibility, iteration, local crafting, and relationship-building. Perceived development: Project Manager ratings: 2/5 → 5/5 across eight check-ins (avg. 3.8/5). Elite informant ratings (end of Year 1): 2–4/5 (avg. 3.2/5). Contextual learning: Documented facilitators and barriers; tensions between plan and reality. (Ch. 4; Figs. 4.10–4.11; Tables 4.3–4.16)	Seven intentions framed delivery (community readiness, subtlety, monitoring, flexibility, relationship-building, supportive environment, community activism). Year 1 facilitators included funding-aligned initiatives (notably a messaging campaign), addressing local needs with quick wins, strong interagency cooperation, and a flexible, iterative approach that allowed time for trust. Barriers included community fear/intimidation, staff safety concerns, GDPR/data-sharing delays, absent resident voice in governance, and Covid-19 constraints. Four propositions follow: intentions created conditions for enhancement; delivery was shaped by specific facilitators/barriers; tensions existed between "ought to" and "was"; overall there was a focus on inputs/outputs that gradually increased capacity for collective efficacy. (Ch. 4–5)	Engaging the community under threat: Fear, intimidation, drug-debt coercion; staff safety risks; high, complex needs in families; areas controlled by dealers. Data sharing/GDPR: Delays in operationalising referrals from network maps; cross-agency protocols unresolved early on. Resident voice missing from governance during Year 1. Future risks: Funding fragility; pillar misalignment; personality clashes; weak collaboration. Covid-19 impacts: Limited face-to-face trust-building; delayed timelines. (Ch. 4; Tables 4.14–4.18)	Funding aligned local interventions (guided by 11 principles), incl. physical improvements and a multi-partner messaging initiative. Addressing local needs: Listening, advocacy, relationship-building, quick wins, focus on perceived safety. Interagency cooperation: Working groups, project visits, contributions to local fora, relevant information exchange. Flexibility & iteration: Local crafting; realistic timelines to build trust and efficacy. Forward actions: Empower residents; tackle fear/coercion; mobilise for incremental change; learn from analogous projects; create feedback loops. (Ch. 4; Tables 4.3–4.13)
Centre for Social Justice & Justice and Care. (2024). Criminal exploitation: Modern slavery by another name. Centre for Social Justice. https://www.centreforsocialjustice.org.uk	Population: Primarily British nationals, especially young males under 18, but also vulnerable adults (e.g., those with mental health issues, learning disabilities, homelessness, or substance misuse). Setting: Communities across the UK, with higher prevalence in deprived areas. Exploitation occurs in homes (cuckooing), schools, streets, and increasingly online.	Criminal exploitation is the most common form of modern slavery in the UK, affecting thousands of young people and vulnerable adults. It involves coercion, grooming, or force to commit crimes such as drug trafficking, theft, and money laundering, often linked to county lines but extending beyond. Technology plays a major role in recruitment and control. Victims face violence, trauma, disrupted education, and criminalisation, while communities suffer from crime and fear. The report calls for legislative reform, improved victim support, multi-agency collaboration, and early intervention to reduce vulnerabilities. It emphasises prevention, education, and	Amend the Modern Slavery Act to include criminal exploitation. Create a specific offence of cuckooing. Mandatory training for professionals (police, teachers, social workers, housing officers). Expand Independent Child Trafficking Guardian (ICTG) service nationally. Multi-agency case conferencing (e.g., MARAC). Neighbourhood policing and hotspot policing. Education in schools on criminal exploitation. Specialist diversion programmes for victims. Housing reforms to exempt victims from local connection rules.	None explicitly stated. The report is descriptive and policy-oriented, not an experimental or quasi-experimental study.	Improved victim identification and safeguarding. Reduction in re-exploitation and criminalisation of victims. Increased prosecutions of perpetrators under modern slavery laws. Stronger community resilience and reduced organised crime activity. Better housing and support for victims. Long-term reduction in vulnerabilities (poverty, addiction, family breakdown).	Criminal exploitation is the leading form of modern slavery in the UK, with two-thirds of UK-based victims reporting it. Most victims are British boys under 18, though adults are also affected. Exploitation extends beyond county lines to theft, violence, and money laundering, often facilitated by technology. Vulnerabilities such as poverty, school exclusion, and social isolation increase risk. Victims often face criminalisation, while perpetrators evade justice. Current responses are inconsistent due to legislative gaps and lack of training. The report recommends legal reform, improved victim support, multi-agency collaboration, and early intervention to break cycles of exploitation and reduce community harm.	Lack of statutory definition of criminal exploitation. Inconsistent awareness and training among professionals. Resource constraints in policing and social care. Short-term funding for support services. Victims' reluctance to self-identify or engage with authorities. Housing shortages and bureaucratic barriers. Complex, lengthy NRM decision-making process.	Existing Modern Slavery Act framework (can be amended). Positive examples of multi-agency collaboration (e.g., MARAC). Successful pilots of devolved NRM decision-making. Established charities and community organisations with expertise. Public and political concern about crime and exploitation. Evidence-based recommendations and strong advocacy from CSJ and Justice and Care.
