

# Exploring the Impact of Anti-Social Behaviour, Drug-Related Crime and County Lines on Local Communities: A Qualitative Inquiry

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*This qualitative research project explores the impact of Drug-Related Crime, Anti-Social Behaviour, and County Lines on local communities. The study aimed to elicit perceptions, views and insight of this impact from local community members. Data for the inquiry was collected by conducting semi-structured qualitative interviews with key informants chosen from local communities. The findings show that Anti-Social Behaviour has had a significant impact on the local communities chosen for the inquiry. In contrast the findings were indicative that the impact of Drug -Related Crime to be much less significant. Although open drug dealing had been a cause for concern reports of acquisitive crime normally associated with “problematic drug use” (Gordon et al., 2007) were extremely low. Evidence in the findings suggest that the overall impact of County Lines within the communities has led to certain amount of resentment and even hostility from local gangs. Included in the conclusion are suggestions for future exploration and research based on the findings of this inquiry.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The purpose of this qualitative research was to explore the impact of Drug-Related Crime (DRC), Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and County Lines (CL) within a community context. This inquiry sought to present qualitative research based on the opinions, perspectives and lived experience of local key informants aware of the impact of DRC, ASB and CL on local communities in a small city in Wales UK. The study took place between June 2019 and June 2020.

### Rationale

In the last two years there has been increasing reports of open drug use, open drug dealing, discarded needles and anti-social behaviour in and around Freetown (name anonymised). ASB involving drug use has been responsible for a number of ASB Closure Orders of various properties in the city, with Dispersal Orders implemented in the city centre.

As the number of these incidents have escalated they have created increasing public concern. One local police chief inspector suggested that local towns and cities were suffering the “impact” of DRC, ASB, CL gangs, increasing amounts of drug related violence and knife crime. CL are defined as out of town organised drug gangs, using teenage runners linked to city dealers to sell Class A drugs to local users (Coomber and Moyles, 2017; Robinson, McClean and Densley, 2018). CL gangs have also been responsible for taking over properties belonging to vulnerable people to sell drugs from. This process known as cuckooing has also attracted the attention of the police who have carried a number of raids on properties in Freetown.

## **Aims and Objectives**

The primary aim of this study was to explore the impact of DRC, ASB and CL on local communities. In order to achieve this aim certain objectives were undertaken which included:

- Assessing any increase or decrease of DRC, ASB and CC
- Exploring possible reason for any increase in DRC, ASB and CLs
- Gaining insights, opinions and perceptions of key informants
- Exploring the responses and reactions of local authorities and the police

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Drug- Related Crime**

Seddon (2008) argues that much of the drug-crime policy in the UK has been primarily concerned with the problematic drug user and acquisitive crime, with the UK government declaring that the central aim of their 2002 drugs strategy would be reducing DRC (Bean, 2008; Bennet and Holloway, 2005; 2010). This would include what is known as volume or acquisitive crime, involving theft from shops and cars, burglary, robbery, small time fraud and assaults (Stevens, 2007). DRC is costing the UK an estimated £6 billion a year with this mainly attributed to acquisitive crimes such as burglary, robbery and shoplifting (Home Office, 2017). Gordon et al. (2007) link this type of crime with the “problematic drug user” dependant on “high harm drugs” predominantly heroin and crack cocaine.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw a rapid expansion in illegal drugs in the UK (Bennet and Holloway, 2005). Indicators showed a substantial increase in heroin use (Mott, 1991). A new market of high quality heroin from South East Asia could also be smoked thus removing the stigma attached to injection attracted many new users (Mc Sweeny et al., 2010). Smoking heroin or “chasing the dragon” as it became known had become a notable reason for the expansion of new heroin users in the UK (Auld et al., 1986; Pearson et al., 1985; Seddon, 2005). To coincide with this new heroin epidemic crack cocaine from the US had also hit the UK drug scene becoming a major concern for the police and healthcare professionals (McSweeney et al., 2010). Socio-economic models had also began to emerge as drugs were commodities which were bought and sold with the price affecting consumption, who uses the drugs and how (Reuters and Kleiman, 1986).

