

Section C: Interpretation of data and conclusion

Chapter seven

Interpretation and Explanation

7.1 Introduction

This chapter concentrates on highlighting factors that proved to be significant in the commission of crime by the youth offenders in this study. The researcher determines which factors are significant by examining those factors that showed predominance throughout the pilot and the main study: both the pilot and the main study will be used as sources for significant factors. In this regard, the researcher will look at findings from the pilot study that correlate with the findings from the main study. The data will be presented in two sections: the first section entails the interpretation of the data; this will be done within the criminal event framework and by using the themes indicated in the interview schedule. The second section involves the explanation of the factors by using suitable theories.

7.2 Part one: Interpretation of data

As already indicated this section deals with deducing the factors that proved significant in the criminal behaviour of the youth offenders in this study. This will be done within the criminal event framework; in other words, the researcher will look at the precursors, transaction and aftermath of the crime. The themes specified in the interview schedule (family, school etc) will be used within the criminal event framework as well. This allows the researcher to adhere to the criminal event framework while at the same time continuing with the themes that the reader has become familiar with. The reader must remember that the essence of this study is to determine which factors proved noteworthy in their contribution towards youth offending, family size and birth order were found to play a small role in this regard and hence their omission as precursors.

7.2.1 Precursors

7.2.1.1 Family

Emphasis has been placed on the impact of the family and family-related issues as an important component in the life of a youngster and the eventual outcome of the adolescent as a well-balanced, socially adept adult (Bierstedt in Yablonsky 2000:302; Lab 2000:135). Six factors were found to play a role in the commission of crime by the youth offenders in this study.

a. Absence of a father figure

Literature has indicated on more than one occasion how important paternal influence is on a child, particularly a male child (Angenent & de Man 1996:105, Barlow & Ferdinand 1992:156). The absence then of a father figure plays a pertinent role in the future behaviour of a juvenile, this is supported by Mkhondo (2005:16). The absence of a father figure played a major role in the lives of the offenders. Of the twenty six offenders interviewed, thirteen had no father figure at all and nine mentioned that their fathers were poor role models. A comment made by an offender illuminates the need for a father figure *“ek het baie agtergebly sonder hom”*. In fact an offender alleges that it is his father’s fault that he (the offender) is in prison today *“Dis sy skuld dat ek hier is”*. The reader will remember that towards the end of the main study the researcher inquired as to how the offenders’ lives could have been different, two offenders replied that they needed a father in their lives *“ñ Pa gehad het wat my kan slaan/guide”*. The researcher feels that the offenders could have benefited from having a positive father figure as a means of showing them the moral path in life.

As a male the youth offender needed a father with whom to identify: the youth could learn through a positive father figure how to interact with other males, how to treat women and how to develop coping/resiliency skills in order to avoid negative influences in his environment. The researcher not only found the absence of a father figure to be an important factor but one that is a sensitive issue for the male offenders as well. Each offender indicated their need for a father and their anger at the absence of one, the predominance of this line of thinking indicated to the researcher the significance and contribution of this factor to the offenders’ transgressions.

Literature has suggested the importance of the father as a role model particularly for young males. Sons identify with their patriarch and thus

learn how to relate with others based on their interaction with and attachment to their fathers. Hirschi's social control theory (Ellis & Walsh 2000:322) explains that the main cause of criminal and delinquent behaviour is the *"failure to socialize to the point of instilling in children a sense of trust, respect, and affection"*. The absence of a father figure indicates that the male youth does not have the advantage of being taught socially acceptable behaviour.

b. Single-parent families

A single-parent per se does not imply subsequent criminal behaviour by the children. The complications that arise from being a single-parent lead to subsequent problem behaviour by the children. Inadequate supervision and discipline, stretched financial resources and a lack of control on a child are aspects usually linked to single-parent families (Rojek & Jensen 1996:192, Kratcoski & Kratcoski 1996:133). A single-parent family has been isolated by Mkhondo (2005:12) as a risk factor in juvenile delinquency. Authors have related how oftentimes it is the mother who is the single-parent (Rojek & Jensen 1996:192, Angenent & de Man 1996:91). An offender clearly stated to the researcher that he paid little attention to his mother's attempts at discipline as she was a single-parent *"My ma het gehoor van my aktiwitetite maar as n single-parent, ek wou nie gehoor nie"*. Given that the majority of the offenders were raised in a single-parent home, the researcher feels that this is indeed a factor worth mentioning. Single-parent families are characteristic of certain tribulations, for example, inadequate supervision and economic difficulties. It is at this point that the researcher wants to mention the importance of discipline and the customary lack thereof within a single-parent environment, this is supported by Wright and Wright (in Rojek & Jensen 1996:192). The researcher feels strongly however, that the offenders paid little attention to any disciplinary action on behalf of the parent/s as a result of

- A parent abusing drugs or alcohol – an offender mentions how his parents were never sober enough to tell him what to do.
- The person administering the discipline was a step-parent and thus offenders felt they need not listen to the step-parents' authority, two offenders argued that they never listened to their step-father's reprimands as they (the step-fathers) were not their (the offenders) biological fathers.
- Or due to the fact that the single-parent administering the discipline was the mother. Offenders claimed that they did not

pay any mind to their mothers' attempts to discipline as she was a woman and therefore emotionally soft. Coupled to this the offenders claimed that they were left to their own devices during the day due to their mothers' long working hours.

Farrington (2002:673) cites authors "*Erratic or inconsistent discipline also predicts delinquency*". To reiterate, although the researcher has not specifically emphasized discipline as a contributory factor, it is important for the reader to bear in mind that inadequate or inconsistent discipline is an outcome of and falls within the realm of single-parent environment. Many of the offenders were left unattended throughout the day due to mothers' working long hours, which leaves the youth open to harmful influences and open to partake in any leisure activity he desires - without having a parent to properly steer him away from criminal behaviour. The offenders involved in this study made it quite clear that their mothers were unaware of their substance abuse or their criminal activities. The aforementioned information suggests that the youth offender did not have consistent interaction with the mother, this denotes further that the offender had not developed a solid relationship with or attachment to the mother. The social control theory developed by Travis Hirschi maintains that the family is the most important social institution to socialise a child. An important element for the successful socialisation of a child stems from effectual attachment with a parent. This attachment is as a result from "*...the dedicated supervision and guidance that parents give their children whenever opportunities for antisocial acts first arise*" (in Ellis & Walsh 2000:322).

c. Family criminality: Family members who commit crime

Researchers have found that when parents are involved in criminal behaviour, the likelihood is high for children to follow in their parent's footsteps (Maree 2003:60, Ellis & Walsh 2000:189). This is corroborated by Farrington; who claims that having a parent that is arrested is related to later criminal behaviour by male offspring (in Lab 2000:135). The family has been emphasised throughout this study as a vital component in the development of a child, it is the family that teaches the child socially acceptable morals and value after all, when there is a failure in this transference the child indulges in problem behaviour as a result. Nineteen of the twenty six offenders have family members who were/are involved in criminal activities, of these sixteen had contact with their criminal family members. This is a pertinent issue with regards to its influence on youth offending. The unlawful behaviour of family members not only enforces the incorrect morals and values but encourages the youth to take part in the same behaviour as well, an offender admits that when he saw his stepfather laden with stolen items he would think to himself how easy it was to commit crime. By now, the

reader is well aware of the significant role that the family plays in a child's life. Literature throughout this chapter has time and again emphasised the importance of the family as an institution whereby the child learns to behave in a socially acceptable manner. The child directly witnesses the conduct of family members and through the observation internalises such conduct as acceptable or not. Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory (Yablonsky 2000:377) supports this argument by asserting that "*criminal behaviour is learned through the interaction with others in intimate personal groups*". The reader will agree that the family is the most intimate and personal of all the groups in society. Another theory that explains the correlation between criminal family members and children who commit crime is the general theory of crime and criminality as proposed by Gottfredson and Hirschi (in Joubert 2003:110). This theory is labelled as a general theory as it attempts to explain all kinds of crime and forms of anti-social behaviour. The importance of proper child-rearing is one of the points underlined by Gottfredson and Hirschi as contributory to criminal behaviour by a youth. This is elaborated by the following excerpt "*...these theorists see a significant link between parental criminality and youth crime, as criminal parents tend not to supervise their children well, do not recognise or discourage criminal behaviour in their children, and do not punish appropriately*" (in Joubert 2003:111).

d. Parents abusing drugs and alcohol

Once again this is a scenario where what the child sees the child does. Ellis and Walsh (2000:191) cite research results that show that children whose parents abuse alcohol have a heightened risk of criminal behaviour and that "*parental use of illegal drugs is positively associated with illegal drug use by offspring, as well as other forms of criminality...*". Twelve of the offenders have parents who abuse drugs or alcohol or both, the repercussions of which were supplied by the offenders. Once under the influence parents became abusive towards the offenders often resulting in physical attacks, relationships were non-existent with parents as they (the parents) were permanently under the influence of a substance "*my pa was altyd gevlam*". One offender went so far as to blame his own substance abuse on his stepfather's alcoholism and resultant assaults on the offender and his mother – abusing substances was a means of escapism for the offender. It was clear to the researcher during the interviews and after surveying the data that the influence of parental substance abuse on youth offending was vast, specifically when one takes into account that the offender was attacked physically by the parents in their intoxicated state. The effect of a child growing up in this kind of environment is twofold: firstly the child learns that such conduct is acceptable and secondly, the child is unable to successfully bond with parents who are seldom sober. The differential

association theory (in DeKeseredy & Schwartz 1996:226) confirms the first point; this theory contends that *“The specific direction of motives and drives is learned from definitions of legal codes as favourable or unfavourable”*. The interactional theory of Thornberry postulates that the inception of crime takes place when an adolescent has failed to bond with his/her parents. This failure in bonding is specifically due to the weak attachment that a child has with a parent (Siegel, Welsh & Senna 2003:149). It is unlikely that the offenders developed a firm and trusting relationship with their parents, particularly when one considers that they were high most of the time. In this regard an offender stated how he never had the opportunity to have a proper conversation with his father as his father was always intoxicated with alcohol.