Hochstetler, L. (2023). Protecting youth from Mexican drug cartel recruitment: The prospects of educational interventions. Lux et Fides: A Journal for Undergraduate Christian Scholars, 1(1), Article 1. https://pillars.taylor.edu/luxetfidesjournal/vol1/iss1/1	Population: Mexican youth, particularly adolescents (ages 10–24), with emphasis on marginalized communities and school dropouts. Setting: Communities in Mexico heavily impacted by drug cartel violence and educational disruption.	This paper examines how educational interventions can protect Mexican youth from recruitment by drug cartels. It explores the impact of the Drug War on education, youth vulnerability, and the role of schools in prevention. The study highlights that beyond increasing enrollment, interventions must address psychological and social needs through self-regulation training, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and programs combating cartel propaganda. Examples include Alcanzando Niños en las Fronteras, Shaking Hands Workshop, Truth About Drugs, and Catalyst. Despite systemic challenges such as corruption, violence, and resource shortages, education remains a critical tool to reduce vulnerability and break cycles	Self-Regulation Programs- Alcanzando Niños en las Fronteras: Psychoeducational program using art therapy, stress management, and music to build resilience. Shaking Hands Workshop: 16-week program to develop emotional management, empathy, and decision-making. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT): Adaptable intervention to change harmful thought patterns; examples include Becoming a Man (Chicago) and STYL (Liberia). Anti-Propaganda and Drug Education- Truth About Drugs: Multimedia-based drug education. Catalyst: Youth-centered program exploring social and political aspects of drug policy.	None explicitly stated. The paper is conceptual and descriptive, drawing on case studies and literature rather than experimental comparisons.	Increased resilience and self-regulation among youth. Reduced vulnerability to cartel recruitment. Improved academic engagement and achievement. Lower likelihood of involvement in crime or violence. Greater critical thinking about drug culture and propaganda.	Educational interventions can significantly reduce youth vulnerability to cartel recruitment when they go beyond enrollment incentives and address psychological and social needs. Programs that build self-regulation and resilience, such as Alcanzando Niños en las Fronteras and Shaking Hands Workshop, show promise in improving emotional management and academic performance. CBT-based interventions like Becoming a Man have demonstrated reductions in violent crime and improved school engagement. Anti-propaganda initiatives such as Truth About Drugs and Catalyst empower youth with accurate information and critical thinking skills. Despite systemic challenges—violence, corruption, and underfunded schools—education remains a vital tool for prevention and long-term societal stability.	Widespread cartel violence causing school closures and teacher extortion. Corruption within education systems and unions. Limited funding and government budget cuts. Fear among educators and families. Persistent cartel propaganda glamorizing drug culture.	Evidence-based programs with proven success in similar contexts. Community and family involvement in interventions. International partnerships and NGO support. Youth engagement and leadership in program design. Integration of psychological and social development strategies into curricula.