Heroin use in the North West of England provided strong evidence that, ‘economic factors rather than ideology or the attraction of addict subculture played a large part in their development and created a stronger link with acquisitive crime’ (Bean, 2008, p.16). Research findings by Parker and Newcombe (1987:1988) show an increasing number of heroin users, resulting in a greater number of acquisitive crimes committed to fund habits. The problem was experienced in areas of high unemployment, housing decay and other social deprivation where thieving and scoring provided an occupation to the otherwise workless day (Pearson, 1991; Parker, 1988).

### *Drugs Cause Crime*

The drugs cause crime model is known by some as the “economic necessity” (Bean, 2008; Parker and Newcombe, 1987). Seddon (2002) argues that the pharmacological properties of illegal drugs create the need to commit crime in order to finance their habit. Causality conceived by one set of circumstances causes another (Seddon, 2002). The strongest evidence of this comes from research literature from Parker and Newcombe (1987) and Parker et al. (1988), in which they identified two groups, one with criminal records whose involvement in crime increased with drug use and another in which drug use led to involvement in property crime.

### *Crime Causes Drug Use*

There has been much published literature on the idea that for many drug -users crime came before drug use (Auld et al., 1986; Burr, 1987; Mott and Taylor, 1974; Parker and Newcombe, 1987). Auld et al. (1986) suggest that mass employment and low benefits may force young people to become involved in petty

criminality in order to make a living and thus become involved with heroin sales and use. In which case crime leads to heroin use. Burr (1987) commented on the fact that existing criminal networks allowed young people to be able to afford long term heroin use financed through other criminal activity, with thieving already seen to acceptable, heroin use became an extension of deviant behaviour.

#### *Drugs and Crime Link Related to Other Factors*

Edmunds et al. (1998) argue that drug use and crime careers run parallel with acquisitive crime providing cash for drug habits and that the drug habit locks them into acquisitive crime. Edmunds adds that drug and crime careers could be the result of broader expressions of delinquent behaviour brought on by other social factors. In relation to violence Goldstein (1985) detailed this in his tri -partite framework: (1) *economic compulsive*- users engage in violent behaviour in order to maintain habit, [Goldstein adds that most heroin users avoid violent acquisitive crime]. (2) *psychopharmacological violence* - some individuals, as a result of short or long -term ingestion of certain substances maybe become excitable, irrational and may exhibit violent behaviour. (3) *systematic violence*- aggressive patterns of interaction within the system of drug distribution and use.

#### *Drug Dealing*

Drug dealing in open air markets can not only affect local resident's quality of life but also contribute to social disorder and other DRC (Hough and Harocopos, 2008). Defining open markets as open to any buyers the advantages are that the buyers know where to go, and its easy access for seller, although there is also a greater risk of possible police involvement. Systematic violence can also be used to settle disputes, with the buyer and seller also prime targets for robbery (May and Hough, 2009).

#### **Anti- Social Behaviour (ASB)**

Although a clear definition of ASB in the UK is seen to be lacking (Hough, 2005; Jacobson et al., 2005; Mc Kenzie et al., 2010; Millie et al., 2004) literature suggests that ASB can be understood to be minor criminal activity and non-criminal nuisance that affects social and/or physical environments of public and semi- public spaces (Jacobson et al., 2005). In relation to drug-related ASB policy literature from the 2004 Home Office Research Directorate outlines a typology of the Misuse of Public Places which includes open drug use, discarding of needles and other- drug litter, drug dealing, the use of crack houses and aggressive begging

#### *Public Drug Use*

Public drug use and related activities such as drug dealing and disposal of other drug related litter in public places are associated with real community concerns. The public injecting environment has received particular attention as an environment of risk, with the extent of public injecting largely unknown (Rhodes et al., 2007). Public injecting is a situational necessity for homeless users (Rhodes et al., 2007). The need to inject quickly in public spaces to avoid public attention also increases the unsafe disposal of injection equipment (Rhodes et al., 2007). There is a trade-off between wanting to inject immediately after acquiring drugs because of the drugs because of the fear of arrest, robbery, feelings of shame and the lack of private space (Tweed et al., 2018).