e. Family violence and conflict

Although there were only eight offenders who suffered as a result of violence and conflict in the home, the researcher identified this as a significant factor due to the negative impact that violence and conflict have on a child and due to the comments made by the offenders. The violence that occurred was witnessed by the offenders: fathers, step-fathers and boyfriends would regularly assault the offenders' mothers. Through this observation the offenders inadvertently learn aggressive behaviour as a form of acceptable conduct. Campbell cited (in Swartz 1997:101) supports this by stating *“it is within the family that the association between masculinity and violence is first established, and it is within the family that men learn to view violence as a socially sanctioned means of resolving conflict”*. Researchers (in Angenent & de Man 1996:94) maintain that delinquent youth often grow up in disharmonious homes where conflict between parents and between parent and child is the norm. The researcher feels that the impact of violence within the family setting plays a contributory role, particularly with regards to the offenders in this study. Offenders' opinions on this subject ranged from never being able to forget the violence to feelings of uselessness. One offender suggested that perhaps it was his fault that his parents fought so much *“ek het gedink dit was my skuld, as ek nie gebore was sou hulle nie baklei nie”*. It is precisely this kind of comment that alerts the researcher to the impact of violence within the family. A youngster should not entertain thoughts of such complexity, guilt for a parent's behaviour should not be internalised by the child, much less the thought of not being born. This along with offenders claiming how they felt anger at the situation and their subsequent feelings of powerlessness leads the researcher to construe that violence in the family left an imprint of low-self esteem, helplessness and insecurity on the offenders, aspects which left the offenders open to spending time away from home. *“I was on the streets a lot, couldn't handle the fighting”* and subsequent aggression as a manifestation of

the offenders' inability to do anything about the violence and conflict experienced at home. As with the previous factor, family violence and conflict has a dual effect on a child. The reader will recall that Sutherland's theory of differential association argues that individuals learn which forms of conduct are deemed acceptable or unacceptable through their interaction with others in intimate personal groups. This theory holds further that intimate social companions such as the family have the greatest influence on an individual's transgressions and attitude development (Joubert 2003:91). A household characterised by violence and conflict therefore; does not promote an image conducive to the effective learning of socially acceptable behaviour. The second impact on the child, is aptly described by Hirschi's social control theory. Authors (in Joubert 2003:93) describe the importance of child/parent bonding *"If socialisation is effective, if children are attached to others, and if they believe in morality of law, the social bond will develop. In turn, a strong stake in conformity will be created, and conformity to the law will result. However, if socialisation is ineffective, natural human impulses will remain unrestrained. Children will be free to violate the law and misconduct will be the consequence. What children must be taught, therefore, is not how to break the law, but how to restrain their natural impulses and how to be law-abiding"*. Offenders found themselves in a permanent state of stress and tension due to the violence and conflict experienced at home. Due to their strained emotional state and the fact that the parents were involved in violent clashes most of the time, the offenders were unable to create any form of attachment to, let alone form a bond with, the parents. This pretty much leaves the offender to his own devices so much so that (1) the offender made decisions without consulting his parents (although not a child, the adolescent nonetheless still requires the guidance and advice of a parent) and (2) the choices made by the offender were very much influenced by the circumstances he was faced with.

f. Socio-economic status

Many poor people never turn to crime as a result of their economic status. The offenders in this study, however, did feel that their poor economic status played a role (not a direct cause) in their committing criminal behaviour. Bezuidenhout (2004:189) alleges that some criminal activities are related to poverty, specific reference is made to drug dealing, shoplifting, burglary and gang-related activities. Maree (2003:58) supports this by stating that youth arrest rates are higher in economically deprived and socially disorganised communities. Thirteen offenders indicated that they hailed from poor families and eleven claimed that they hailed from average to poor families. The majority of the offenders argue that although they had food, their parents could not afford to buy them the clothes, shoes or cell phones that they desired.

In short, the offenders in this study felt that they were deprived of certain material possessions that their friends or peers had. Often through the course of the interview the researcher was given the impression that the offenders were ashamed of their poor economic status, one offender claimed that he left school before completing his education as his mother could not afford to buy him shoes and he was too humiliated to go to school barefoot. It was clear to the researcher that the offenders (like most teenagers) wanted to wear fashionable clothes and shoes and have the freedom of being able to afford whatever their heart desired. Taking the offenders' attitude towards their economic status into account as well as their motivation behind the crimes (chapter 6, section 6.4) the researcher concluded that poor economic conditions did indeed play a role in the commission of crime by the youth offenders involved in this study.

7.2.1.2 School

Traditionally, the school has been viewed as one of the most important institutions outside of the family with particular attention on the school as the secondary socialisation agent of a child. Siegel et al (2003:268) agree that the school plays an important role with regards to the socialisation of a child; these authors state that the school is the *“basic conduit through which the community and adult influences enter into the lives of adolescents”*. Five factors have been highlighted by the researcher as significant in their contribution towards criminal behaviour by the offenders in this study.

a. Academic achievement

Research cited (in Ellis & Walsh 2000:194) shows the association between academic achievement and criminal behaviour *“...the vast majority of studies have found a significant tendency for those who have completed the fewest number of years of education, and those who have dropped out before finishing high school, to be more involved in criminal/anti-social behaviour than their more educated counterparts”*. Lab (2000:136) asserts that poor academic performance is related to existing and later deviance. Not one offender completed his schooling and on average the offenders claimed that they did not fare very well at school. The fact that these offenders did not perform well academically is associated with their level of attachment and commitment to their respective schools and on a larger scale to their future education. Offenders gave the impression that given their poor academic accomplishments there was little enticement to complete their schooling, rather the prospect of earning money once out of school proved to be the major attraction to drop out. The researcher feels that if

the offenders had a good academic record at school (and therefore the chance of successful completion) then perhaps the lure of dropping out of school would be minimised as a result. The offenders did not achieve well academically and dropping out of school was not seen as an impediment to their future plans of employment and financial stability. Given the written style of the offenders' lives (supplied by the offenders) and the manner in which they expressed themselves, the researcher is not convinced that the offenders had the intellectual abilities to perform well at school. The researcher also found through discourse with the offenders that on leaving school the offenders had plenty of time on their hands. This resulted in the offenders becoming bored and open to any form of excitement to fill their days. According to Hirschi's social control theory (Joubert 2003:92) positive bonding with and attachment to parents prevents children from partaking in criminal activities. He expands on his central theme of attachment and bonding to include a youngster's attachment to the school as an integral part of crime deterrence. Joubert (2003:92) clarifies *"By devoting time to conventional work, actions and pastimes such as sport and church activities, the young person cannot find the time, and does not feel the need, to engage in criminal behaviour. Schoolwork, recreation and hobbies are time-consuming activities that leave no room for boredom"*. The researcher would like to mention at this point that the academic achievement of the offenders is not only supported by their personal comments regarding their school performance but also the fact that at times offenders were unable to comment on crucial issues. For example: in section 6.3.3.1 (main study) an offender was unable to provide the reason for leaving school early *"Ek het nie 'n antwoord vir daai nie"*. The researcher also refers the reader to table 6.13 (main study) where some offenders were unable to provide any comment concerning their substance abuse. Another example which the researcher feels is important to mention is in table 6.20 (main study) whereby ten of the offenders were incapable of providing any comment with regards to their thoughts concerning the consequences of their crimes. The three examples provided illustrate to the reader the offenders' lack of insight and their inability to articulate their thoughts concerning issues that are not only crucial but pertinent to their committing their respective crimes.⁶

b. Substance abuse

Authors cited (in Bezuidenhout & Tshiwula 2004:97) declare that it is not alcohol as such that leads to youth offending but rather that the abuse of alcohol plays a role in the commission of antisocial behaviour. The same may be said for drugs as well. Illegal substances are inanimate objects that do not *cause* the criminal act to take place: what they do is lower an individual's inhibitions and therefore lead the

substance abuser to indulge in risky and sometimes criminal behaviour (Maree 2003:56). Twenty three offenders had abused drugs or alcohol or both. The topic of substance abuse came up repeatedly with the offenders as they divulged that the substances they abused (particularly the drugs such as crack-cocaine and mandrax) clouded their judgement and thus resulted in their criminal offences. The researcher is of the opinion that substance abuse contributed to the offenders' criminal acts in two ways. Firstly, being under the influence of the substances meant that the offenders' state of mind and therefore thoughts were not lucid or rational, leaving them vulnerable to behaving in such a manner so as not to consider the consequences of their actions or the fact that they were transgressing a criminal law. Secondly, the offenders used the substances prior to committing a criminal act as a vehicle for facilitating their crime. The offenders were unable to commit their crimes when sober, the effect of the drug gave them a sense of courage to commit the crime (thus reducing their fear levels) and a false sense of power that allowed the offenders to believe that they could commit their crimes unscathed. It was found that the offenders' addiction often led them to commit crimes with the ultimate aim of obtaining money in order to sustain their drug habit.

The influence of friends played a paramount role in the onset of substance abuse by the offenders. Thornberry's interactional theory suggests that the onset of crime can be attributed to the decline in social bonds during adolescence. This is as a result of poor attachment to parents, school and conventional values; the peer group becomes the most important aspect in the adolescent's life (Joubert 2003:108). What this theory illustrates is the importance of strong affiliations with conventional values and groups in society, the lack thereof results in forming associations with negative influences. Offenders had weak relationships with their parents and schools – the impact of which resulted in an instantaneous bonding with peers and subsequent desire to emulate peers as a means of strengthening the aforesaid bond. One must not discount the impact of observation and interaction with others as a means of encouragement for substance abuse. Sutherland's differential association theory maintains that criminal behaviour (in this case substance abuse) is learned through the interaction with significant others such as friends (Brown, Esbensen & Geis 2001:326).

c. Negative peer associations

This risk factor can be listed under the school or the youth's environment/community. The researcher has chosen to discuss negative peer associations at this stage as it was found that negative peer influence resulted in the offender's substance abuse. The reader must note that interacting with delinquent peers takes place not only during school hours but after school within the community/neighbourhood per se. Authors (in McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter and McWhirter 1998:75) indicate the reason for the marked impact peers have on adolescents "Young people are very responsive to peer group comments as measures of self-worth and self-esteem". In this regard, Bezuidenhout and Thsiwula (2004:94) maintain that during adolescence the youngster becomes more independent of the parents and looks to his/her friends for the support and self-evaluation previously required from the parents. Having highlighted the impact that peers can have on teenagers it is of consequence to look at prior research that supports the view of negative peers, negative behaviour. Researchers cited (in Maree 2003:66) claim that affiliating with deviant peers increases the probability of negative behaviour by an adolescent. This is supported by research conducted whereby the results showed a correlation between socialising with immoral individuals and subsequent criminal behaviour (Ellis & Walsh 2000:198). The influence of criminal friends and peers is widespread throughout this study. Friends were the primary influence in the offender's onset of substance abuse: friends encouraged, manipulated and very much lured the offenders into trying a substance, oftentimes citing the pleasures of being under the influence as an attraction. It was through the interaction with negative peers that offenders came to join gangs. The persuasions of friends also played a significant role in the offenders dropping out of school. What made the influence of friends more credible to the researcher and thus a significant factor is the offenders' family situation (this was provided in section 6.3.2.2). Many of the offenders had poor relationships with family members, lived with a single-parent, had criminal family members and experienced some form of violence and conflict within the home. The researcher feels that given the offenders' dismal family circumstances, their subsequent attachment to and imitation of their friends' criminal behaviour, copying such behaviour is an understandable response as a means of obtaining acceptance and perhaps, in a sense, a form of affection. Thus the behaviour of friends was not questioned but emulated and finally internalised as normal conduct among the offenders. In this regard, the comment of offender seven (see section 6.5 in chapter six) aptly illustrates the need to belong and fit in with peers. The researcher inquired as to the motivation for the offender committing crime when he knew it was

illegal, to which the offender responded *“Ek wou soos die ander jong manne gewees het”*.

