

## Section A: Introduction and Literature review

### Chapter 1

# Introduction and Orientation

## 1.1 Introduction

Youth offending has been and still is a social problem across many countries, it is a problem that affects and shakes the very fabric of society. The problem with the youth in modern society is both a national concern and an important subject for academic study (Siegel, Welsh & Senna 2003:9). This particular study focuses on youth offending and the (predisposing) factors building up to it. A difficult question that arises in any society, according to Baker (1999:16) is why some of its members break its rules: why only some individuals commit crime. As a response to this question, one begins with the developmental consideration of how an individual advances into delinquent and criminal behaviour. As a result, studying delinquent and criminal youth becomes a focus for trying to understand the risk factors related to criminal behaviour in general. If an understanding can be reached as to how a youth becomes an offender, then there exists some hope that perchance the conditions which are contributing to criminal behaviour may be altered or ameliorated (Baker 1999:16).

Different theories on tentative explanations for the causes of youth offending have been developed over time. Since the study of delinquency is essentially interdisciplinary, theoretical explanations on the causes of this phenomena reflect different avenues of inquiry, including biology, psychology, sociology and criminology. Siegel et al (2003:59) differentiate between individual, sociological and developmental views of delinquency. Individual views of delinquency hold that delinquency is basically caused by factors such as personal choices and decision-making influenced by psychological and biological factors. Other theories postulate that youthful misbehaviour is either caused by a youth's place in the social structure, in particular his/her relationship with social institutions and processes as well as the youth's reaction to social conflict. Finally, there are those theories that regard

delinquency as a developmental process, reflecting the changes that occur in young people's lives as they evolve during their life's course. Sapsford (2001:27) states however in the Sage Dictionary of Criminology, that it is rarely possible, even in theory, to argue that the supposed cause precedes the supposed effect in time and, ideally, that the effect always occurs. Social causation is generally complex, and it may take a combination of causes to produce an effect. Fattah (1997:275) supports this statement and maintains that causative factors do not, automatically lead to crime. Sapsford (2001:27) expands on this "... *association between the supposed cause and effect is a necessary condition for causation but not a sufficient one*". In criminological research, Sapsford (2001:27) argues, one seldom speaks absolutely of causes, but rather of antecedent influences on predisposing factors. In this study the focus is on those factors that contribute to youth offending.

In this particular study, the researcher wants to determine which significant factors are conducive to crime being committed by the youth in South Africa. A preponderance of crimes is being committed by young people, in this regard Bezuidenhout and Tshiwula (2004:6) claim that in some countries youth offending accounts for 60 to 70 percent of all recorded crimes. They maintain further that this is the case in developed and developing countries – South Africa is considered a developing country. Booyens (2003:48) cites various statistics to illustrate the problem of youth offending in South Africa today, Booyens makes the following conclusion based on the statistics "...*South Africa is experiencing unprecedented levels of children and youths being arrested and convicted of crimes*". Addressing and conducting research on youth offending in South Africa is an issue that holds interest for the criminologist, parents, educationalists and law enforcers. The youth of today are the leaders of the future and as a part of a youth's society, one should be concerned about an adolescent's behaviour. Youth offenders are a threat to the South African community at large. The Criminal Justice System of South Africa picks up on this threat and is reacting as a result. A case in point is where a fourteen year old girl (who murdered her grandmother) was handed a heavier sentence by the Appeal Court (in Venter 2005:3). The girl was previously sentenced to 36 months correctional supervision but the State had felt that it was too lenient and hence their approach to the Supreme Court of Appeal. The teenager was twelve years old when she asked two men to help her kill her grandmother.

Of particular concern to the researcher is the involvement of young offenders in violent crimes such as murder, attempted murder, rape and armed robbery. Hosken (21 April:2004) writes of a sixteen year old schoolboy who was arrested for "*hacking and stabbing*" his mother to death with a kitchen knife. It was found that the mother had been stabbed repeatedly in the head, face, neck, chest and arms. The teenager committed this violent act in a fit of blind fury subsequent to an argument he had with his mother (the argument was about a girl the teenager was dating). This anecdote illustrates the seriousness and violence of the crime.

Given the gravity of youth crime in South Africa it is vital for a criminologist to study this phenomenon. This occurrence needs to be examined to ensure effective intervention and control thereof to reduce the possibility of a youth becoming a serious, dangerous offender. The following excerpt gives an example of the juvenile as a dangerous offender "*.... more juveniles are carrying firearms because they are involved in drug trafficking and need guns to protect their valuable goods. Some carry guns because they believe they need guns for self-protection. Others carry guns simply because their friends carry them. The problem with juveniles having so many guns is that they will use them*" Bartollas (1997:18).

An effective approach to the problem of youth offending would be to focus on the juvenile as an important component of the criminal act. This is indeed the approach adopted in this study: to provide answers on youth offending based on empirical findings. The significant factors that contribute to youth offending will be those factors that were found to play a pertinent and dominant role in the criminal behaviour of the youths involved in this study.

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

In this section the researcher demonstrates the need for this project. This is done by looking at the incidence of youth crime, the age of youth committing the crimes and the seriousness of the crimes.