#### *Drug Related Litter (DRL)*

Discarded drug related litter (DRL) in the community and shared social spaces are source for concern in numerous international studies (Hunt et al., 2007; Marshall et al., 2010; Mc Knight, 2007; Parker and Coomber, 2010; Small et al., 2007; Taylor et al., 2006). Since 2001 there has been an escalation in the amount of DRL, intensifying public health concerns and reducing community safety (Parker and Coomber, 2010).

### *Crack Houses and Shooting Galleries*

Much early explorative literature on crack houses has come from the US (Bourgeois, 1995; Geter, 1994; Inciaridi, 1995; Webster et al., 2003) with UK literature focusing on enforcement (Burgess, 2003; Peters and Walker, 2005; Webster et al., 2003). The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (UK) stating that crack houses are any premises or any type of structure where drugs are used, supplied or made. Although crack houses are seen as a relatively new phenomena places where heroin was bought and sold were known as shooting galleries. Parker and Coomber (2009) argue that the term shooting gallery has been accepted within academia to describe rooms or an abandoned building where groups of drug users meet to inject. However, the term shooting gallery seems outdated and instead the term Informal Sorter Houses (ISH) should be used (Parker and Coomber, 2009). The sorter is the unit of currency for entering the house – a provision of drugs.

Since 2014 (due to amendment of 2003 ASB Act) local councils, the police and private landlords have been able to apply for ASB Closure Orders for premises which are seen to be associated with any illegal activity, disorder or if a criminal offence has or is about to take place in or around that property.

### *Youths and ASB*

Millie (2008a) suggests that the phrase anti-social behaviour over the last two decades has gained prominence as a matter of public order enforcement. Focusing on urban spaces, Millie (2008a, p.3) states, 'what's regarded as ASB is determined on social and cultural aesthetic acceptability.' The New Labour government took a rigorous approach to ASB, the PM declared:

The scourge of anti-social behaviour affects us all and in our biggest cities, on suburban estates and rural villages... People too frightened to go into the city centre at night.  
(Tony Blair, 2004).

The prime concern of the government in town and city centres had now become gangs of youths hanging out. New legislation in order to tackle ASB had also been introduced (Millie, 2008b). In 1999 the New Labour introduced Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), which may be used against anyone over the age of ten who has acted in an anti-social manner, with the intention to prevent further escalation of ASB (Campbell, 2002). The 2004 ASB Act introduces a new dispersal order giving police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) the power to disperse any groups they believed might be harassing, intimidating, alarming or distressing any members of public (Millie, 2008b). This Millie argues could lead to other groups, such as the homeless or sex workers, also becoming targets for marginalisation.

Recently local authorities in the UK have sought to regulate the use of public spaces with the implementation of Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) as part of the ASB Crime and Policing Act (2014). A PSPO can prohibit certain activities taking place in certain areas (Brown, 2017), with those who do not comply face a possible fine of up to £1000 (Heap and Dickinson, 2018).

### **County Lines (CL)**

Developments in local UK drug markets are sparking an 'evolution of approaches to trafficking, supply and sales of heroin and cocaine' (Coomber and Moyles, 2018). This phenomenon known as County Lines is the latest term to describe contemporary drug practices of criminal gangs (Robinson, McClean and Densley, 2019). Until recently UK drug research referred to indigenous street level distribution with local dealers born and bred in the area (May et al., 2005). County Lines drug dealers travel from city hubs to provincial towns to not just to deliver their product but to retail as well (Coomber and Moyles, 2018, 2012; Robinson, Densley and McClean, 2019). Mobile phone lines link users with the dealers, usually through a third party who in turn supervises his team, the 'County Line' is set up to take orders (Robinson, McClean and Densley, 2018) As the out of town dealers (OTD) take over local drug markets and create new customers they begin "harnessing" vulnerable populations in order to take up street level dealing. These populations can include dependant users, single females, single parents or even individuals with learning difficulties which are then recruited as commuters or runners (Coomber and Moyles, 2018, 2012; Moyles,