Hirschi's social control theory (Bezuidenhout & Tshiwula 2004:87) suggests that when the social bonds are strong between individual and society the likelihood of criminal behaviour is low. When individuals have a poor social bond, they turn to peers who are like-minded, this affiliation with similar individuals affords them the support and approval that they are seeking. Following on from this theory is Thornberry's view that delinquent youths seek out the company of other youths who share their interests and beliefs and who will support their criminal behaviour (Siegel et al 2003:149). The weakening of social bonds has taken place and associating with delinquent peers is a consequence. What occurs next according to the differential association theory is the learning of criminal behaviour through the interaction with criminal peers (Bezuidenhout & Tshiwula 2004:89). The learning occurs due to the individual's close association with others in a group. This is supported by a statement made by offender two (in chapter five, section 5.6). This offender claimed that his friends taught him how to gain entry into houses by using a crowbar.

7.2.1.3 Youth's environment/Community

It is within the community that an adolescent is exposed to accepted forms of socialisation. This implies that within the community the youth learn to interact with each other, older individuals and members of authority. When the community falls short of promoting a positive, socially acceptable picture, the youth can adopt adverse behaviour. Maree (2003:58) clarifies *“For some children, vandalism, stealing and violence have become internalised and part of everyday living, almost normal and acceptable. When looking at the prevailing value system in some communities, more often than not a strong moral foundation is absent and the moral fibre of the community is questionable”*. Lab (2000:136) claims that when looking for risk factors within the community one must focus on social factors such as: economic deprivation, poor neighbourhood integration, availability of firearms and the level of gang activity.

a. Area where offender was born and raised

The researcher found the community wherein the offender was born and raised as a significant factor supported by the offenders' comments concerning their neighbourhood and subsequent confirmation by literature that the community plays a contributory role in the commission of crime. The majority of the offenders were born and raised in

neighbourhoods characteristic with unemployment, gang and criminal activities and violence. In this regard Mkhondo (2005:12) states that the impact of a violent community on a child results in problem behaviour. Offenders spoke of neighbourhoods where drug dealing *"It's a thing in the community, word is, you want money you sell drugs"*, robbery, gang-related crime and violent clashes were the order of the day. Communities were described as corrupt, an offender explained that once released from prison he would return to drugs and eventually criminal behaviour as his community is rife with such activities *"Ek sal meer in die tronk in val"*. The researcher considers an offender's environment as a significant contributory factor for criminal behaviour especially when taking into consideration how many of the offenders (a considerable amount) had committed crimes prior to being apprehended and how many were serving a second prison sentence. Many offenders had committed more than one housebreaking or robbery for example, prior to actually being apprehended. The researcher concludes that members of the community were either too afraid of the offenders and therefore did not report the crime or such criminal actions were part of the community's existence *"Westbury is corrupt"*, this statement by an offender is further supported by Maree (2003:57) *"A person who lives in a community in which crime is accepted and endured will not experience the social control that a person living within a culture which finds the commission of crime unacceptable would"*. Another point to consider is the fact that some offenders had already served a sentence prior to the current one. These second time offenders in question returned to their community on release and claimed that there was no other way but to re-offend as a means of survival and/or obtaining money *"There's no way to escape Westbury, you have to move to another place"*. As mentioned in section 7.2.1.2, many offenders dropped out of school and therefore had plenty of time on their hands during the day. Offenders professed that this leisure time was spent loitering on the streets, hanging out with friends and taking drugs. The implication of so much (unsupervised) leisure time is that a great deal of it was spent within the greater area of the community; exposing the offenders to the means and standard of living present in the community. The communities wherein the offenders resided have a poor standard of living with a great deal of gang activity and criminal behaviour. These are thus the activities witnessed and subsequently emulated by the offenders.

The researcher has previously stated that the offenders were raised in communities distinctive with unemployment, poverty, criminal and gang activities. A theory that aptly encapsulates the offenders' communities and the problems associated therewith is the social disorganisation theory of Shaw and McKay. This theory holds that crime and delinquency are as a result of neighbourhood disorganisation,

particularly neighbourhoods in large urban areas. These theorists list poverty, cultural heterogeneity and physical mobility as conditions that prove conducive to social disorganisation. Dissel (1997:3) describes the coloured township of Westbury *“The township is characterised by limited economic activity, poor sanitation, inadequate infrastructure, poor education, high rates of illiteracy and unemployment”*. Two offenders were raised in Westbury. According to Shaw and McKay it is precisely under these conditions that individuals residing in such neighbourhoods have little prospect of achieving a common set of social norms, especially norms that are against anti-social behaviour (Ellis & Walsh 2000:354). There is no concrete evidence that the members of the offenders’ communities condoned criminal behaviour. However, this study does reveal that the offenders themselves (as members of their respective communities) felt that their communities were corrupt, explaining that criminal activities were part of the community’s daily practice. Factors such as these are not conducive to internalising socially acceptable norms and forms of behaviour. This study has shown that the offenders resided in economically poor communities. Offenders in this study; frequently disclosed their frustration due to their lack of money and their subsequent inability to obtain their desired material possessions (for example: clothing, shoes etc). They elaborated that their criminal behaviour was as a result of poor finances, partaking in criminal activities allowed for the offenders to obtain their sought after objects albeit through illegal actions. In this regard the researcher asks the reader to refer to chapter five, section 5.6 and chapter six, table 6.19 (the motivating factors for the offender’s criminal acts). Of the twenty six offenders in this research project, twenty two committed illegal acts as a means of obtaining money for drugs and clothes. The opportunity for criminal activities exists due to the widespread presence of gangs within the offenders’ communities. This will be dealt with in the next point.

b. Gang involvement

A majority of studies cited (in Ellis & Walsh 2000:199) show that delinquency is associated more with gang members than non-members. Dissel (1997:3) explains that the main purpose of a gang is to provide drugs for the community, gangs that consist mostly of young members commit crimes such as car theft, burglaries and robbery as a means of supporting their drug habits. In most cases the offenders’ communities are ubiquitous with gang activity. Fourteen offenders confessed to being gang members with the main attraction being the economic opportunity the gang presented to them. It was through the gangs’ criminal activities that the offenders were able to afford the clothing they desired and the illegal substances they required to function everyday. What makes gang involvement a contributory factor for criminal behaviour is

not just the fact that gangs are synonymous with criminal activities (which the researcher feels is an end result of gang membership) but the incidence of gangs in the communities and the type of individuals who establish such gangs. The researcher is trying to point out that gangs would not exist if the need for group affiliation and cohesion was not prevalent in the offenders' communities as a whole and by the youth resident in the aforementioned neighbourhoods. Given that the majority of the offenders grew up in unpleasant circumstances the researcher feels that the gang is primarily a social structure that provides the member (in this case the offender) with protection and the opportunity to make money quickly while at the same time having a sense of family and acceptance within the group. The fact that the majority of the gang members (in this case the offenders as well) hail from economically limited families leads to their undertaking criminal activities as a means of improving their economic situation. Lastly, the researcher cannot ignore the influence of friends in the offender's decision to become gang members.

The existence and persistence of gangs through time is explained by Cloward and Ohlin's theory of delinquent subcultures (Moyer 2001:71). These theorists defined a delinquent subculture as "*one in which certain forms of delinquent activity are essential requirements for the performance of the dominant roles supported by the subculture*". They refer to three types of subcultures of which the first and second are relevant for this discussion: the criminal and conflict/violent subculture. It is within the first subculture that criminal conduct is an accepted means of achieving success (Moyer 2001:72). The conflict/violent subculture develops due to the prevalent instability in the neighbourhood. In this regard Cloward and Ohlin postulate that communities unable to develop conventional forms of social organisation and legally acceptable means of achieving socially prescribed goals; result in a community that is not only disorganised but ubiquitous with failure as well (Moyer 2001:72). This type of community allows for a violent/conflict subculture. The fact that so many offenders have been raised in poor socio-economic neighbourhoods with little opportunity for employment and where the occurrence of gang and criminal activity is commonplace, suggests communities that are not only disorganised; but also breeding grounds for criminal and gang activity.

7.3 Linking the significant factors

One cannot look at the significant factors in isolation. Indeed, these factors that have been highlighted as contributory to criminal behaviour by youth offenders, are in fact, interdependent on and interrelated with

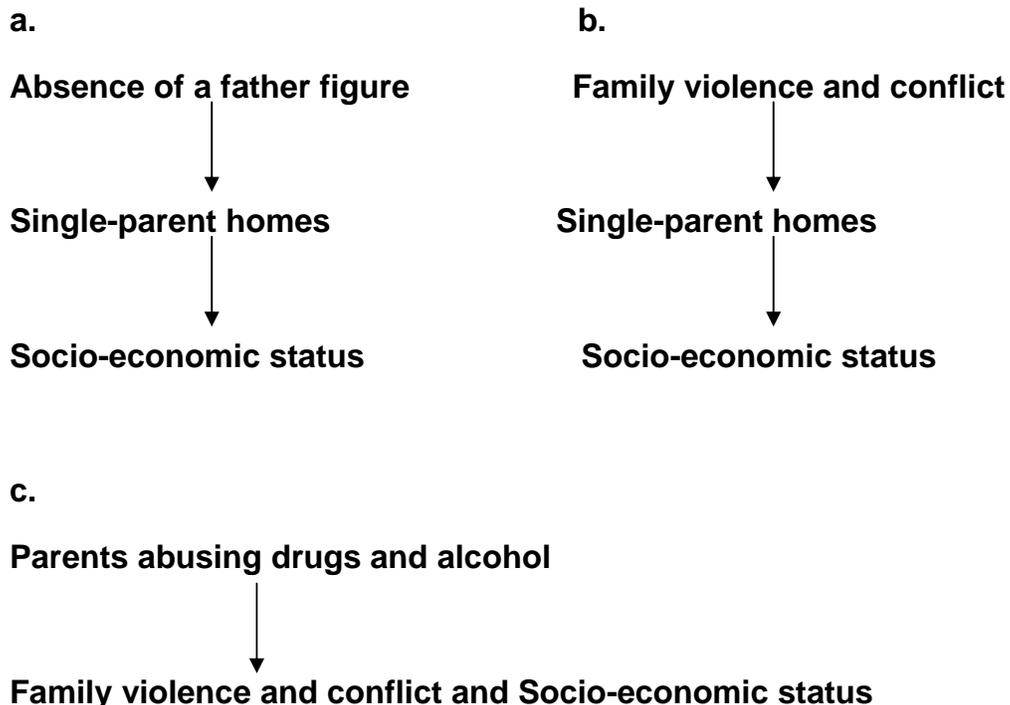
one other. This statement implies that the factors are connected to each other, in that one factor can lead to the occurrence of another. The correlation between all the pertinent factors for this study will be presented diagrammatically. Furthermore, the researcher will show that not only is each theme (family, school and offender's environment/community) related to each other but factors within each theme are interconnected to one another as well.

7.3.1 Linking significant factors within each theme

As already mentioned, the researcher will present the correlation between factors within each theme. This is done so as to illustrate to the reader that the significant factors highlighted in this study need to be focussed on as a whole and not as separate entities that contribute to youth offending.