Statistics are not available for the incidence of youth offending in South Africa. The following discussion does however highlight: that youth crime is not a rare occurrence. Schönreich (1999:3) alleges that in the majority of countries it is the teenagers and adolescents that are more

likely to be involved in criminal behaviour than older adults and children. Statistics provided by the Department of Correctional Services (2004:26) show that 43 percent of the total prison population in South Africa is 25 years or younger with some 24 669 under 21 years old. It is important to note at this point; that the aforementioned figures demonstrate convicted offenders only. In an article by Meyer (18 January:2000) reference is made to the fact that youngsters in South Africa are increasingly turning to crime. Meyer includes statistics from Statistics South Africa to illustrate the aforementioned statement:

- 2 288 out of 100 000 males aged between 18 and 20 years were convicted of committing a crime compared with 1 481 per 100 000 for males aged 21 and older.
- The number of youth convicted for murder is almost double than that for older offenders (42 out of every 100 000 males between the ages of 18 and 20 years are convicted for murder).
- The figure for robbery is bigger. Approximately 109 out of every 100 000 youths are convicted for robbery.
- Young males are over-represented in the awaiting-trial sections of South African prisons – nearly 43% of awaiting-trial individuals are between 18 and 25 years old.

In another article by Meyer (20 October:1999) the incidence of youth offending is portrayed by looking at the young prison population in South Africa, there are over 25 000 youths in South African prisons. This is an increase of about 6 000 youths since 1996. Meyer warns that when looking at youth crime one must bear in mind; that the total of youth offenders could be higher if the country's conviction rate was not considered. For example: only two out of every thirteen murders end in conviction, one out of eleven rapists are imprisoned and only one out of fifty eight car hijackers are incapacitated. *"The past two years have seen a discernable increase in the number of youths in South Africa involved in both violent and organised crime"* in (The Star,12 September:2002). An article from the Sunday Times (Sukhraj,10 April: 2005) depicts an incidence of youth crime: A young male was brutally stabbed to death by two young offenders aged 17 and 19 years respectively, their friend (also a youth) assisted them in abducting the victim and his girlfriend but was not involved in the murder. All three offenders raped the female victim. Conceivably the most chilling aspect of this story is the comment made by the male victim's father (after

attending court proceedings) with regards to the three offenders “*We were confronted by boys who are still like children*”. This brings the researcher to the next point of discussion - the age of youth offenders.

Longitudinal studies of child delinquents cited in Howell (2003:55) indicate that a considerable relationship exists between early onset and later crime and delinquency. Schönreich (1999:3) alleges that in the majority of countries it is the teenagers and adolescents that are more likely to be involved in criminal behaviour than older adults and children. The problem with partaking in criminal offending at a young age is that youth offenders do not accept the norms of society and therefore are unable to form positive attachments with conventional others and the community (Howell 2003:55). What concerns the researcher is the probability that youth offenders in South Africa may persist with their delinquency into adulthood. Moffit (in Howell 2003:55) describes the life-course-persistent-offender and his/her continuation with crime into adulthood “...*the main cause of life-course-persistent-offending is the interaction of ‘neuropsychological’ deficits with adverse environmental conditions early in childhood. That is, in life-course-persistent-offenders, anatomical structures and physiological processes within the central nervous system (neurological) produce differences in cognitive abilities (psychological) that are manifested in subtle cognitive deficits, difficult temperament, or hyperactivity*”. Moffit continues that these children typically also suffer inadequate parenting, disruptive family bonds and poverty. These children do not have a solid foundation with which to start life and their differences from others are exacerbated by their day-to-day interactions with their social environment, at home and school. Their evolution into adulthood is accompanied by the traits that got them into trouble as a child i.e. high activity level, irritability, poor self-control, and low cognitive ability. Perhaps the aforesaid factors that have been highlighted by Moffit may be found to be relevant to the youth offenders in this research project.

Warby (17 July:2000) delineates youth offending in South Africa “*Three boys aged between eight and 13 are arrested for the rape of a 3-year-old girl. Four girls, aged between 14 and 15, allegedly assault and kill a man who takes them to a shebeen. A 19-year-old boy faces murder charges after allegedly killing his parents and brother while they slept. Another teenager is arrested for shooting dead his parents and their domestic worker. A 19-year-old girl is facing trial for a string of robberies with aggravating circumstances*”. The same article provides comments made by criminologist Dr Irma Labuschagne “*It’s becoming very scary. The people committing hate crimes and violent crimes are getting*

*younger and younger*". Authors (in Bartollas 2000:53) claim that a strong predictor for a chronic offender was offending at an early age. In this regard, Farrington (in Bartollas 2000:53) claimed that offenders who were convicted at the earliest age (ten to twelve) offended time and again, at a higher rate and for a longer period than offenders who were first convicted at later ages. The following excerpt from the ISS Crime Index (1999:1) explains that notwithstanding the fact that crime declines as the offender matures, the actuality remains that crime hits the highest point in the teenage years "*There is a direct relationship between age and crime. Some believe that age is so fundamental to crime rates that its relationship to offending is called the 'age-crime curve'. This curve peaks in the late teen years, highlighting the tendency for crime to be committed during the offender's younger years and to decline as age advances*". Schönteich (in The Star, 2000) as stating that "*While links between crime levels and age had been shown around the world, South Africa faced a more serious challenge given the high proportion of young people in the population. Almost 45% of the country's population was younger than 19*". This statement alone sends a clear message that the youth of South Africa need to be nurtured into becoming well-balanced, law-abiding adult citizens. Evidence cited in Siegel & Senna (2000:58) suggests that the age of onset of a criminal is of great consequence on the duration of such behaviour, individuals who are inclined towards anti-social behaviour at an early age are more likely to commit crime for longer and are more likely to develop into career criminals.