2019; Robinson, McClean and Densley, 2019) The next move of the OTD is to establish themselves some local accommodation. This process is called “cuckooing,” where the OTD takes over a local flat or house and sets up a base for dealing. Drug users are paid in drugs for the use of their flat with female connections made in order to “pay the rent” (Coomber and Moyles, 2019). Cuckooing is a form of criminal exploitation recently emerged and taken a foothold in the UK (Spicer, Moyles and Coomber, 2019; Stone, 2018). Criminally exploited youths receive tangible rewards for working County Lines. Cannabis is used as a hook to keep the large pool of runners interested, with gang membership providing a sense of familiarity (Moyles, 2019; Robinson et al., 2019). County lines represents an important development in the UK drug supply landscape, with Andell and Pitts (2018) suggesting that city gangs have joined forces in order to run county lines gangs. They add that in the past small- town dealers operating within a more limited network had been easy for local police to control. By removing the small-town dealers, a void had been left leaving opportunity for County Lines gangs to take over.

## **Conclusion**

Recent UK research concerning drug-related crime has been primarily government funded quantitative research focused on the “user” and their demands on related available services and agencies. Therefore, research focused on the impact and experience of DRC on local communities and the wider familial groups has been relatively minimal. Since the end of the New Labour government (2011) research on anti-social behaviour has been said to lack “rigor” (Kemp, 2016). Recent research concerning the relatively new “County Lines” phenomena has concentrated predominantly on the organisational side of the County Lines gangs, child exploitation and links to gang culture.

The majority of the literature regarding drug-related crime in recent years seems focused on Government policy circa 2007. This does in-fact leave some gaps between 2007/8 and present -day research literature. This gap could provide reason for more up to date research on the subject of drug-related crime. However, there is an emerging source of literature surrounding CL drug gangs, cuckooing, the use of weapons and drugs and using vulnerable people for illegal activities. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) have also called for relevant gaps in drug related research to be filled (ACMD, 2016). In this context then, this inquiry seeks to contribute to filling this gap by specially investigating the experiences of the local communities within this broader perspective.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research was exploratory and qualitative in design, adopting an inductive approach towards data analysis. The primary purpose of the inductive approach was to allow research findings to emerge from dominant or significant themes in raw data and to condense text data into a brief summary establishing links between research objectives and summary findings.

### **Data Collection**

Qualitative in -depth interviews became the primary method for data collection (Mason, 2002; Charmaz, 2006). Semi-structured interviews and the inclusion of open-ended questions which may extend beyond the interview schedule allowed participants the freedom to express their views on their own terms and enabled them to speak freely using their own concepts and terminology (Cohen and Crabtree, 2006). The interviews were recorded on an 8Gb digital recorder, with field notes also taken.

The sample was chosen from the local communities based within the eight council wards that constitute Freetown. For the purpose of this inquiry these wards are to be known as Areas. The sampling method chosen for this study had been the non-problematic purposive sampling the participants were chosen from key informants involved in various local communities including local ward councillors, local shopkeepers, street musicians and members of the night-time economy. In total eight participants were chosen, this included seven males and one female male. The ages of the chosen participants ranged from early thirties to late fifties. All names of participants have been anonymised.

## Data Analysis

This study used Thematic Analysis (TA) as the approach to data analysis. TA is a highly flexible approach which can be modified for the use in many studies and used across a range of epistemological questions (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun and Clarke, 2006:).