7.3.1.1 Family

Figure 7.1 **The interrelation of significant factors within the family**



The first diagram (a) illustrates how the absence of a father figure (and therefore husband) leads to the mother (the mother is the single-parent for the majority of the offenders in this study) becoming the single-parent and thus the sole breadwinner for the family. The fact that the mother had the single responsibility to cover the family's financial requirements resulted in the family suffering from poor economic conditions. The absence of the father; immediately re-defines the family setting as a single-parent family who battle financially as a consequence of having only one income in the house. The second diagram (b) looks at the interrelatedness of family violence, single-parent homes and socio-economic status. This study has shown that family violence and conflict sometimes precedes divorce or separation in the family. The consequence of which is a single-parent unit where once again the mother is the sole provider for the family's basic living requirements. One income is not enough to cover all the necessities of the family and economic difficulties are the resultant effect. The third diagram (c) shows that oftentimes when parents are substance abusers they tend to lash out (physically) at their spouses or partners. Offenders mentioned how their mothers would be physically assaulted by their boyfriends (especially when either or both were under the influence of drugs or alcohol). Substance abuse also leads to the parents' not having stable employment and hence a home where financial restraints are a common occurrence.

7.3.1.2 School

Figure 7.2 The interrelation of significant factors within the school

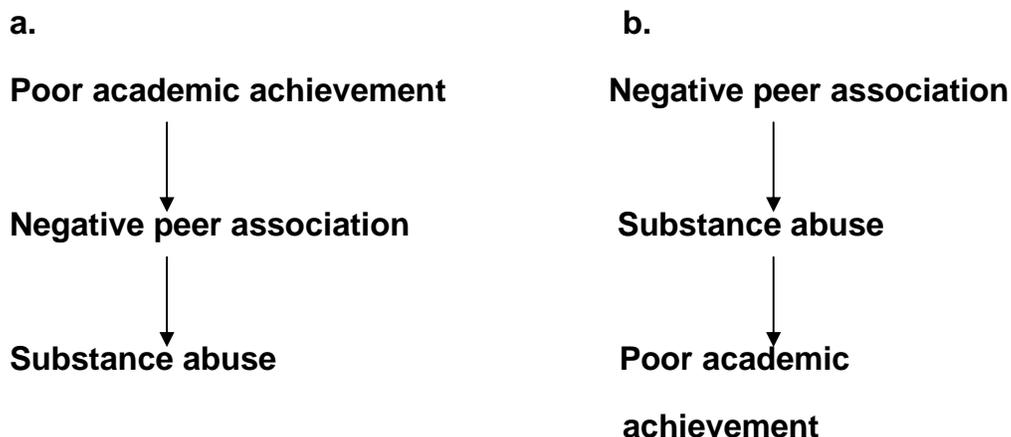
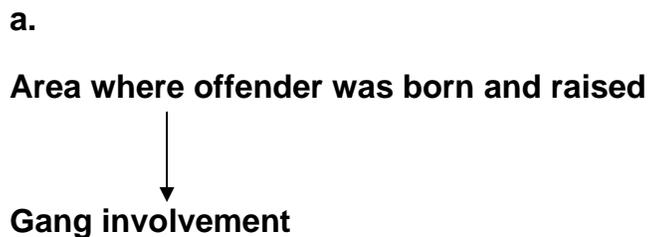


Diagram (a) illustrates that when adolescents fare poorly at school they tend to affiliate themselves with other learners who do not perform well at school either. The researcher is not suggesting that learners who fare badly at school should be thought of as harmful influences towards other peers, but the information from this study does reveal that learners who are not strong academically (1) associate themselves with other poor learners and (2) have a poor commitment to their education and thus their school. The influence of peers, overrides the value of completing one's school career and the tendency to follow one's friends is thus stronger. The researcher refers to section 7.2.1.2 point (c) where Thornberry's theory explains that adolescents are inclined to affiliate themselves with friends who are likeminded and who share their beliefs. Negative peer association leads to the adolescent experimenting with illegal substances. Once again, the researcher refers to the vast influence friends and peers have over an adolescent and the importance that an adolescent places on his/her friendships with his/her friends and peers. Youngsters will delve into the world of drugs as a means of not only impressing, but copying their much respected friends' behaviour. Diagram (b) implies that interacting with harmful friends and peers can lead to substance abuse that in turn leads to the adolescent performing badly at school - abusing substances is not conducive to academic achievement.

7.3.1.3 Youth's environment/Community

Figure 7.3 The interrelation of significant factors within the youth's environment

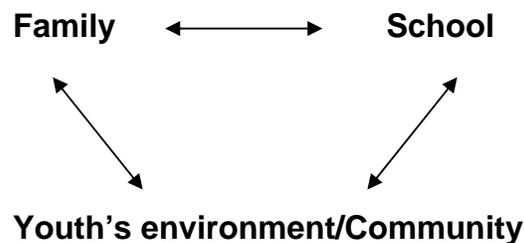


The youth's environment/community dictates the kind of socialisation the youngster will internalise. A sizeable amount of the offenders were raised in communities that were rife with poverty, unemployment, criminal and gang-related activities. This suggests that the communities were not favorable for the proper learning of society's norms and values. Gang involvement was not condemned but accepted (whether

willingly or not) as a way of life for community members. Offenders, therefore perceived gang membership not as something to avoid but rather as a means of procuring money, establishing friendships and as a means of protection and security from the community's violent element.

7.3.2 Linking each theme as a whole

Figure 7.4 The interrelation of each theme



As the primary and therefore most influential socialisation agent, the family determines the path of a child from the day of birth up until the years of early adulthood. When parents fail to discipline and teach a child about acceptable forms of behaviour, the child is left vulnerable to external, harmful influences. The child will be exposed to negative influences at the school and within the child's immediate neighbourhood and community. In terms of school influence, the parents are the forerunners in emphasising the importance of an education, failure to do this results in the adolescent having a weak attachment to the school and subsequently sparing few thoughts for academic achievement and ultimately dropping out of school. This in turn leaves the youngster open to any negative influences within the school (other learners who are just as uncommitted to the school) and to negative influences within the community. The latter of which entails gang involvement, substance abuse and criminal activities. Offenders in this research project were not adequately disciplined by their parents (bearing in mind that in most cases the offenders hailed from a single-parent family with the mother as the sole disciplinarian and breadwinner). Offenders commented on how they would ignore any disciplinary attempts by their mothers and how oftentimes their mothers were unaware of their daily routine and activities. Due to their weak bond and poor communication with their mothers, offenders did not have a clear set of values with regards to the importance of attending and completing school. Academic performance was thus not internalised as a priority and the offenders' subsequent

attachment to their friends at school was given precedence. Given that the mother was working most of the time, the offenders' conduct and choice of friends went unnoticed. The offenders' mothers did not force them to remain at school and hence the high dropout rate. In terms of the community's influence, the adolescent is easy prey for gang members if parents have not taught the youngster resiliency skills and the confidence to avoid peer pressure. The lure of the neighbourhood's daily activities becomes an attractive option specifically when compared to the attraction of attending school. Obtaining a stable education does not feature as important to the youth as the parents from the onset; failed to relay the value of attending and completing school. The family then affects the youth's approach to his/her education and the youth's resistance to destructive influences within the community. Having exercised poor supervision and control over the offenders, the mothers of the aforesaid had little knowledge of the time spent after school (if offenders were still attending) or throughout the day (if the offender had already dropped out of school). This indicates once more that the offenders were free to socialise with whom they wanted and to indulge in any activity that caught their attention. Another point to consider is that a child raised in a conflict-ridden home, where parents abuse drugs and alcohol or where family members are involved in criminal activities, does not afford the youth the opportunity to develop into a well-balanced individual, geared with the necessary life skills to elude negative influences.

The school has been cited in chapter three as the secondary socialisation agent for the youth. It is at the school that the child spends the majority of his/ her time and where the learner comes into contact with peers. The fact that the learner spends the majority of his/her time at the school and that the school is an important means of socialisation for the youth, indicates therefore that the environment at the school must be conducive to the effective learning and transference of a sound education and socially acceptable morals and values. Once again the influence of the family as a whole or the parent is paramount in the adolescent's willingness to absorb such education and knowledge. The researcher has determined in the previous paragraph that the offenders were not taught the worth of obtaining an education, hence the drop out rate, this in turn is exacerbated by the environment at school which the offender was confronted with. It was established in this study that the offenders attended schools where gang-related clashes and fighting with others were the order of the day. Schools were not safe environments for the offenders and this only lends itself to a lack of respect by the offenders for the school and its role as an educational institution. This led in part to the offender (1) dropping out of school and (2) the offender's choice to join a gang as a means of protection. The reader must bear in mind that due to the ineffectiveness of the school

as an educational institution, the offenders had little if any respect towards their respective schools and thus the decision to leave school was not a difficult one to make. The fact that the offenders' schools were riddled with gang-related conflict does not only reflect on the school but on the community wherein the school is situated, this leads to the next discussion.

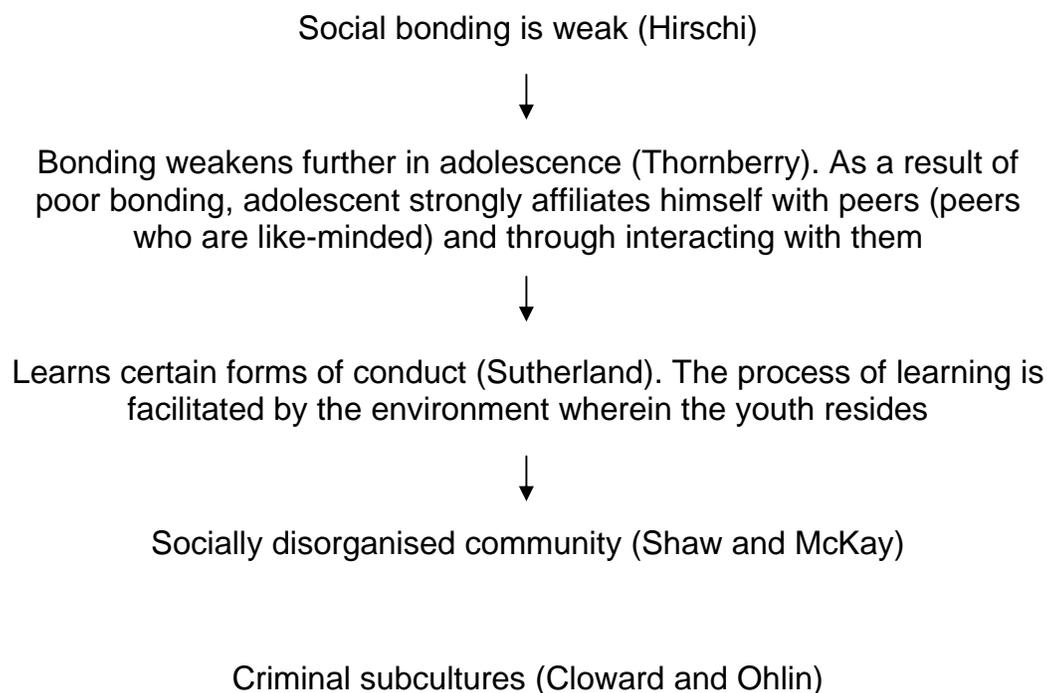
The community wherein a youth resides plays an important role in terms of the opportunities available for the youth to build a career or to find basic employment. The offenders' neighbourhoods were widespread with gang and criminal activities, with little opportunity for employment. The fact that so many offenders were involved in gangs indicates that joining this kind of group satisfied a particular need for the offender. This can be explained in two ways: In the first instance the offender wanted to possess the same material items that he witnessed his peers owning and the only means of earning good money quickly was to join a gang, and as a consequence partake in criminal activities as a means of obtaining such money. If the neighbourhood had a well-developed infrastructure that allowed for employment opportunities, perhaps then the offenders would not have considered gang membership. If on the other hand parents highlighted the importance of an education as a means of obtaining employment, then the offenders might have considered completing their schooling. As it is, this was not the case for the offenders and the lure of the gangs (which is prevalent in the offenders' communities) proved to be stronger than attending school. In the second instance, the gang provided to a large extent the opportunity for the offender to experience some form of affection and acceptance that was seemingly lacking at home. Bearing in mind that the offenders were raised in dismal circumstances and that the majority of the offenders lacked a positive male model with whom to identify, offenders could look elsewhere for their emotional fulfillment. The gang provided very much the acceptance that the offender felt was missing at school and within the family. Being part of a gang allowed the offender to manifest his feelings of anger with regards to his home environment, frustration due to lack of money and aggression as a means of releasing feelings of insecurity and inferiority. The gang not only accepted but condoned the offenders' behaviour as well. Gangs provide excitement for bored, young people who are not involved in conventional activities such as extramural activities at school.