Since the beginning of 2001 to the end of April 2001, 352 children younger than 18 years old (in Pretoria alone) had been arrested for serious offences varying from murder to theft (Oelofse, 11 June:2001). This brings the researcher to the second point of discussion in this section: the fact that so many youth offenders are committing serious, violent crimes in this country. The same article alleges that the children in Tshwane are increasingly becoming involved in serious and violent crime.

The Star newspaper (19 July:2000) provides an idea of the rate of serious offences committed by youths "*The number of young people convicted of murder was also almost double that of older offenders with 42 out of every 100 000 men between 18 and 20 convicted of murder. For robbery the discrepancy was even greater. About 109 out of every 100 000 youths were convicted of robbery*". In this regard Meyer (20 October:1999) claims that "*Increasing numbers of young people are being convicted for serious and violent crimes, with almost 10 000*

*youngsters serving jail terms for murder, attempted murder and vehicle hijacking. A further 3 100 have been imprisoned for committing serious sexual offences".* The rising rate of serious crimes by youth offenders was confirmed by the Chief Deputy Commissioner (in Merten, 19 September: 2002) from the Department of Correctional Services (DCS). The commissioner claimed that there was a definite increase in the amount of children involved in violent and organised crime from the year 2000.

It has been established that youth offenders are committing serious crimes. The researcher wants to draw the reader's attention at this point to the incidence of violent crimes within the prison as well. In this regard, Venter (14 March:2005) relates how two youth offenders in the Baviaanspoort prison attacked two prison nurses and subsequently raped them, this attack left the nurses seriously injured. If youths are able to commit such heinous acts within a correctional facility, what then, are the possibilities for violent actions by youth offenders in larger society?

Mkhwanazi (5 November:2004) tells of three young men (24, 18 and 19 years old respectively) who killed an elderly couple. The male victim was found with multiple stab wounds and the female victim had been strangled, stabbed and burnt with hot water. The article by Mkhwanazi commences by stating that the three perpetrators were laughing and joking after being convicted. This article portrays the violence of the crime as well as the lack of seriousness of the perpetrators' perceptions of their crimes. This indicates that the problem of youth offending should look at the feelings (or lack thereof) that accompany the commission of such aggressive crimes. When a crime is committed, one is somewhat appeased at the thought that criminals are somewhat remorseful and have gained insight into their actions. An excerpt from *The Daily News* written by Meyer (20 October:1999) provides another scenario where a vicious crime is committed by youths "*Five youngsters were also arrested for the rape and murder of a Bluff mother, Miss Chantelle Pienaar (20), who bled to death after being raped and stabbed and left between railway lines near Fynnland in September. The youngest suspect is 15 years old*".

To conclude, the researcher was sent current statistics from the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) that portrays the amount of juveniles that are imprisoned ([www.communications@dcs.gov.za](http://www.communications@dcs.gov.za)). The statistics are broken down into two parts: the first part deals with the amount of sentenced and un-sentenced juveniles in prison as well as

the crimes for which they are incarcerated, the second part deals with the amount of juveniles imprisoned per region in South Africa:

**Table 1.1 Prisoners statistics on juveniles regarding type of crime committed and province where incarcerated**

Prisoner Statistics – Juveniles: Conditions= (Average For Periods: 2005/02, Measures: In Custody)

SENTENCE GROUPS	CRIME CATEGORIES					Total
	Economical	Aggressive	Sexual	Narcotics	Other	
Unsented	3657	5891	1722	115	394	11779
Sented	5434	6523	1362	252	708	14279
	<b>9091</b>	<b>12414</b>	<b>3084</b>	<b>367</b>	<b>1102</b>	<b>26058</b>

Prisoner Statistics – Juveniles: Conditions= (Average For Periods: 2005/02, Measures: In Custody)

RSA	GENDERS		
	Female	Male	Total
Eastern Cape region	62	4093	4155
Gauteng region	64	5789	5853
Kwazulu/Natal region	93	5470	5563
Limpopo, Mpumulanga & Northwest region	49	3081	3130
Northern Cape & Free State region	42	2825	2867
Western Cape region	87	4403	4490
			<b>26058</b>

After perusing these statistics there can be no doubt as to the severity of the crime problem amongst the youth in South Africa today. The reader will notice that the highest crimes for which youth offenders are convicted are aggressive in nature, hence the researcher's need to conduct this research. It is also interesting to see that the Gauteng region has the highest total of juveniles in prison. The researcher wants



to draw attention to this as this research is executed within the Gauteng region. It is with all the aforementioned information in mind that the researcher concludes this section, emphasising that the number of youths committing crimes is on the increase and that the nature of the crimes reflect brutality and viciousness.