## FINDINGS

### Theme One: The Impact of ASB on Communities in Freetown

Within the context of this study the label ASB became an umbrella term encapsulating a number of facets. Employing sub-themes within the narrative provided a framework in which a more detailed and comprehensive analysis could be achieved. The opening response from nearly all the participants from all areas of Freetown demonstrates that there had been an overall increase in the amount of ASB in the last two years. When asked about the impact this has had on the communities in Freetown Area 52 ward councillor Mr White answered:

ASB has had an impact on other people's lives in the area. It's those who live in them blocks who are really affected. Well you don't want to come home with blood all over the walls do you, but people aren't scared to deal with it

When asked if Area 51 had been affected by the impact of ASB participant Ms Pink a local retailer in Area 51 replied:

Of, course it has, these are hard times, the other day I spoke to a guy who has a garden centre who took only three pounds all day last Friday. Taxi drivers are saying that people don't go into Freetown after five o'clock in the evening.

When asked if ASB is putting people off coming to Area 51, another local retailer Mr Blue replied, 'the whole town is saying that. Yes defiantly, it's all gone down- hill. I've also heard of aggressive beggars being forceful asking for money... people just don't want to come to town.' Music promoter Mr Purple, when asked if ASB has had an impact in Freetown replied:

Oh, yea too right, people have actually been worried about going into town at night-time. I moved here about ten years ago from the home counties, where you expected certain areas to be hostile, I moved to Freetown because I thought it was laid back, but recently its bin like the inner city has arrived.

Freetown Street vendor Mr Brown said, 'people over 40 don't like coming to town... the locals get blame but it ain't them.'

### *Subtheme One: Open Drug Use*

Participant Mr White gives an account of open drug use in Area 52:

It's when it starts coming into the open you start upsetting people, when you get people shitting and pissing in stairways and communal areas and jacking up in hallways which has been the main problem... hmm... we've had instances outside school when people jacking up, not the sort of thing you want your kids to see, it should be behind closed doors.

Local ward councillor Mr Orange describes a similar scenario in an Area 54 green space:

There's been a regular number of druggies up at [green space] on and off for the last couple of years openly taking all sorts and drinking on top, they have been openly injecting up at [green space]... well it's not the same as smoking pot is it.

This open drug use has also been witnessed in broad daylight in Area 51, with Ms Pink making this comment, 'the girl was topless with a needle in her arm. A lot of pictures on [social media] of them having an overdose when carnival was on.'

#### *Subtheme Two: Discarded Needles*

With open drug use comes the problem of discarded needles, with many of the participants in all areas of Freetown reporting the problem. Ward councillor in Area 53 Mr Red recalls his experience with discarded needles:

I found some outside the school once – I called the needle van, but it had to come from [local town], there's only two in [county name]. It's disgusting that someone has been leaving needles in [local park].

Mr Orange also has a similar experience:

I found a whole box of needles up there a few months ago which wasn't very good although they were in a box and not scattered all over the place. The needles I handed to police who I think passed them on the needle van?

#### *Subtheme Three: Closure Orders*

There have been local media reports of property closure orders due to DRC and ASB in Freetown these reports have also been echoed by Mr White in Area 52:

We've had four flats with temporary closures in one block and two flats with permanent closures in another block and two others in the same block with temp closures well if you got one flat in a block it's a problem but if you got two or three rife flats in a block well... You see it's like a balloon you squeeze one bit and it just fucking pops out again.

These Closure Orders have also taken place in other parts of Freetown. Mr Red in Area 54 describes how, 'some houses have been boarded up near the [community centre]... someone has written CRACKHEADS on one of them.' Mr White suggests, 'that he increasing problem is the influx of new people from the outside.' Local street performer Mr Green added, 'It's a council thing, they keep dumping all sorts in [regional area], people with habits, paedophiles, others with non-drug related activities, ex-users, ex-dealers and ex-prisoners.'

#### *Subtheme Four: Gangs of Youths*

Window smashing had been a major concern for local retailers in Freetown recently. Ms Pink gave this account of her own windows, 'well basically in May my windows got kicked in and I replaced them with boards, but they got ripped off.' Throughout the summer gangs of youths congregated around the local bus stops in Area 51. Ms Pink commented on behaviour around the bus stops, 'I catch the 6.30 bus and the kids are on the roof of the bus shelter for some people that can be intimidating.'