7.4 Part Two: Explanation of data

The researcher has utilised five theories to explain and support the behaviour of the offenders involved in this research project. Central components from each theory have been extracted as a means of developing an integrated explanation for the behaviour of the youth offenders. Essentially the main components from the theories include social bonding and learning, thereafter the researcher includes a community which is socially disorganised, characteristic with poor economic conditions and criminal subcultures. The following diagram illustrates for the reader the process of the youth becoming a criminal:

7.5 Using theories to explain youth offending

Figure 7.5 Theories illustrating the commencement of delinquent and criminal behaviour



This diagram will be used as a guideline for the explanation, this allows the researcher to discuss the process of the eventual offending by

indicating the factors that played a role as emanated from the empirical study.

7.5.1 Social bonding is weak

This is the first step in the decline into amoral, delinquent and criminal behaviour. The theory to be discussed exemplifies the behaviour of the offenders in this study.

Control theories assume that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken (Hirschi 2002:75). The social control theory of Hirschi is based on the assumption that *"a person is free to commit delinquent acts because his ties to conventional order have somehow been broken"* (Brown et al 2001:350). This theory aptly explains the initial bond that a child forms with important others in his/her life. The subsequent behaviour of the child as an adolescent and later as an adult depend largely on the bonding that took place early on in life. Binder, Geis and Bruce (2001:182) maintain that bonding to conventional individuals is a strong deterrent for criminal behaviour. The central theme for all the types of the control theories is thus, that human behaviour is to a large extent determined by how children are socialised and their ensuing attachment to major institutions, such as the family and school (Ellis & Walsh 2000:231). In this regard, Brown et al (2001:351) assert the following *"Assuming normative consensus, weakened or broken social bonds reduce a person's stake in conformity"*. These authors elucidate further that the weakened ties to society allow for the individual to act upon his/her deviant impulses. The researcher has continually emphasised the importance of the family as the primary socialisation agent, thus suggesting that it is the family per se that introduces the child to different forms of socially acceptable conduct. It is also the family that provides the child with the necessary foundation for a successful life and facilitates the child into becoming a well-balanced citizen in society. This requires the parents not only to discipline the child properly but to be positive role models so that the child is easily able to identify with the parents and thus emulate acceptable behaviour. Hirschi (2002:112) explains that the one set of people a child is expected to be close to (at least in childhood) is the parents, he claims further that one can assume that a weak parent/child relationship is indicative of future crime and delinquency, Brown et al (2001:351) assert *"The weaker the ties, the more likely deviance is to transpire"*. When the family setting is favourable the child is able to form a strong bond with the parents and thus strong attachments to the parents' morals and values. In this regard Hirschi (2002:113) states *"...those least attached to their parents are most likely to commit delinquent acts"*. This poor attachment to the parents, Hirschi (2002:113) explains can be due to the parents being less worthy of

respect: perhaps the parents have fewer resources with which to force or buy conformity, or the parents are unable to live up to the adolescent's standards of appearance and behaviour, parents are easily manipulated (objectively speaking parents have less money and education). McCord and McCord (in Hirschi 2002:113) proclaim that there are parents who do not care to earn their child's respect. The social control theory of Hirschi advocates that when a child has little or poor attachment to the parents this attitude can quite easily lead to a lack of respect for teachers and other adults in general (Hirschi 2002:113).

The offenders in this study seemed to display weakened bonds and attachments to their parents. This is not an unsupported statement to make when the reader considers the kind of family life the majority of the offenders experienced. Factors such as absent fathers (thus broken homes) family criminality, parents abusing substances etc played an important role in the offender's lives. The poor relationship between offenders and their parents lead to the offenders having a poor relationship with society at large, offenders were oblivious to and perhaps more to the point indifferent to the consequences of their crimes in terms of their victims and families. In this regard, Cullen and Agnew (2003:231) contend that when attachment exists, the youth is more likely to care about what the significant others in his life think about him. Therefore, Cullen and Agnew (2003:231) postulate that if the youth finds himself in a situation marked with criminal intentions the youth will reject such intentions as he is concerned about his relationship with the significant others in his life (the youth will not commit crime as he does not want to disappoint the people with whom he has a positive attachment and bond).

Hirschi (in Brown et al 2001:351) identified four interrelated elements of the social bond declaring that *"the more closely a person is tied to conventional society in any of these ways, the more closely he is likely to be tied in other ways"*.

- **Attachment** – Attachment is deemed the most important element of the social bond, it deals with the trust, respect and intimacy that develops between a child and his/her parents (Joubert 2003:92). Attachment is as a result of consistent supervision and guidance by the parents when a child is exposed to criminal opportunities. Ellis and Walsh (2000:322) believe that it is precisely through the parents' discipline that the initial step of bonding takes place and consequently the development of morality within the child. Understanding of and compassion to the opinions of others is at the crux of the

attachment aspect of the social bond theory. Wells and Rankin (1998:278) explain that individuals who have no attachment to others are also insensitive to their opinions, Moyer (2001:148) expands on this by stating *“When an individual is attached to society, or connected to the whole of society, he or she will behave in such a manner as not to offend other members of that society. The individual will behave morally”*. As Hirschi (in Brown et al 2001:351) says *“The essence of internalization of norms, conscience, or superego thus lies in the attachment of the individual to others”*. Of particular importance is the child's attachment to the parents. Hirschi had originally suggested that attachment to a parent (irrelevant of the parent's level of conformity) was a means of isolating the child from criminal behaviour (Brown et al 2001:351). Research findings however, have shown that attachment to *conventional* parents will insulate the child from delinquency and crime (Brown et al 2001:351). As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the relationship between the offenders and their parents indicates that there was little, if any bond with and subsequent attachment to parental values and norms. The majority of the offenders' parents did not pass on conventional norms and values, added to this the environment at home was not conducive to deterring the offenders from committing crime. Attachment has been afforded the most attention of all four elements. In this regard authors (in Brown et al 2001:352) believe that the attachment an individual has to the family and the school are the strongest predictors of conformity. The reader will remember the lack of attachment the offenders displayed towards their schools, obtaining money was deemed far more important than completing their schooling. Williams and McShane (1999:195); Carrabine, Iganski, Lee, Plumer & South 2004:62) provide examples of attachment: Identification with peers or parents, emotional bond between child and parent, concern and respect for parents' or peers' opinions, supervision by parents and general sensitivity to the opinions of others.

- **Commitment** – Individuals are rational beings and will therefore contemplate the consequences of their actions before acting (Brown et al 2001:352). Based on this, Hirschi believed that weighing the pros and the cons of a particular action can be considered as a commitment to conventional order – therefore conformity is encouraged by the fear of losing what one has or what one expects to attain (Brown et al 2001:352). In this regard, De Keseredy and Schwartz (1996:219) claim that an individual who has nothing to lose will

not be inhibited from committing a crime. If, however, one envisions the opportunity for educational qualifications and/or opportunities and employment and maintaining a good reputation then the likelihood for criminal behaviour is low. Offenders dropped out of school due to lack of money for school fees, the need to acquire money for drugs and clothes and poor academic achievement. A good reputation was defined by the community wherein the offender resided, partaking in gang activity afforded the offender with the label of having status and prestige precisely for the offender's involvement in a gang. The following points are examples that embrace the commitment component: Investment in society, academic competence, academic aspirations and expectations, expected occupation and the importance of reputation (Williams & Mc Shane 1999:195; Carrabine et al 2004:62).

- **Involvement** – Involving oneself in socially acceptable, indeed conventional activities, is believed to deter an individual from partaking in any deviant or criminal activities (Brown et al 2001:353, De Keseredy & Schwartz 1996:219, Moyer 2001:149). According to Cullen and Agnew (2003:231) taking part in conventional activities facilitates control. Hirschi (2002:79) explains his ethos with regards to an individual involved in conformist behavior *“To the extent that he is engrossed in conventional activities, he cannot even think about deviant acts, let alone act out his inclinations”*. Many of the offenders related how their free time was spent loitering on the streets, taking drugs and hanging out with friends all of which the reader can agree do not encompass behaviour that is either conventional or in some cases socially acceptable. Examples include: Time consuming activity, time spent on homework, lack of boredom and time spent talking with friends (Williams & McShane 1999:195; Carrabine et al 2004:62).
- **Belief** – This element of the social bond is quite basic in its point of departure. Simply put, Hirschi believed that an individual with a strong belief in upholding the law will be less likely to commit crime (Brown et al 2001:353). Yablonsky (2000:386) maintains that the notion of belief can be defined as *“the endorsement of general conventional values and norms, especially the belief that laws and society’s rules for behaviour are morally correct and should be obeyed”*. Hirschi (in De Keseredy & Schwartz 1996:220) argues *“The less a person believes he should obey the rules, the more likely he is to violate them”*. Although the offenders did not say outright

that they had no respect for the law, the researcher definitely formed the impression that the offenders perceived their criminal acts merely as a vehicle for obtaining their desired objects (drugs, money clothes). This leads the researcher to deduce that their belief in the law was neither fixed nor existent. Williams and McShane (1999:195; Carrabine et al 2004:62) provide the following examples for this form of social bond: Respect for authorities and importance of and respect for law.