### **1.3 Aim of the research**

The aim of this research is broken down into primary and secondary objectives:

The primary objective is to determine the significant factors that proved conducive to the commission of crime by youth offenders. In this regard, the researcher will conduct this study using a multi-faceted approach i.e. individual, social and environmental factors will be addressed in personal interviews with youth offenders as a means of covering all the areas in a youth's life which may or may not prove conducive to the commission of crime. Individual factors will refer to: age, intelligence and academic performance. Social factors will include: the family setting, socialisation and discipline to mention a few, environmental factors will focus on the structure of the neighbourhood (particularly the incidence of substance abuse and gang activity), the school and the influence of peers. The researcher is adopting a comprehensive approach in order to cover all areas of the youth's life and thus find prevalence of specific factors that played a role in the commission of crime.

The secondary objectives are:

- Consult current literature sources with regards to factors contributing to youth offending as well as theoretical explanations pertaining to youth offending.
- Conduct an empirical study by means of in-depth interviews with incarcerated youth offenders to ascertain factors which contributed to their criminal behaviour.
- Establish whether the findings of the empirical study correspond with other research findings as indicated in literature on youth offending.

- Explain the criminal behaviour of the youth offenders involved in this study.

It is through the secondary objectives that the researcher will be able to identify and explain the significant factors contributing to youth crime in South Africa, hence realising the primary objective.

## 1.4 Definition of key concepts

This study will make use of certain terms or concepts that will need to be defined for the reader, these are concepts that will be used regularly throughout the subsequent chapters and therefore need to be made clear.

### 1.4.1 Juvenile/Youth/Child

Bezuidenhout (2003:7) states that the concept of child and youth is difficult to define as there are different definitions for both. This causes confusion when trying to define these terms. Bezuidenhout (2003:7) claims that the concept “child” and “youth” do not remain fixed but rather change and reflect current times and beliefs. For the purposes of this study the terms child, youth and juvenile will be used interchangeably.

According to the Correctional Services Act (Act no 8 of 1959), a juvenile is a person under the age of 21 years. There is no provision for the term juvenile in the Correctional Services Act 111 of 1998, but only a definition of the child as a person under the age of 18 years. The DCS Draft Youth Policy defines youth as persons of 18-25 years (communications@dcs.gov.za). This definition correlates with that of the South African Constitution (1996), section 28(3) (Bezuidenhout 2003:7).

Due to the confusion of the concept child, youth and juvenile the researcher has included an explanation by Muncie (1999:3) for the term “youth”:

The problem years of a teenager are habitually defined by the terms “youth” or “adolescence”, a phase that extends from an innocent childhood to the social maturity of adulthood. However, the exact limitations of “youth” and “adolescence” remains vague. No one seems

certain about when childhood is left behind or when adulthood can be achieved. Furthermore, there is no neutral English noun that can identify a period of “*youth*” with the same conviction and impersonality as “*child*” or “*adult*”. While “*child*” and “*adult*” are largely neutral terms connoting what is generally viewed as a normative period in life, “*youth*” and “*adolescence*” usually conjure up a number of emotive and troubling images. Images that range from notions of uncontrolled freedom, irresponsibility, vulgarity, rebellion and dangerousness – as such “*youth*” is largely defined in terms of what it is lacking.

Phil Cohen (in Muncie 1999:41) identifies four major assumptions that lie behind most political, policy and professional reactions to the “*youth question*”:

- Youth is a unitary category with certain psychological characteristics and social needs common to the age group.
- Youth is an especially formative stage of development where attitudes and values become anchored to ideologies and remain fixed in this mould in later life.
- The transition from childhood dependence to adult autonomy normally involves a rebellious phase which is itself part of a cultural tradition transmitted from one generation to the next.
- Young people in industrial societies experience difficulty in making successful transitions and require professional help, advice and support to do so.

For the purpose of this specific study, a juvenile or youth is between the ages of 13-23 years.

#### 1.4.2 Juvenile delinquency and youth offending

Criminologists frequently use the concepts of crime and delinquency interchangeably, particularly when their focus of study is young individuals. For this reason Muncie (in the Sage Dictionary of Criminology 2001:84) defines delinquency as a term loosely used to refer to any kind of youthful misbehaviour. Muncie does point out however, that there are crucial differences between crime and delinquency. A legal definition of crime refers to behaviour forbidden by

criminal law. At the same time delinquency is also applied to all kinds of behaviours that are deemed undesirable. Therefore, delinquency also includes waywardness, misbehaviour, the *'anti-social'* and what is believed to constitute the *'pre-criminal'*.

Siegel et al (2003:9) define juvenile delinquency as *"Participation in illegal behaviour by a minor who falls under a statutory age limit"*.

The operational definition of juvenile delinquency for this study refers to behaviour that grossly transgresses society's behavioural and social norms for example truancy, bullying and graffiti, whereas youth offending per se, constitutes any behaviour that is illegal and thus punishable by law. For the purpose of this study, youth offending refers to youths that have committed a crime, have been found guilty of such crime, have been sentenced in a court of law and who are incarcerated.

### 1.4.3 Risk factors

The term *risk factors* or *at risk* will be widely used in this study. Emphasis will always be placed on factors that place the juvenile at risk of problem behaviour or that are seen as being conducive to the commission of crime. McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter and McWhirter (1998:7) use the term *at risk* to *"denote a set of presumed cause-and-effect dynamics that place the adolescent or child in danger of negative future events"*. This definition has been used as it allows for the possibility that when certain factors are present in an individual's life the likely (although not definite) effect might be behaviour that is delinquent.