### **Theme Two: The Impact of DRC on Communities in Freetown**

Overall the impact of DRC in relation to the definitions set out within the literature review received a mixed response from the participants of the inquiry. Establishing whether or not there had been an overall increase in DRC remained unclear, although certain issues such as drug dealing had become a matter of concern within the communities of Freetown. When asked if there had been any increase in 'acquisitive'

crime in any area of Freetown answers received from the participants ranged from no increase, to large increase over short period of time.

#### *Subtheme One: Open Drug Dealing*

When asked if open drug dealing had any impact in Area 51 Mr Blue described how, ‘the other day there was a lad drug dealing in the open at the bus station with people filming him, asking if they had his best side, not bothered at all.’ In reply to the same question Ms Pink replied, ‘you hear people talking about drug dealing and drug dealers on push bikes.’

From the observation of open drug dealing Mr purple in Area 53 described his encounter with drug dealers:

I ‘ve bin stopped a few times now and asked if I want to buy weed in Area 53 and 54. A few weeks ago two lads tried to mug me right outside my house, there’s been a problem in the bus stop across the road for a while... I reckon they must be dealing cos there is always someone coming or going.

Mr Red added that, ‘it can be quite frightening in town at 9-10 o’clock with people hassling you [to buy drugs].’ Participants also remarked on the night- time economy (NTE) becoming increasingly violent as cocaine has become the recreational drug of choice, as Mr Purple explained, ‘young people can’t afford cocaine on a regular basis and that must contribute to the level of aggression especially with the dealers.’

#### *Subtheme Two: Acquisitive Crime*

There was a mixed response across all areas concerning the impact of acquisitive crime in Freetown. Participant Mr White when asked about any increase in DRC answered, ‘I wouldn’t say there has been an increase in burglaries and break-ins as such... with burglaries only between other drug dealers.’ In contrast participant Mr Orange in Area 54 said, ‘there has been an increase in crime in general, and most of it drug related.’ Mr Orange gave an account of how much of a problem house breaking had become in Area 54:

My own house has been burgled three times in the last 2 years with a number of other houses around both [green space] and [green space] having reported break-ins as well over the same time span. the last time we got burgled was when we were on holiday yes they had some computer stuff mainly,

When asked if there had been a rise in acquisitive crime in Area 53 Mr Red replied, ‘car doors around the [public house] had been messed with... Area 57 is bad for break-ins and smashed windscreens and I’ve also heard of someone stealing needles out of the public needle bin in the bus station toilets.’ Asking if there had been much shoplifting in Area 51 Mr Blue answered, ‘umm occasionally, but not in this shop, I used to get some, there still could be some I don’t see it.’ Ms Pink suggested that, ‘some shops in town had adopted a policy of not prosecuting shoplifters.’ When asked whether there had been any increase in acquisitive crime in Area 51 Mr Brown replied, ‘no, not really, not by smackheads anyway, up [local street] there has always been a lot of robbing but it’s down to one bloke apparently.’

### **Theme Three: The Impact of County Lines**

All the participants in all areas made reference of the term ‘County Lines’ (CL) with the majority of participants aware that the police had been ‘cracking down’ and arrests had been made. When asked what effect CL had in Area 52 Mr White replied, ‘we have had Merseyside dealers sending runners down in gangs for the last 18 months... they are just like businessmen using young kids, there is a resentment towards CL from [local] users who say let’s get rid of the Scousers.’ Mr White also points out that, ‘the ‘Scousers’ aren’t welcome in Area 52, they are better off in town where there is no community.’



Expanding on the gang/runner element of CL Mr Green described how, ‘they [the police] busted all the local dealers, leaving a vacuum open for the CL kid gangs, and now there are gangs from all over the UK.’ Mr Green further remarked:

Runners are everywhere, some 14-15 years old, the public don’t see them, in tents holding 20-50 balls [heroin] and 60-100 stones[crack cocaine], getting busted and robbed. It’s the governments fault, no money for the young, with the local young lads trying to big up themselves when the County Lines boys are about.