Authors (in Joubert 2003:93) fittingly encapsulate Hirschi's social control theory "*If socialisation is effective, if children are attached to others, and if they believe in the morality of law, the social bond will develop. In turn, a strong stake in conformity will be created, and conformity to the law will result. However, if socialisation is ineffective, natural human impulses will remain unrestrained. Children will be free to violate the law and misconduct will be a consequence. What children must be taught, therefore, is not how to break the law, but how to restrain their natural impulses and how to be law-abiding*". In essence, the social control theory is dominated by the premise of control. This suggests that although human behaviour can be viewed as a result of both motivations and restraints, it is wise to rather focus on the variations in restraints as a means of explaining conformity. Hence, conformity, rather than criminal behaviour is the issue that needs explanation – delinquency and criminal behaviour is due to the failure of the control process (Wells & Rankin 1998:276).

Hirschi's social control theory explains the poor attachment that the offenders had towards their parents, educational institutions, the law and greater society. Offenders were not provided with the consistent supervision and guidance essential for the development of a strong sense of morality that in turn prevents delinquent and criminal behaviour. The offenders were raised in homes where only one parent provided discipline (usually the mother) – discipline that the researcher feels was neither consistent nor effective. Any chance for bonding was further sabotaged by the fact that the offenders' parents and family were either substance abusers, involved in criminal and gang activities or displayed little affection and attention towards the offender. All the aforesaid factors largely determined the quality of relationship the offender could have had with his parents and thus the degree of attachment that the offender could forge with his parents or family. The researcher has shown that the offenders had poor relationships with their parents – it has been suggested countless times in this study that the family is fundamental in its role as primary caretaker of a child, thus indicating that the family is foremost in the teaching of values, morals and norms to a child through not only consistent discipline and guidance but as positive role model as well. The effectiveness of the family,

specifically the parents as teachers and caretakers determine the child's attachment to his family, school and greater society.

7.5.2 Bonding weakens further in adolescence

Thornberry's interactional theory aptly aids in explaining the attachment of the offenders to their friends and peers. It is Thornberry's belief that delinquency and crime begins as a result of the decline in the social bond in adolescence, this is marked particularly by the adolescent's poor attachment to his/her parents, commitment to school and belief in conventional values (Siegel et al 2003:149, Bartollas 2000:159; Empey, Stafford & Hay 1999:312). Cullen and Agnew(2003:504) contend that when social bonds are weakened the youth is freed from conventional constraints and is thus open to adverse behaviour. One of the basic premises of this theory is that human behaviour takes place in social interaction and can thus be best explained by looking at aspects that focus on interactive processes (Thornberry 1998:472; Cullen & Agnew 2003:504). For instance, the interactional theory contends that delinquent youths create belief systems that are in congruence with their immoral lifestyle (Siegel et al 2003:149). According to Thornberry, delinquent adolescents tend to seek out other youths who share their same interests and lifestyle, this results in the reinforcement and encouragement of deviant and criminal behaviour (Siegel et al 2003:149). The aforesaid is supported by Bartollas (2000:159) who claims "*Associations with delinquent peers and delinquent values make up the social setting in which delinquency, especially prolonged serious delinquency, is learned and reinforced*". The interactional theory emphasises that delinquent prone adolescents do not turn innocent youths into criminals, rather they interact with other youths who have a similar lifestyle, way of thinking and attitude towards others (Siegel et al 2003:149). Friends and peers who are deviant and criminal support other adolescents who behave in the same manner.

The main premise of the interactional theory is that influences on deviant and criminal behaviour are in fact bi-directional (Siegel et al 2003:150). This is clarified by Siegel et al (2003:150) when they state "*Weak bonds lead kids to develop friendships with deviant peers and get involved in delinquency. Frequent delinquency involvement further weakens bonds and makes it difficult to re-establish conventional ones. Delinquency-promoting factors tend to reinforce one another and sustain a chronic delinquent career*". Empey et al (1999:312) argue that weakened bonds alone do not cause criminal behaviour; youngsters must be in an environment that promotes the learning and reinforcement of delinquency and criminal behaviour. It is the belief of Thornberry that criminality is a developmental process that takes on a different meaning and form as an individual matures and that this

process is not only dynamic but one that develops over a person's life (Siegel et al 2003:150, Bartollas 2000:159). During adolescence, the family is the most important decisive factor with regards to an adolescent's belief in conventional norms and law-abiding behaviour (Siegel et al 2003:150, Thornberry 1998:480). The family is after all the primary and most influential caretaker of the child. In mid-adolescence, friends, peers and school replace the family as a primary influence (Siegel et al 2003:150, Bartollas 2000:159). At this stage of adolescence the opinion of friends and peers supersedes that of the parents. Thornberry (1998:483) clarifies as to the nature of the negative influence on an adolescent *"By this point in the life cycle, the most salient variables involved in the production of delinquency are likely to be external to the home, associated with the youth's activities in school and peer networks"*. The researcher makes no mention of Thornberry's approach to adulthood and criminal behaviour as the focus of this study is on the youth offender. In terms of a poor attachment to school, the interactional model maintains that poor commitment to the school does not lead directly to criminal behaviour, rather the influence is indirect through a youth's association with delinquent and criminal peers (Cullen & Agnew 2003:509).

The interactional theory suggests therefore that criminal behaviour is in fact *part* of a dynamic social process and not merely an outcome of it. Thornberry maintains that although deviant and criminal behaviour is influenced by social forces, it also influences these processes and thus creates a behavioural trajectory toward increasing transgression of the law for some individuals (Siegel et al 2003:150). This is made clear by Thornberry (1998:488) when he says *"For some youth a behavioural trajectory is established that predicts increasing involvement in delinquency and crime. The initially weak bonds in early adolescence between some youths, their parents, school, and conventional values, lead to high delinquency involvement. The high delinquency involvement further weakens the conventional bonds, and in combination both these effect make it extremely difficult to reestablish bonds to conventional society at later ages. As a result, all the factors tend to reinforce one another over time to produce an extremely high probability of continued deviance"*. This indicates then, that the causal influences on youth crime are reciprocal (Joubert 2003:108).

This theory also proposes (a proposition that holds true for the offenders in this study) that the processes that influence deviant and criminal behaviour are systematically related to an adolescent's social standing. Bartollas (2000:159) clarifies *"Class, minority-group status, and the social disorganization of the community all affect the initial values of the interactive variables as well as the behavioural trajectories"*. Adolescents from socially disadvantaged backgrounds begin the process least bonded to conventional society and most

exposed to the world of delinquency and crime (Bartollas 2000:159). Thornberry contends that it is the nature of the process that increases the likelihood that youths from socially disadvantaged backgrounds will continue with their delinquency and turn to serious criminal involvement (Bartollas 2000:159). This theory (as initially suggested) aptly explains the life course of the offenders in this study, the offenders hail from poor socio-economic backgrounds, socially disorganised communities ubiquitous with criminal and gang activities. In this regard Joubert (2003:108) states *“Youths growing up in socially disorganised environments are at the greatest risk of having a weakened social bond and are subsequently more likely to commit crime, particularly when law-breaking values and attitudes can be learned from peers”*. Offenders had poor (or none whatsoever) bonding with their parents for various reasons, they were also raised within a single-parent family where in most cases the onus was on the mother to provide financially for the family. This left the offenders unsupervised for the majority of the day, offenders were thus left vulnerable to negative influences that were predominant in their communities. Associating with deviant peers (bearing in mind that the opinion of peers is deemed important and overrides that of the parent) only serves to further weaken the bond and thus the cycle of crime continues.

7.5.3 Learning deviant behaviour

So far, Hirschi's bonding and Thornberry's interactional theory have illustrated the importance of attachment and bonding to one's family and other social institutions. These two theories contain two key components that the researcher feels apply to the lives of the offenders in this study: attachment and bonding. The offenders had a poor attachment to parents and thus a poor bond with them, as a result, the offenders had poor bonds with other social institutions as well, for example, the school. These weakened bonds as well as the fact that the offenders hailed from poor and socially disorganised communities, predisposed the offenders to befriending individuals who were like-minded. It is at this stage that Sutherland's theory of differential association demonstrates how behaviour is learned through interacting with other individuals. The basic premise of this theory is that criminals are taught antisocial behaviour (Bartollas 2000:138). Criminals then, learn antisocial behaviour by interacting with others who have also violated the laws of the state (Valier 2002:48; Lawson & Heaton 1999:54; Williams 2001:180; Martin 2005:84). More specifically, criminal behaviour is learned through interacting with other individuals, particularly intimate others (Cullen & Agnew 2003:131).

Bartollas (2000:137), De Keseredy and Schwartz (1996:225), Cullen and Agnew (2003:132) and Carrabine et al (2004:56) provide a concise

overview of Sutherland's differential association theory. This is done by using the nine propositions implemented by Sutherland:

Proposition 1: Criminal behaviour, like other behaviour, is learned from others. According to Brown et al (2001:325) this proposition provides the foundation for differential association. Human beings therefore are not born "*bad*" but rather learn certain behaviour depending on the social context. The offenders learnt through the absence of their parents (due to death, imprisonment or long work hours) to fend for themselves. The role models that the offenders were confronted with, either exercised poor discipline or none at all, were involved in criminal activities or indulged in substance abuse. Offenders also had to cope with conflict within the family. All these factors mentioned do not make for proper learning of conventional morals and values.

Proposition 2: Criminal behaviour is learned through an adolescent's active involvement with others in a process of communication. Joubert (2003:91) explains "*People actively learn as they interact with other individuals who serve as teachers and guides to crime – thus criminality cannot occur without the aid of others*". Time and again the offenders have mentioned how they would spend all their leisure time loitering on the streets with friends, this involved talking and abusing substances with them.

Proposition 3: The learning of criminal behaviour occurs foremost within intimate social groups. In this regard, Binder et al (2001:178) claim that in order to look for the source of criminal behaviour; one must look at the socialising experiences of an individual. Joubert (2003:91) agrees with Sutherland and stipulates that the learning occurs in personal groups made up of significant others (in this case friends and peers). De Keseredy and Schwartz (1996:225) confirm *this "... you tend to learn from those people you are closest to and have the most respect for*". The offenders made it quite clear that their friends were considered an important part of their lives. Many of the offenders were involved in gangs and they related how gang members were their family away from family, indeed how the gang members were considered in most cases to represent a true family for the offenders. The gang members became an important source of support and affection for the offenders, they replaced the offenders' parents as significant others. Brown et al (2001:326) assert that the emphasis for proposition two and three is placed on the importance of child rearing and its effect on subsequent behaviour. These authors continue by stating that traditionally it is the parents who teach the child language, eating habits and other forms of behaviour, differential association extends this process of learning to the criminal world. Brown et al (2001:326) explain

“As the associations of youth [i.e., their circle of significant others] expand, it is expected that conduct initially shaped by parents will increasingly come under the influence of peers, often arousing concern of the parents about the company kept by their offspring”. This statement made by the aforesaid authors applies very well to the offenders involved in this study: the offenders’ friends were not ideal individuals with whom to spend time, yet the parents of the offenders were either incapable or unwilling to do anything about it.

Proposition 4: When criminal behaviour is learned, it involves the learning of the different techniques of committing a crime, which are sometimes very simple. It also includes the specific directions of motives, drives, rationalisations and attitudes. One of the offenders in this study claimed how he learned to break into a house from his friends, he was shown how to use a crowbar to gain entry into the targeted house. The reader must also not forget that offenders who abused substances were introduced into the world of illegal substances by their friends.