Martin (2005:141) defines risk factors as *"....indicators of the pathways children and adolescents take to serious, violent and chronic juvenile delinquency... Risk factors predict increased risk for developing a problem or disorder"*.

The following table lists risk factors and indicate their impact on youth behaviour. This table not only illustrates the different type of risk factors but also provides the reader with an idea as to what encompasses the term *risk factor*.

**Table 1.2 Risk factors associated with youth offending**

<b>Risk Factors</b>	<b>Adolescent Problem Behaviours</b>				
	Substance Abuse	Delinquency	Teenage Pregnancy	School Dropout	Violence
Availability of drugs	X				
Availability of firearms		X			X
Community laws and norms favourable toward drug use, firearms and crime	X	X			X
Media portrayals of violence					X
Transitions and mobility	X	X		X	
Low neighbourhood attachment and community organisation	X	X			X
Extreme economic deprivation	X	X	X	X	X
Family history of the problem behaviour	X	X	X	X	
Family management problems	X	X	X	X	X
Family conflict	X	X	X	X	X
Favourable parental attitudes and involvement in the problem behaviour	X	X			X
Early and persistent antisocial behaviour	X	X	X	X	X
Academic failure beginning in elementary school	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of commitment to school	X	X	X	X	
Rebelliousness	X	X		X	
Friends who engage in the problem behaviour	X	X	X	X	X
Favourable attitudes towards the problem behaviour	X	X	X	X	
Early initiation of the problem behaviour	X	X	X	X	X
Constitutional factors	X	X			X

**Source: Bartollas (2000:357)**

In a report by the Independent Projects Trust (1999:1) examples are supplied of what constitutes risk factors and how they affect criminal behaviour *“The key risk factors identified within the literature, and with no particular ranking, are being poor, race, age, location i.e. where you live, sex and gender, having being victimised, coming from a dysfunctional family, doing poorly at school and abusing a substance. These risk factors do not themselves cause criminality but rather, over time, influence the likelihood of turning to crime and violence”* (www.ipt.co.za).

#### 1.4.4 Gangs

In 1975 Walter Miller (in Curry & Decker 2003:18) conducted a study with youngsters involved in a gang. The following definition was based on Miller’s interviews with various adolescents:

*“A gang is a group of recurrently associating individuals with identifiable leadership and internal organization, identifying with or claiming control over territory in the community, and engaging either individually or collectively in violent and other forms of illegal behaviour”*

A definition that is favoured by the researcher includes all aspects of a gang, as compiled by Jankowski in (Branch 1999:XVIII).

*“A gang is an organised social system that is both quasi-private (not fully open to the public) and quasi-secretive (much of the information concerning its business remains confined within the group) and whose size and goals have necessitated that social interaction be governed by a leadership structure that has definite roles; where the authority associated with these roles has been legitimised to the extent that social codes are operational to regulate the behaviour of both leadership and the rank and file; that plans and provides not only for the social and economic services of its members, but also for its own maintenance as an organization; that pursue[s] such goals irrespective of whether such action is legal or not....”* .

The researcher underlines this particular definition as it includes the services it provides its members (social and economic) and the fact that members will carry out certain activities in order to achieve their goals irrespective of whether those activities are against the law or not.

Another definition that aptly characterises a gang is supplied by authors (in Howell 2003:77) according to which the criteria traditionally used to decide whether or not a given group is a gang include the following:

- The group must have a name.
- It must have a leader or several leaders.
- Its members must hang out together.
- Its members must display or wear common colours or other Insignia.
- It must claim a turf or territory.
- Its members must commit crimes together.

According to Howell (2003:77) one must remember that defining a youth gang is always difficult as gangs change over time, particularly adolescent gangs. The cohesiveness of the gang changes as the members grow older and move from place to place. For the purpose of this study the researcher feels that the definition in Maree (2003:66) is the most apt:

*“A gang can be seen as a group of young people who form an allegiance for a common purpose”*. Kinnes (2000:7 [www.iss.org.za](http://www.iss.org.za)) in his report on gang warfare in the Western Cape explains that one cannot take any definition of a gang as an adequate definition, rather Kinnes points out one must look at the established definitions of gangs and derive the following facts that:

- Gang members may range in age from youngsters to adults between 20 and 40 years of age.
- The nature and activities of gangs are mainly determined by their social context.
- Membership of gangs may include persons both inside and outside of jails.
- Gang membership may be anything from street level operators to sophisticated syndicate bosses.

- They may belong to the category regarded by the government and its agencies as being at risk of becoming involved in criminal activities, or may make a choice to become involved with full cognisance of the associated risks.
- Gangs may be involved in criminal activities for the sake of survival, or may be high-level, structured organisations.

The definitions supplied aptly describe a gang and its characteristics.

#### 1.4.5 Substance abuse

Bartollas (2003:326) purports that substance abuse (specific reference is made to adolescent substance abuse) is “...*when the abuser becomes dysfunctional...*” He elaborates by stating that the adolescent is considered to abuse substances when he/she is unable to attend or perform in school, is incapable of maintaining social and family relationships and exhibits dangerous and aggressive behaviour.