Luyten, K., & Baltiikauskaite, G. (2025). Recruitment of minors into organised crime. European Parliamentary Research Service. PE 772.903. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank	Population: Minors (as young as 12) in EU Member States, increasingly involved in organised crime. Setting: Primarily urban and socio-economically disadvantaged areas across the EU, but spreading to smaller cities and rural areas.	The EPRS briefing highlights the growing recruitment of minors into organised crime across the EU, driven mainly by the illicit drug trade and facilitated by digital platforms. Children are exploited for tasks ranging from drug extraction to violent crimes, often lured by promises of money, status, or belonging. Risk factors include poverty, family instability, peer influence, and migration vulnerabilities. Recruitment increasingly occurs online via social media and gaming platforms, using grooming-like tactics and gamification. The EU response emphasizes prevention, community engagement, and cross-border cooperation, with initiatives like the Greentown Project (Ireland) and "Breaking the Cycle" (Netherlands) offering promising models.	EU-Level Strategies EU Strategy to Tackle Organised Crime (2021–2025) and EU Roadmap on Drug Trafficking. Digital Services Act for online child protection. Planned EU Action Plan on Child Protection (by 2027). Best Practices Greentown Project (Ireland): Disrupt recruitment, empower communities, family support. Free to Choose (Italy): Remove children from mafia-influenced families. Breaking the Cycle (Netherlands): Support youth from criminal families. Community Policing & Mentorship (Sweden): Crime Prevention Councils in 90% of municipalities. Global Examples UNICEF and UNODC programs for reintegration and resilience.	None explicitly stated. The report is descriptive and policy-oriented, not experimental.	Reduced recruitment of minors into organized crime. Increased resilience of communities. Improved child protection online and offline. Enhanced cross-border law enforcement cooperation.	Recruitment of minors into organized crime is rising in the EU, driven by drug markets, socio-economic vulnerabilities, and digitalization. Children as young as 12 are exploited for drug trafficking, violence, and fraud. Online recruitment via social media and gaming platforms uses grooming tactics, slang, and gamification to attract youth. Risk factors include poverty, family instability, migration, and peer influence. EU responses focus on prevention, awareness, and integrated community strategies, alongside legislative measures like the Digital Services Act. Best practices include family-based interventions, mentorship, and exit programs. Despite efforts, data gaps and cross-border dynamics complicate prevention and enforcement.	Lack of reliable, comparable data across Member States. Underreporting due to juvenile justice protections. Organized crime's adaptability and digital recruitment tactics. Socio-economic inequalities and limited social services. Corruption and resource constraints in some regions.	EU policy frameworks and funding (e.g., EU Roadmap, SOCTA). Cross-border cooperation via Europol, Eurojust, Frontex. Community-based prevention models (Greentown, Breaking the Cycle). Digital Services Act for online safety. Global partnerships (UNICEF, UNODC) and local mentorship programs.

Europol. (2024). The recruitment of young perpetrators for criminal networks. Intelligence Notification Ref. No.: 2024-033. The Hague: Europol.	Population: Minors aged approximately 13–17, increasingly involved in organized crime. Setting: EU Member States, with recruitment occurring primarily online via social media and messaging apps.	Europol reports a growing trend of minors being recruited into organized crime, particularly drug trafficking and violent acts. Criminal networks exploit minors as low-risk operatives for roles such as couriers, warehouse operators, and even killers, offering financial incentives up to €20,000. Recruitment is largely digital, using encrypted messaging, influencer-style language, and "gamification" to make criminal tasks appealing. Grooming techniques foster trust and belonging, blurring the line between friendship and exploitation. Minors' lack of criminal records and limited knowledge of network structures make them attractive to cartels. Europol calls for targeted	Preventive Measures: Awareness campaigns targeting youth and parents. Digital Monitoring: Enhanced detection of recruitment on social media and gaming platforms. Community Engagement: Programs to build resilience and provide alternatives to crime. Law Enforcement: Cross-border cooperation to dismantle recruitment networks.	None provided. The report is descriptive and intelligence-based.	Increased understanding of recruitment tactics. Identification of risk factors and digital methods. Recommendations for preventive and enforcement strategies.	Criminal networks increasingly recruit minors for drug trafficking and violent crimes, exploiting their low legal risk and lack of awareness. Recruitment occurs mainly online through encrypted apps, using slang, emojis, and influencer-style language. Gamification strategies frame illegal tasks as "challenges," while emotional grooming fosters loyalty and belonging. Minors are offered significant financial rewards, making crime appear attractive and low-risk. These tactics make detection difficult and increase the resilience of criminal networks. Europol stresses the need for targeted prevention, digital monitoring, and community-based interventions to counteract these recruitment strategies and protect vulnerable youth from exploitation.	Encrypted messaging and self-destructing communications. Rapid adaptation of recruitment tactics. Minors' perception of low risk and high reward. Limited parental and institutional awareness.	Cross-border law enforcement cooperation. Public awareness campaigns. Partnerships with social media platforms. Community-based prevention programs.