Proposition 5: The particular direction and motives of drives is learned from the definitions of the law as favourable or unfavourable. Sutherland maintains that adolescents come into contact with individuals who either uphold the law or break the law. The offenders had daily contact with individuals who were involved in criminal activities.

Proposition 6: An individual becomes delinquent due to the presence of more definitions against the law than definitions in favour of abiding to the law. This proposition is the crux of this theory, where differential association takes place. If adolescents interact more with others who transgress the law then the likelihood is high that they will adopt the same values and morals as the transgressors. Offenders were confronted with friends and peers who were involved in illegal activities in one way or another, these friends and peers were considered to be important to the offenders and hence the offenders adopted their friends’ lifestyle and commenced or continued with their criminal activities.

Proposition 7: Differential associations can vary in frequency, duration, priority and intensity. It stands to reason that the more time one spends with people the higher the likelihood of adopting others’ values. The offenders visited with their friends every day due their friends not attending school either, resulting in both the offenders and their friends having a lot of free time to spend together.

Proposition 8: The process involved in learning criminal behaviour through the association with criminal elements is the same as conventional learning.

Proposition 9: Although criminal behaviour is a manifestation of general needs and values, it is not as such explained by the needs and values, because conformist behaviour is also a manifestation of the same needs and values (Brown et al 2001:329). The difference is the motive for delinquent and criminal behaviour. Every human being wants enough money to afford fashionable clothing, cars, electronic gadgets etc, the reality is that not everyone is presented with the same opportunities to obtain the aforementioned items. The offenders yearned for fashionable clothing, money etc, but were disadvantaged in the sense that they could not afford these items. Their socio-economic background did not allow for any luxuries.

De Keseredy and Schwartz (1996:226) sum up Sutherland's theory *"The point, then, behind the term differential association is that everyone is exposed to definitions in favor of lawbreaking and law abiding, but that things are not equal. As suggested, frequent exposure to ideas, long-term exposure, early exposure, and definitions that come from people whom the person holds in high regard will all help to push a person in one direction or another"*. The persistent exposure to negative influences from individuals considered to be important and significant increases the likelihood that the person exposed to the aforesaid influences will adopt the same lifestyle. This is exactly the case for the offenders of this study, their frequent exposure to negative influences by individuals considered by the offenders as important led to their partaking in criminal activities. What particularly appeals to the researcher about the differential association theory is Sutherland's belief that individuals residing in socially disorganised neighbourhoods have a higher chance of associating with individuals who will encourage criminal behaviour (Brown et al 2001:324). This holds true for the offenders as they were all raised in communities where poverty, unemployment and gang activities are common.

7.5.4 Socially disorganised community

The social disorganisation theory centers specifically on the social characteristics of a community as contributory to youth delinquency and crime (Bartollas 2000:102). Shaw and McKay believed that it is the type of a neighbourhood and not the nature of its inhabitants that lead to criminal involvement (Burke 2005:97). Social disorganisation was a term coined by Shaw and McKay to describe a community where poverty, residential mobility and racial heterogeneity are existent (Joubert 2003:88, Brown et al 2001:310). These three factors result in or produce social disorganisation and hence their contribution towards the occurrence of crime. Although the offenders resided in coloured communities, the reader must take note that South Africa as a larger community constitutes a variety of cultures and thus norms and values.

This theory along with the subsequent theories illustrates how the environment contributes towards the commission of crime.

According to Joubert (2003:88) a disorganised community is one where the family and the school (as establishments of social control) are fragmented and thus unable to function properly. Bartollas (2000:103) supports this and adds that it is as a result of the breakdown of the family and the neighbourhood that youth misconduct occurs. In this regard, Empey et al (1999:145) maintain that a socially disorganised neighbourhood leads to the ineffective control of children. Burke (2005:98) corroborates this; youngsters raised in a socially disorganised neighbourhood, are vulnerable to the lure of crime. Burke continues by stating that due to the disintegration of conventional institutions; the youth are poorly supervised and left pretty much to their own devices. The reader can agree that the offenders' family, school and neighbourhood environments are not conducive to produce law-abiding citizens. The offenders failed to receive adequate supervision or discipline from either of the aforementioned social institutions and as a result succumbed to negative influences.

Shaw and McKay believe that youth delinquency and crime become alternative forms of socialisation through which adolescents hailing from disorganised communities are attracted to deviant lifestyles (Bartollas 2000:105). It is argued by Shaw and McKay that delinquent and criminal behaviour are culturally passed on from generation to generation (Bartollas 2000:105; Burke 2005:98). In this regard, an excerpt by Shaw and McKay illuminates the cultural transmission of criminal behaviour *"The heavy concentration of delinquency in certain areas means... that boys living in these areas are in contact... with groups which sanction such behaviour and exert pressure on their members to conform to group standards.... This means that delinquent boys in these areas have contact not only with other delinquents who are their contemporaries but also with older offenders, who in turn had contact with delinquents preceding them..."* in (Empey et al 1999:145). Offenders had family members involved in criminal activities, one offender was proud of the fact that his grandfather was a legendary gangster. The founders of the social disorganisation theory contend that a delinquent gang forms as a response to the surrounding poor conditions as well as the social deficit of the community. It was further concluded by the theorists that delinquent and criminal behaviour are a logical choice when one considers the lack of legitimate opportunities present for individuals from a lower economic status (Bartollas 2000:105).

An excerpt written by Shaw and McKay (in Brown et al 2001:310) encapsulates the social disorganisation theory *"In areas of high economic status where the rates of delinquency are low there is, in general, a similarity in the attitudes of the residents with reference to*

conventional values...In contrast, the areas of low economics status where the rates of delinquency are high, are characterized by wide diversity in norms and standards of behaviour. Children living in such communities are exposed to a variety of contradictory standards and forms of behaviour rather than to a relatively consistent and conventional pattern". The offenders in this study were unfortunate to live in a community where there was a lack of consensus with regards to criminal and law-abiding behaviour. Members of the community were ineffective as role models for the offenders as adolescents, this partly due to the shortfall of consistent norms and values. Taking this into account, and the fact that traditional social institutions (the family and school) failed the offenders together with their poor socio-economic status all contributed to the offenders' criminal acts.

7.5.5 Delinquent and criminal subcultures

The opportunity theory of Cloward and Ohlin suggests that just as legitimate means of obtaining economic success varies transversely through social groups so does access to illegitimate means as well (Brown et al 2001:294). In this regard, Cloward and Ohlin argued that the failure to achieve economic success makes an individual ripe for delinquency and crime (Cullen & Agnew 2003:191). It was the belief of Cloward and Ohlin that if an individual is involved in delinquent and criminal behaviour it is as a result of delinquent and criminal opportunities that are made available to such an individual (Brown et al 2001:294). According to these theorists, criminal behaviour results from not only limited legitimate opportunity but from the available illegitimate opportunities as well (Carrabine et al 2004:60). This theory holds that residents in lower-class communities are provided with illegitimate means to achieve their cultural goals (Anderson & Dyson 2002:158). Hence, this theory postulates that an adolescent for instance will not partake in delinquent and criminal activities if such an opportunity does not exist. Cloward and Ohlin emphasise that the character of the neighbourhood and the ability of its residents must be considered to play a role in the commission of crime (Binder et al 2001:152). Cloward and Ohlin maintained that the advancement of specific subcultures is due to available opportunities in certain neighbourhoods/communities (Moyer 2001:72). They define a delinquent subculture as "*one in which certain forms of delinquent activity are essential requirements for the performance of the dominant roles supported by the subculture*" in (Moyer 2001:71, Yablonsky 2000:361). The delinquent and criminal subculture justify the criminal activities by their members as a normal response to a stressful situation (Cullen & Agnew 2003:191).

What stands out for the researcher concerning this theory is its assertion that individuals need to learn the necessary values and skills

in order to effectively take advantage of deviant and criminal opportunity structures within the community (Brown et al 2001:294). The researcher wants to propose at this stage that if there is no one from whom to learn unlawful behaviour would deviant and criminal behaviour occur?

Cloward and Ohlin (Moyer 2001:72, Brown et al 2001:296) defined three types of subcultures or gangs of which the criminal and conflict/violent are considered to be important and applicable to this study. The first subculture is the criminal subculture, according to Cloward and Ohlin this subculture is in fact the most stable of the three and displays the most defiance to change. The fact that this subculture is stable is due to youthful delinquency and adult criminality, hence the acceptance of deviant and criminal behaviour as a means of achieving one's desired goals (Tierney 1996:107). It is within the criminal subculture that prestige is actually bestowed on individuals who obtain material possessions by way of committing crime. An excerpt in (Moyer 2001:72) clearly defines this subculture "*The means by which a member of a criminal subculture achieves success are clearly defined for the aspirant. At a young age, he learns to admire and respect older criminals and to adopt the 'right guy' as his role model. Delinquent episodes help him to acquire mastery of the techniques and orientation of the criminal world and to learn how to cooperate successfully with others in criminal enterprises...*". The offenders were raised in neighbourhoods ubiquitous with gangs and their criminal activities. Joining a gang for the offenders was a matter of acquiring prestige and status. One offender went so far as to confirm this by stating that he grew up *wanting* to be a gang member; he also wanted to be feared by members of the community and own the fancy cars and clothes that gang members had.

The second subculture, the conflict/violent subculture is referred to as such due to its characteristic violent behaviour that is also dominant within this group. The conflict/violent subculture develops in neighbourhoods that are unstable (Tierney 1996:107; Anderson & Dyson 2003:159). This subculture is well defined by Cloward and Ohlin (in Brown et al 2001:298) "*First, an unorganized community cannot provide access to legitimate channels to success goals....Secondly, access to stable criminal opportunity systems is also restricted....Finally, social controls are weak in such communities. These conditions, we believe, lead to the emergence of conflict subcultures*". Moyer (2001:72) explains further "*Because social controls are not present to maintain order, violent behaviour is more apt to occur*". Cloward and Ohlin declared that the typical role model in this subculture is one who parades around with his gang, fights with weapons so as to earn respect from other gangs and who manages to elicit a fearful reverence from conventional adult members of the community due to capricious and destructive assaults on people and

property alike. The following excerpt (in Moyer 2001:73) advances on the aforesaid information “*The immediate aim in the world of fighting gangs is to acquire a reputation for toughness and destructive violence*”. Offenders have more than once mentioned how being a gang member ensured that they were fearfully respected by members of their respective communities.

This theory was thought to be suitable to explain the existence of gangs within the communities wherein the offenders were raised. When taking into consideration the social structure of the particular communities of the offenders, one can assume that social disorganisation did indeed exist. The opportunities for the offenders to commit crime were not only openly available to them, but the offenders were in contact with other individuals who supported unlawful behaviour and thus willingly transferred deviant and criminal values to the offenders. The researcher is aware that Cloward and Ohlin’s theory is a branch of the strain theory and that it emphasises blocked opportunities. The researcher acknowledges that the offenders did not have blocked opportunities per se (i.e. they had the opportunity to attend school for instance). The attraction of this theory is the fact that it looks at the availability of illegitimate means to achieve financial success and the forming of criminal subcultures. As a result this theory was felt to be suitable for this study.