The definition of substance abuse by Glick (1995:344) corresponds in essence with the definition provided by Bartollas:

Substance abuse is “.... *the excessive or compulsive use of a drug to the degree that it is harmful to the user’s health or social functioning, or to the extent that it can result in harmful consequences to others*”.

#### 1.4.6 Criminal event

Baker (1999:251) emphasises that qualitative research must be based on a theoretical framework. The researcher needs to have an integrated set of ideas about how to operate within the social environment to be studied and how to interpret the subsequent collected data. The criminal event provides the framework wherein the researcher will address the criminal setting. This framework allows the researcher to look at various aspects of the offenders’ lives and not focus solely on one issue. The structure of the criminal event is such that it includes all factors of the perpetrator’s life from the day of birth. The reader must note that a criminal event is different to a criminal act. Criminal acts are occurrences in behaviour; whereas an event involves the social



environment or the milieu wherein the behaviour takes place (Meier, Kennedy and Sacco 2001:3).

The criminal event is described as “.... *the precursors, including the area and situational factors that bring people together in time and space, the event itself, the interaction between the participants and how this influences the event, the aftermath of the event, including reporting it to the police and their response, the harm caused to the victim, correctional steps taken, as well as the long-term consequences of the event in respect of public reaction to the event and the amendment of laws*” in (Sacco and Kennedy 1994:137).

The major components of the criminal event are the (a) precursors to the crime, (b) the transaction (the actual criminal act) and (c) the aftermath of the crime.

**(a) Precursors** - Sacco and Kennedy (2002:11) argue that it is important to realise that criminal events arise due to predisposing circumstances. Analysing the precursors to a crime allows the criminologist to see that, depending on circumstances, behaviour that advances into criminal activities in one situation may not have the same consequences in other situations. Sacco and Kennedy (2002:12) do warn however, that understanding predisposing factors does not mean that one can predict criminal behaviour with more precision. The precursors involve the build up to the commission of crime.

**(b) The transaction** – When examining the criminal act as such, one considers the circumstances, incidence and frequency of certain types of crimes, Sacco and Kennedy (2002:14) explain further “*We are particularly interested in viewing the criminal event not in isolation but rather in relation to social events as well as to other criminal events*”. These authors further stipulate that interaction can be affected by the site of the criminal act, whether drugs or alcohol were used and the availability of weapons. The transaction therefore refers to the location and time of offence.

**(c) Aftermath** – Sacco and Kennedy (2002:16) claim that in order to understand the setting of the crime one must be able to have access to various information with regards to the offender’s behaviour. The aftermath of the crime also takes into account the reaction of the police and the victims. It is also important to establish whether the offender believes that he or she can repeat the crime with impunity

(Sacco & Kennedy 2002:16). Essentially, the aftermath looks at social responses to criminal behaviour.

Risk factors is a term that has been defined for the reader as the researcher will look at such factors that place a youth in danger of committing a crime. Taking this into consideration, the criminal event is fitting in its approach towards the commission of crime. Kennedy and Van Brunschot (2001:29) clarify "*The events perspective emphasizes behavioural repertoires (routines) in the consideration of crime risk. How do individuals behave that make them more or less likely to be involved in crime? What is their routine exposure to structural hazards? Which social contexts do individuals frequent increasing the likelihood that they will be exposed to crime?*". The routine within the criminal event perspective emphasises the interaction between the risks related to individual behaviours and way of life as well as the dangers posed by the environments wherein the individuals socialise. The possibility for crime exists where there is interface between structural conditions and repertoires (Kennedy & Van Brunschot 2001:31).

## **1.5 Methodological overview**

This section will provide the reader with a synopsis of what the methodology entails for this research project.

### **1.5.1 Research design**

In any research design, a researcher confronts two major tasks. Firstly, the researcher must stipulate as clearly as possible what it is the researcher wants to find out; secondly, the researcher must also ascertain the best way to do it (Babbie 2001:91).

#### **1.5.1.1 Research approach**

In order to gain first-hand knowledge of the reasons why youths commit crimes, a qualitative approach is imperative. Qualitative research answers the question "*What is going on here?*" (Bouma 2000:171). As mentioned earlier, this study wants to establish which significant factors play a key role in a youth committing a crime, this suggests then that the research approach needs to be in-depth and detailed in order to extract information about the youth's life. Essentially this study will deal

with and examine every aspect of the juvenile's life in order to safely determine important contributory factors. Qualitative research "... is designed to provide an impression; to tell what kinds or types of 'something' there are; to tell what it is like to be, do or think something" (Bouma 2000:171). Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (1992:272) explain that when conducting qualitative research, one wants to understand behaviour by getting to know the individual involved in the research study. This involves learning the individual's values, rituals, beliefs and emotions. Corbetta (2003:40) supports this by claiming that the qualitative researcher tries to get as deep inside the subject as possible, this is done in order to see the subject's social reality "*through the eyes of the subject studied*". The researcher asked the offenders to provide a written summary of their lives, this enhances the value of this study and underlies the qualitative approach.

#### **1.5.1.2 Research goals**

Neuman (2000:22) asserts that when using descriptive research one tends to present a depiction of the specific details pertaining to a situation, social setting or relationship. Explanatory research is used when a researcher wants to determine the motivation behind behaviour, to explain certain behaviour. Neuman (2000:22) provides a list of components that constitute descriptive and explanatory research:

##### **Descriptive research**

- Provides a detailed highly accurate picture.
- Locates new data that contradicts past data.
- Creates a set of categories or classify types.
- Clarifies a sequence of steps or stages.
- Documents a causal process or mechanism.
- Reports on the background or context of a situation.