Geiran, V. (2021). Creating a bridge to a better future: Community safety & wellbeing – Report of a scoping review for the Department of Justice. Department of Justice, Ireland.	Population: Residents of Drogheda, Ireland, with a focus on vulnerable children, young people, and families affected by organized crime and drug-related violence. Setting: Drogheda town and surrounding areas (including East Meath), characterised by socio-economic disadvantage and recent organised crime feuds.	This scoping review was commissioned following severe drug-related violence and organised crime feuds in Drogheda, including the murder of a teenager in 2020. The report identifies key challenges: interagency fragmentation, drug-related intimidation, youth involvement in crime, and inadequate community facilities. It recommends a multi-level response combining law enforcement with intensive wraparound services for at-risk youth and families, improved interagency coordination, and investment in education, youth services, and community infrastructure. Proposals include a high-level oversight group, an implementation board, expanded Garda Youth Diversion Projects, enhanced addiction services, and targeted educational supports. The report stresses urgency, leadership, and community engagement.	Governance & Coordination- Establish a High-Level Oversight Group and Safety & Wellbeing Implementation Board. Four sub-groups: Policing & Drugs; Family & Youth; Employment; Community Development. Crime & Youth Justice- Intensive wraparound services for vulnerable youth and families. Expand Garda Youth Diversion Projects (CABLE & BOYNE). Consider Joint Agency Response to Crime (JARC). Additional Probation Service resources. Drug Services- Increase funding for Red Door Project (€150,000 extra annually). Reinstate Drug Court in Louth. Improve harm reduction (Needle & Syringe Programmes, Naloxone). Education & Youth Development- Upgrade three schools to DEIS Band 1. Expand apprenticeships and restorative practice in schools. Develop community hubs (Northside and Southside). Community & Infrastructure- Build sports/community facilities (e.g., DIFE sports block). Enhance estate management and anti-social behaviour responses.	None provided. The report is a scoping review and policy roadmap, not an experimental study.	Reduced youth involvement in organised crime. Improved interagency coordination and service delivery. Enhanced community safety and wellbeing. Increased access to addiction treatment and harm reduction. Better educational attainment and youth engagement.	Drogheda faces severe challenges from organised crime, drug-related violence, and socio-economic disadvantage, creating fear and trauma, especially among youth. Existing responses are fragmented, with gaps in addiction services, youth supports, and interagency coordination. The report calls for urgent, coordinated action: a governance structure with strong leadership, intensive wraparound services for at-risk youth, expanded diversion and probation resources, and improved drug treatment. Education and community development are central, with proposals for DEIS upgrades, new community hubs, and sports facilities. The report stresses that enforcement alone is insufficient; a holistic, evidence-based approach combining justice, health, education, and community engagement is essential.	Fragmented governance and interagency silos. Resource constraints and staff shortages. Boundary issues between Louth and Meath. Community distrust and fear due to intimidation. Covid-19 disruptions to service delivery.	Strong political mandate and Department of Justice leadership. Existing community goodwill and local initiatives. Proven Irish models for wraparound youth interventions. National Drugs Strategy and NEIC model as templates. Potential for EU and national funding for regeneration.