7.6 Summary

This chapter focussed on the factors that proved to be significant in their contribution towards youth offending, specifically the important data revealed from the interviews was interpreted and explained. This was done by dividing the chapter in two sections: section A dealt with the interpretation of data and section B paid attention to explaining the significant factors by using suitable theories.

In section A, six factors were found to be significant under the theme of family, three factors under the theme of school and two factors under the theme of youth’s environment/community. The researcher proceeded further to submit a correlation between the significant factors; this was done to illustrate the interdependence of these factors. The various factors were then linked to each theme and each theme was subsequently linked to one another: once again as a means of demonstrating to the reader how each theme and particularly each significant factor is related to each other.

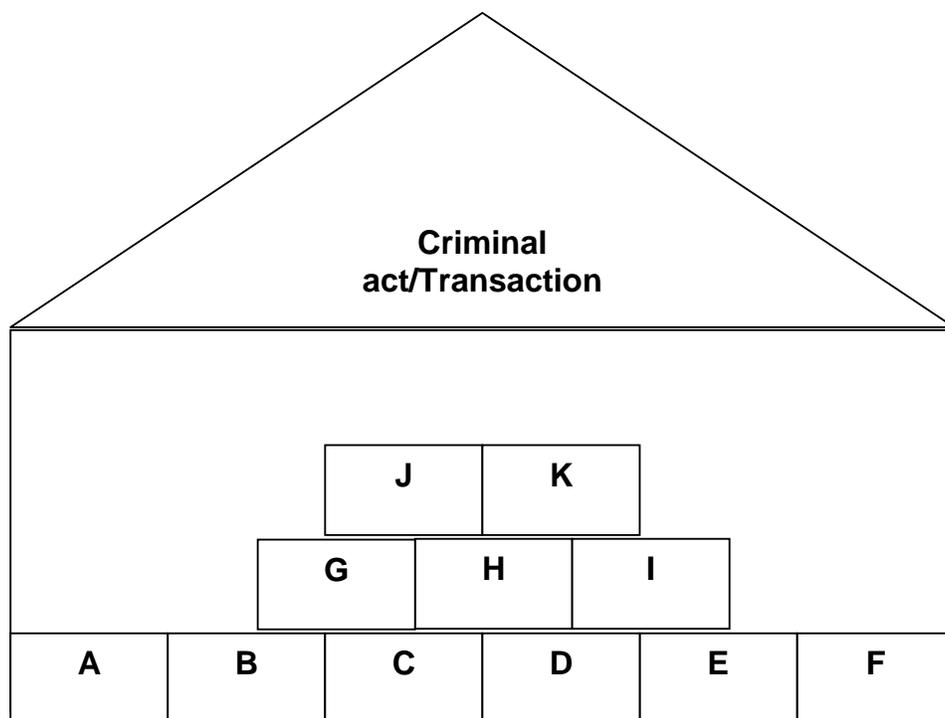
Section B included theories as a means of explaining the behaviour of the offenders. Six theories were chosen based on their ability to

adequately enlighten the reader with regards to the offenders' lives and their progression towards criminal behaviour.

7.7 Conclusion

The following diagram demonstrates how the offenders involved in this study progressed towards committing crime.

Figure 7.6 Significant factors



A: Absence of a father figure

B: Single-parent families

C: Family criminality: Family members who commit crime

D: Parents abusing drugs and alcohol

E: Family violence and conflict

F: Poor socio-economic status

G: Lack of academic achievement

H: Substance abuse

I: Negative peer associations

J: Socially disorganised area where offender was born and raised

K: Gang involvement

This “house” is a metaphor for the life course of the offenders involved in this study and highlights the precursors to the transaction (criminal actions). The researcher specifically chose to conclude the data in such a manner due to the symbolism the house holds for the researcher with regards to the lives of the offenders. The foundation of a house needs not only to be completed before adding on to the house, but also built in a such a way to ensure that it is stable, guaranteeing that the rest of the house (walls, rooms etc) does not collapse and cause damage to itself and others. The same applies for the foundation of the offenders’ lives. Time and again the researcher has emphasised the absolute importance of the family. The family is the primary socialisation agent, educator and caretaker for a child – the family then is the first institution that lays the foundation for a child in order to ensure that the child enjoys a secure future: mentally, physically and emotionally. This is done by disciplining the child, this is done by giving the child affection and support when it is needed, this is done by providing the child with a good education....When the family fails in this regard the foundation for the child’s journey in life is unstable, thus indicating that the child does not have the necessary life skills to resist harmful influences, develop insight and make the correct decisions for a successful future. Six factors were found to be important with regards to their contribution towards criminal behaviour by the youth in this study. The absence of a positive father figure proved to play a significant role in the lives of the youth involved in this study. Offenders expressed their desire to have known their fathers and in turn enjoy a stable relationship with them. The researcher therefore presumes that the bonding which is necessary between parent and child did not take place. So many of the offenders were raised in a single-parent/broken home environment. The lack of supervision of the single-parent (in many cases the mother) made for the offenders spending their free time with dubious characters of whom the mothers had no knowledge. The financial burden of taking care of the family lay completely on the mother’s shoulders with the result that (1) the mother had to work long hours in order to supply the family with essential items e.g. food and clothes. This, however, does not automatically indicate that the family was well-off financially, offenders pointed out that their economic status was poor (2) the mother was unable (due to long working hours) to monitor the offender’s behaviour

and/or his involvement with negative influences. Once again, the offenders did not enjoy a close bond with their mothers, offenders had indicated that they did not listen to their mothers for various reasons. The fact that many offenders had family members who were involved in criminal activities does not promote a “normal” family environment or a positive image of accepted behaviour. The fact that the parents were not good role models for the offenders (as children) implies that bonding with those parents was poor, this is exacerbated by the fact that offenders did claim that they could not communicate with their parents when they were inebriated let alone have a relationship with them. Parents abusing substances gave the offenders the impression that it is an accepted past time and means of solving one’s problems, added to this is the fact that the parents (once under the influence of drugs and alcohol) would become physically abusive towards each other and towards the offenders as well. This particular significant factor was not covered in the literature study (as the literature consulted does not emphasise parents abusing substances as a contributory factor) which indicates then that this is a unique factor applicable to the offenders involved in this study. Literature that did mention parents abusing substances did not single out alcohol as part of the substance abuse, alcohol abuse was found to be pertinent for this study and hence its inclusion. Bonding in this kind of environment is poor if existent at all. Some offenders had the misfortune of being raised in a conflict-ridden home. Witnessing their parents being abusive to each other left the offenders feeling powerless and insecure. The socio-economic status of the family was indigent, leaving the offenders feeling deprived of certain items and frustrated at their inability to obtain the desired goods through legitimate means.

Three factors under the theme of school, were found to be prominent in the offenders’ advancement into the realm of crime. Offenders fared badly at school which led them to abandon their school career early and thus have more free time than usual available to them. It is at this stage that the researcher wants to mention that the offenders lacked insight, none of the offenders considered the consequences of dropping out of school. They did not contemplate the possibility of finishing school and finding employment as a means of obtaining whatever material objects they desired. Their thoughts were simply to obtain immediate satisfaction for their needs without taking into account the shortcoming of an incomplete education. The offenders could not have made the decision to drop out of school if their friends had not influenced them to do so. But, perhaps the most important issue at hand is that the offenders did not consider there to be any other option but to leave school and make do for themselves, in other words, they did not foresee any future via legitimate channels as the structure of the community did not allow for such opportunities to achieve their goals. The majority of

the offenders abused drugs or alcohol or both, their initiation into the world of substance abuse was influenced by their friends. Offenders experimented (and subsequently became addicted to) with drugs through their associations with friends and peers. Having said this the next significant factor, negative peer association, was found to play a fundamental role in the offenders' deviant and criminal behaviour. Many offenders were involved in gangs and their respective gang-related activities. Learning plays a key function in this regard: offenders emulated their friends and peers within the gang setting and were often supported and encouraged by gang members to commit crime as a means of obtaining desired items e.g. clothes and drugs.

The offender's environment and community is also pertinent to their commission of crime. The neighborhood wherein the offenders resided was rampant with poverty, unemployment and gang activities. Such an environment is not conducive to correct social or educational learning.

If the offenders had been provided with a proper basis (by the family) whereon to build a future perhaps they might have had a chance at avoiding damaging influences. It would be incorrect to presume that individuals living in socially disorganised environments would automatically turn to crime. Hence the researcher believes that if the parents of the offenders had provided them with consistent discipline, love and nurturing and a stable environment, perhaps the offenders would have had the necessary life skills to persevere with school and avoid negative influences.

The key components from the theories that are applicable to the offenders' lives and behaviour are: bonding, attachment, learning, a socially disorganised community, economic conditions and criminal subcultures. The researcher is aware that some of the theories used are dated, however, the researcher firmly believes that these theories are entirely applicable to the youths' lives and behaviour. When looking at these theories as an integrated whole one can see how they, in turn, form an explanation that is not only pertinent to the offenders' lives but is comprehensive as well. Essentially, the advancement of the offenders into the realm of crime took the following path: due to their unpleasant circumstances at home the offenders did not form a close bond or attachment with their parents. Bonding and attachment with the school was also non-existent. Parents did not encourage the offenders to continue with their education and the school environment was not conducive to proper learning. Bonding and attachment weakened further during adolescence as the opinion of friends and peers took precedence over the parents. Listening to friends and peers is a natural process for adolescents, this was however, aggravated by the offenders having formed poor bonding and attachment with their parents. Their friends quickly became their nucleus wherefrom they evaluated

themselves, built their self-esteem and derived their self worth. Having said this, it is not surprising then that the offenders joined gangs to experience familiarity with other individuals who were not only like-minded but who very much were like a family for the youngsters. Through their intimate interaction with their friends, the offenders learnt about drugs and how to commit crime. When a community is disorganised characteristic with poverty, unemployment and gangsterism, the image portrayed to a youngster is one of mixed values and morals and unlawful behaviour that is not only accepted but encouraged as well. The offenders were raised in families who were disadvantaged economically and as a result the offenders felt deprived of certain material goods. Joining a gang was an opportunity for the offender to improve his economic situation. Achieving financial prosperity through legal channels was not an alternative for the offenders as they had dropped out of school early: therefore seeking employment was not an option. It is important to mention at this stage that the offenders did not *want* to find work as they knew they could earn money far easier by joining a gang and committing crime. The structure of the community was such that the offenders found themselves living in a subculture of violence and conflict. Gang-related activities were the order of the day and the offenders were left little option but to join a gang as a means of protection and security against rival gangs. The gangs also provided the offenders with the opportunity to obtain their desired material possessions through illegal activities.

Poor attachment to their parents and school, the importance of impressing friends, learning amoral behaviour, a neighbourhood that presents the opportunity for obtaining one's goals via illegitimate channels, poor socio-economic conditions and a subculture of violence and conflict are significant factors in the commission of crime.

In the next and final chapter, this research project is evaluated in terms of objectives and pertinent recommendations are made.