##### **Explanatory research**

- Tests a theory's predictions or principle.
- Elaborates and enriches a theory's explanation.
- Extends a theory to new issues or topics.
- Supports or refute an explanation or prediction.
- Links issues or topics with a general principle.
- Determines which of several explanations is best.

Descriptive studies answer questions of what, where, when and how, explanatory questions, of why (Babbie 2001:93). For the purpose of this study, the descriptive and explanatory research goal will be utilised as a means of providing a description of the offenders' family, school and community environment and to explain the offenders' advancement into the world of crime.

### **1.5.1.3 Unit of analysis**

The individual male offender will be studied, in particular young coloured male offenders ranging from 16 - 23 years. These offenders are incarcerated and have been sentenced by a court of law. The coloured offender was chosen, as the researcher is able to communicate in Afrikaans fluently. This enables the researcher to understand the offender when he is talking and vice versa. The researcher is able to derive a complete understanding "*verstehen*" of the coloured offender's life due to easy discourse. Sociologist, Max Weber cited in Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias (1992:14) explains the concept "*verstehen*" as when the researcher puts himself/herself into "the place of the subject of inquiry" which is vital in order to understand the behaviour of the individuals studied. In this regard, Baker (1999:241) corroborates with Weber and states that "*verstehen*" means to establish meaning from the point of view of the subjects in a social environment. This is the aim of qualitative research: to reveal the dynamics, meaning and mechanisms behind human behaviour.

### **1.5.1.4 Time dimension**

The pilot and the main study were conducted from 2001 to 2003. The data analysis and interpretation were completed in 2004-2005. Each offender was interviewed for approximately one and a half hours.

## **1.5.2 Data collection**

### **1.5.2.1 Research method**

The case study will be used as a means to gather data. The case study is a descriptive record of an individual's social reality and behaviour (Stangor 2004:129). Huysamen (1994:168) says about a case study "*... case studies are directed at the understanding of the uniqueness and the idiosyncrasy of a particular case in all its complexity*". Stangor

(2004:129) states that case studies have been used more regularly on individuals who have experienced stressful situations, who have had unusual experiences or who have atypical characteristics. This type of research method enables the researcher to study the offenders exhaustively and derive an understanding as to their choices made in life.

### **1.5.2.2 Literature review**

Before attempting any form of data collection (a semi-structured interview with an interview guide will be used; see section 1.5.2.3) it is important to consult literature as a means of preparation for the data collection (Champion 2000:80). In this regard, Fouché and Delport (2002:127) assert that a literature review assists in gaining a clearer understanding of the type and meaning of the research problem identified. Fouché and Delport (2002:128) explain why a literature review is necessary:

- Literature is an excellent source for selecting or focusing on a topic, as one reduces the chances of selecting an irrelevant or outdated topic or focus by investigating what has already been done in a particular problem area. This is corroborated by Champion (2000:81) who asserts that a researcher must be sure that the research problem is current and relevant.
- At the same time, the researcher ensures that nobody else has already performed what is essentially the same research.
- Marshall and Rossman (in Fouché & Delport 2002:128) state that if research has already been conducted on the same topic the researcher has the opportunity to identify deficiencies and thus contend that the proposed study will meet a proven need.
- A thorough scrutiny of literature will stimulate the identification of “*evergreens*” and “*thought leaders*” in the field of study. This will enable a researcher to demonstrate knowledge of the most recent and authoritative theories, accepted definitions and key concepts in her field of study.
- In reading about a specific topic; the researcher may shape the research question/hypothesis through the identification of

alternative conceptions of the problems or variables that had not previously occurred to him.

- According to Neuman (In Fouché & Delpont 2002:129), a good literature review places a research project in context – it shows the path of prior research and how the current project is linked to the former.

### **1.5.2.3 The semi-structured interview and interview guide**

An in depth semi-structured interview will be utilised. In this type of interview the researcher refers to an interview guide (this will be dealt with shortly) of the topics to discuss during the interview (Corbetta 2003:270). The semi-structured interview allows the researcher to direct the conversation as needed, to ask the necessary questions in order to explicate the information given by the research subjects (Corbetta 2004:270). In other words, the semi-structured interview gives the interviewer free reign to deviate from the topic, ask the subject for clarification on information and prompt the subject for more detail.

Literature was consulted with regards to the research topic as a means of compiling an interview guide (section 1.5.2.2). The interview guide entails a set of questions that steer the researcher in the interview. The interviewer is able to expand on the questions in the interview; this means that although the questions are the same for each respondent; the researcher can modify the terminology used to suit the offender's background or educational level (Huysamen 1994:145). The questions in the interview guide were arranged according to themes. The researcher determines which themes are pertinent to the study (based on the literature search conducted) and information is thus collected according to the chosen themes. These themes include for example: the family and school. This study is conducted within the criminal event framework, therefore the compilation of the interview guide was based on the main points of the criminal event; namely: the precursors to a crime, the criminal act/transaction and the aftermath of the crime. A copy of the interview guide is available in appendix A.