Malm, A., & Bichler, G. (2011). Networks of collaborating criminals: Assessing the structural vulnerability of drug markets. Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 48(2), 271–297. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427810391535	Population: Individuals (n = 1,336) involved in drug trafficking and associated criminal enterprises. Setting: British Columbia and Yukon Territory, Canada (data from 2004–2006).	This study applies social network analysis (SNA) to examine structural vulnerabilities in drug market networks. Using multisource police intelligence, the authors mapped 1,636 individuals in a principal component of the drug network, analyzing niche-specific structures (production, transport, supply, retail, financial, parasitic). Findings reveal significant variation: simple niches (production, retail) exhibit small-world and scale-free properties, while complex niches (transport, supply, financial) show high vulnerability due to bridging roles. Policy implications suggest niche-specific enforcement strategies: repeated hub attacks for simple roles, and targeted bridge removal for complex roles. The study underscores the	Targeted Enforcement Based on Network Role- Hubs: Repeated attacks on highly connected individuals in simple niches (production, retail, parasitic). Bridges: Focus on individuals linking subgroups in complex niches (transport, supply, financial). Financial Disruption: Prioritize removal of financiers and money-laundering hubs. Differentiated Strategies: Avoid uniform enforcement; tailor tactics to niche vulnerabilities.	None. The study is observational and analytical, not experimental.	Identification of structural vulnerabilities in drug networks. Evidence that niche-specific strategies can maximize disruption. Demonstration that retail-level enforcement has minimal systemic impact.	Drug market networks are heterogeneous, with structural properties varying by niche. Simple roles (production, retail) show high clustering and hub concentration, making them resilient to random attacks but vulnerable to repeated hub targeting. Complex roles (transport, supply, financial) exhibit high betweenness centrality and fragmentation potential, making bridge removal highly effective. Retail networks are least susceptible to disruption, suggesting street-level enforcement is inefficient. Financial actors are critical hubs; removing them can destabilize networks. These findings challenge the notion of uniform enforcement and advocate for niche-specific strategies to reduce network resilience and disrupt commodity flows effectively.	Hidden or masked leadership roles. Incomplete or biased intelligence data. Dynamic adaptation of networks to enforcement. Legal and resource constraints for sustained targeting.	Use of social network analysis to identify hubs and bridges. Multisource intelligence integration (police reports, surveillance, interviews). Existing law enforcement frameworks for financial crime targeting. International cooperation for transnational linkages.
Maxwell, N., Wallace, C., Cummings, A., Bayfield, H., & Morgan, H. (2019). A systematic map and synthesis review of child criminal exploitation. Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, UK.	Population: Children under 18 exploited for criminal purposes (primarily in the UK). Setting: Urban, rural, and coastal areas affected by County Lines drug networks.	This review synthesizes evidence on child criminal exploitation (CCE), focusing on early identification and effective service responses. CCE involves coercion, control, or manipulation of children into criminal activity, often linked to County Lines drug networks. Risk factors include poverty, abuse, school exclusion, care status, and multiple vulnerabilities. Exploitation tactics include grooming, debt bondage, cuckooing, and violence. Effective responses require multi-agency collaboration, contextual safeguarding, and relationship-based approaches. Key recommendations include improved data sharing, risk assessment panels, education and health sector involvement, and community outreach. Evidence gaps remain, particularly regarding intervention effectiveness, highlighting the need for research and policy innovation.	Policy & Governance- National County Lines Coordination Centre for intelligence sharing. Disruption Toolkit for police (Home Office, 2013). Proposed Child Criminal Exploitation Protection Orders. Multi-Agency Approaches- Contextual safeguarding frameworks. Multi-agency risk panels for older children. Joint action plans for hotspot areas. Education- Staff training to identify CCE indicators. Avoid unnecessary exclusions; PRUs identified as recruitment hotspots. School-based prevention and mentoring programs. Family & Community- Family-focused interventions and parental support. Community outreach, youth work, and safe spaces. Employment and training pathways for at-risk youth. Health- Training for health professionals to identify and support exploited children.	None. The review is descriptive and thematic, not experimental.	Improved early identification of at-risk children. Enhanced safeguarding and disruption of exploitation networks. Increased awareness and multi-agency coordination. Reduced criminalisation of exploited children.	CCE is an emerging safeguarding issue, often linked to County Lines drug networks. Children are exploited through grooming, debt bondage, and violence, with risk heightened by multiple vulnerabilities (poverty, care status, school exclusion). Current responses are inconsistent, with gaps in data, policy, and practice. Effective strategies require whole-system approaches: national intelligence coordination, contextual safeguarding, and relationship-based interventions. Education, health, and community sectors play critical roles in prevention and support. Families need practical and emotional assistance. Evidence on "what works" is limited, but promising practices include multi-agency panels, outreach programs, and employment pathways. Research and policy innovation are urgently needed.	Lack of statutory definition and consistent protocols. High service thresholds; reactive rather than preventive responses. Data gaps and GDPR-related sharing challenges. Professional attitudes framing CCE as lifestyle choice. Resource constraints and austerity impacts.	National coordination (County Lines Centre). Disruption powers (Digital Economy Act, 2017). Community-based prevention and trusted relationships. Cross-sector training and contextual safeguarding models. Engagement of schools, health services, and youth workers.