The semi-structured interview and interview guide have qualitative qualities as they permit the interviewer to investigate the life course of the offenders extensively.

#### **1.5.2.4 Observation**

In every form of qualitative research, nearly all qualitative researchers use observation as one of their central gathering methods. Scwandt (in Baker 1999:246) defines observation in qualitative research as “*direct firsthand eye-witness accounts of every day social action*” which answers the question, What’s going on? Observation attends to the goals of descriptive research, it deals with research questions in terms of an individual’s beliefs, behaviours and attitudes in a social environment. This is an important tool for this research project. The researcher needs to observe the offender for any verbal or non-verbal behaviour; this involves the offender’s body language and tone of voice. Observation is a means for the researcher to establish the demeanour of the offender i.e. hostile or relaxed.

#### **1.5.2.5 Non-probability sampling**

The researcher is utilising the non-probability sampling technique. The Department of Correctional Services (DCS) restricted the researcher in terms of choosing the research subjects randomly, however, participants in this research project did conform to the researcher’s requirements.

Non-probability sampling, indicates that not every subject had an equal chance of being included in the sample (Uys & Puttergill 2003:13). The researcher is using purposive sampling in particular. Purposive or judgemental sampling is chosen on the grounds that there is existing knowledge of the population (Uys & Puttergill 2003:13). In this regard, Hagan (2000:142) claims that a purposive sample involves selecting an appropriate sample that is based on a researcher’s skill, judgement and needs. This means that the offenders were chosen due to their shared characteristics and the requirements of the researcher i.e. coloured, incarcerated youth offenders between the ages of 13 and 23.

#### **1.5.2.6 The pilot study**

A pilot study was conducted prior to the main study. The details and purpose hereof will be discussed in chapter five. A pilot study involves trying out questionnaires or interviews on a small group of subjects in order to estimate a reaction before commencing with the main study (Stangor 2004:95). The pilot study proved indispensable for the

researcher: it allowed for the researcher to execute the main study effectively.

#### **1.5.2.7 The main study**

The main study was executed on completion of the pilot study. The researcher carried out the main study after having looked over any changes that needed to be done based on the information obtained from the pilot study. This was done to improve the quality of the main study as well as the validity of the research project.

#### **1.5.3 Data processing**

Data was arranged according to the themes of the interview guide and within the criminal event framework, in terms of the precursors to the crime, the transaction (the crime itself) and the aftermath of the crime. The researcher looks at how the information correlates with literature findings and which factors showed predominance in the offenders' lives.

Suitable theories were introduced as a further means of explaining the offenders' behaviour. The theories are particularly useful as a means of explaining the significant factors found in the data and in demonstrating the link/relation between the factors presented in the theories and those yielded by the study.

### **1.6 Problems encountered with the research**

The researcher encountered various problems concerning the study; these obstacles or problems will be highlighted.

- The researcher struggled to find statistics concerning the nature and incidence of youth crime in South Africa. The South African Police Service was contacted; specifically the Crime Management Information Centre where the researcher was informed by General de Kock that the police would no longer be releasing statistics on youth crime in South Africa; in fact General de Kock informed the researcher that there were no statistics whatsoever available concerning crime by the youth in South



Africa. The researcher did manage to find statistics from the Department of Correctional Services with regards to youth offenders in prison. Other statistics that the researcher found deal with child abuse and the incidence of drug use by the youth in South Africa.

- Due to the nature of the study, the researcher was confronted with a lot of information (specifically for the literature reviews). This proved to be a challenge for the researcher as certain information had to be extracted and structured in order to present proper, comprehensive and clear literature reviews.
- Despite the plethora of literature on the family and its influence on youth offending, the researcher did struggle to find information that was not dated.

## **1.7 Layout of chapters**

The study has been divided into three sections: A: Introduction and literature review, B: Empirical study and C: Conclusion and recommendations. A breakdown of the chapters follows.

### **Section A: Introduction and Literature Review**

#### **Chapter One**

This chapter provides the blueprint for the study. The rationale for this research project as well as its objectives are supplied. Various definitions are given for terms or concepts that will be used throughout or frequently in this study. A detailed overview of the study in terms of the steps in the research process is laid out with the intention of providing the reader with a clear indication of how the study was executed. Problems encountered with the research have been included as well.

#### **Chapter Two**

Chapter two comprises a literature review. In this chapter risk factors relating to the family are highlighted and discussed.

## **Chapter Three**

This chapter comprises a literature review as well. It looks at various factors within an individual's environment that may play a role in the commission of crime.

### **Section B: Empirical study**

## **Chapter Four**

The various steps taken in this research project are highlighted in this chapter and discussed in detail.

## **Chapter Five**

Chapter five provides a concise description of the execution of the pilot study.

## **Chapter Six**

This chapter looks at the main study. The information is presented according to the themes included in the interview guide.

### **Section C: Interpretation of data and conclusion**

## **Chapter Seven**

Chapter seven focuses on the interpretation and explanation of data. The information is arranged according to the themes of the interview guide and within the criminal event framework. Theories are utilised as a means of explaining the behaviour of the offenders.

## **Chapter Eight**

Chapter eight addresses the objectives of this research project and its effectiveness in achieving the primary and secondary objectives for this study. Recommendations are supplied for further study as well.