O'Meara Daly, E., Redmond, S., & Naughton, C. (2020). Lifting the lid on Bluetown: A replication case study investigating the contribution of engagement in a local criminal network to young people's more serious and persistent offending patterns. University of Limerick, School	Population: Young people (under 18) involved in atypical crimes (burglary and drugs for sale/supply) and their associated networks. Setting: An anonymised large urban Garda sub-district in Ireland, referred to as Bluetown.	The Bluetown study replicated the Greentown study to explore whether engagement in local criminal networks influences young people's offending patterns. Using the Twinsight methodology, researchers combined PULSE crime data with interviews from 21 Gardaí to map and analyze Bluetown's criminal networks. Four distinct networks were identified: one family-based, two peer-based, and one drugs-focused. Findings revealed that family ties to crime, proximity to offending peers, individual vulnerabilities, and pro-criminal norms contributed to more serious and prolific offending.	Network-focused interventions rather than solely individual-focused approaches. Targeted disruption strategies for strong, family-based or hierarchical networks. Early intervention programs addressing family influence and pro-criminal norms. Community-based diversion projects to reduce peer clustering and provide pro-social alternatives. Multi-agency collaboration to address structural and cultural risk factors.	No formal comparison group. This is a qualitative case study; findings are compared conceptually to the original Greentown study and a second replication (Redtown).	Identification of network structures and their influence on youth offending. Evidence that network engagement correlates with escalation to serious and prolific crime. Highlighted risk factors: family criminality, peer proximity, individual vulnerabilities, and cultural norms. Insights into network strength and stability driven by trust and intimidation.	Bluetown contained four distinct criminal networks: a hierarchical family-based network, two peer-based burglary networks, and a drugs-focused network with external control. Young people involved shared common risk factors: family ties to crime, proximity to offending peers, individual vulnerabilities (e.g., school dropout, substance misuse), and pro-criminal norms. Network strength and stability varied, with family-based networks being most resilient. Fear and intimidation reinforced control in drug networks. Engagement in these networks likely contributed to young people's progression into more serious and prolific offending. Findings underscore the importance of addressing network dynamics in youth	Large geographical area and multiple networks complicate targeted interventions. Community fear and intimidation hinder intelligence gathering and cooperation. Intergenerational criminality entrenches norms and resists change. Institutional bias risk due to reliance on Garda perspectives. Resource limitations for sustained, multi-agency interventions.	Strong Garda knowledge of local networks. Existing diversion programs (e.g., Garda Youth Diversion Projects). Community engagement structures (e.g., local meetings). Policy support for evidence-based interventions. Replication methodology (Twinsight) provides a robust framework for understanding networks.

Appendix 3. Prevalence of intervention approaches across sources

Source	Network-informed disruption	Family-centred responses	Rapid engagement and embedded delivery	Place-based responses and collective efficacy	Digital safety and counter-recruitment online	School-based responses	Justice-adjacent contexts and reachable moments	Economic opportunity and prosocial identity building
Alderson et al. (2020)	✓	✓	✓					
Brisson et al. (2020)		✓						
Calderoni et al. (2022)	✓							
CSJ et al. (2024)				✓				
EUCPN (2024)	✓			✓	✓			
Europol (2024)					✓			
Gallupe et al. (2018)	✓					✓		
Garbarino et al. (2020)		✓						✓
Geiran (2021)		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Hager et al. (2017)								✓
Higginson et al. (2018)		✓				✓		✓
Hochstetler (2023)					✓	✓		
Lawlor et al. (2021)				✓				
Luyten et al. (2025)					✓			
Malm et al. (2011)	✓							
Maxwell et al. (2019)			✓			✓	✓	
Moody et al. (2024)			✓			✓	✓	
Muir et al. (2024)						✓		✓
O'Meara Daly (2023)	✓	✓		✓				
O'Meara Daly et al. (2020)	✓							
Randell et al. (2015)						✓		✓
Villalobos and Torres, (2023)			✓	✓				✓

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