#### *Subtheme One: Cuckooing and Vulnerable People*

Mr White reported, ‘an increase of new people, who befriended vulnerable people, and once befriended used them to sell drugs... there was one man who has mental health problems who depending on what mood he is in lets them use his flat...he doesn’t even know what’s happening.’

When asked if he was aware of cuckooing Mr Red said, ‘I’ve heard of it, but I don’t know of any in Area 53. I don’t know who was in that flat that got closed down, but I think the boards have gone so someone else could have moved in.’ Most of the other participants seemed unaware of the practice of cuckooing with the exception of Mr Blue in Area 51 who commented, ‘there’s been some raids, some flats up [street in Area 51] got busted cos of dealers or cuckoo’s they call them don’t they?’

#### *Subtheme Two: Busted, Battered and Robbed*

Inquiring into the effect recent CL arrests might have had in Freetown, Mr Green gave this account, ‘no, stop for a day or two, I don’t know how it works but the amount of money they must have lost through people being robbed then busted.’ To gain some insight into the extent of the CL involvement Mr Green had been asked if he knew how many firms were operating in the Freetown area, to which he replied:

about five at the moment, yeah, all Liverpool, all of the regular places being used [secluded spaces for dealing]. One lad this week had 550 balls and £3000 in cash gone, but still out doing dark and white, owing 3 grand, yea they still got him working 16 year old, something like that...usually there one lad on his own up there [secluded public footpath]. A guy got stabbed up there I think, another guy he had got like, battered then robbed, jumped all over his back and that...

Some of the participants commented on further police actions, Ms Pink said, ‘there had been a number of CL arrests in town recently.’

#### **Theme Four: Reactions and Responses of Police and Local Authorities**

In response to the amount of ASB in areas of Freetown the Police and the local Council implemented the ASB property closure orders on the flats in Area 52 and other properties in Freetown. When asked if the Closure Order intervention had worked in Area 52 Mr White answered:

They work immediately for those particular players. It certainly gives a break for those affected. Once the three months were up though they had a party to celebrate although it hasn’t gone back to previous, just waiting for next situation

A number of the participants had attended meetings with the Police, including Mr Red who after a community meeting in Area 53 said, ‘the Police at the meeting claimed that much of their input now goes into CL’s and were unable to police the streets.’ The same thing had been said at a similar meeting Mr Orange had attended, although when asked if he thought the recent CLs interventions were working Mr Orange replied:

yes they had a crackdown on so called CL drug dealers who were dealing at the [local green space] and also in [local green space] using the woods for hiding places ... and had also they managed to catch who they thought was responsible for nearly all of the house break-ins and car robberies in the Freetown are for the last 2-3 years.

In Area 51 Ms Pink said she had recently witnessed, 'the Police issuing an ASBO to a group of youths who had been throwing stones at people by the bus stops and running rings around a PCSO.' Mr Red had been informed that a new PSPO would shortly be introduced in Area's 51 and 53.

Installing CCTV as an intervention in Area 52 has had a positive effect according to Mr White, who pointed out that, 'wardens visit new tenants and have cameras on all blocks. Cameras change people's ways, the wardens are now all over Freetown, aware of all players.' However, in the more retail Area 51 Mr Blue pointed out, 'CCTV? I don't think they work, do they? well they don't up this end anyway.'

### **Theme Five: Community Voices**

This last theme allowed the participants to give their views, ideas and opinions concerning strategies and possible interventions that could be used when dealing with ASB and DRC.

#### *Subtheme One: The Police, Government and Local Council*

Throughout the inquiry there had been very little animosity or ill feeling directed toward the police. However, a primary concern for the majority of the participant's had been the lack of police on the street, therefore the general consensus implied that more 'real' police was needed in all areas. When asked about suitable deterrents Mr Blue's immediately answered, 'more police on the beat, real ones not these Micky Mouse PCSO ones.' Mr brown remarked, 'there had been a lack of police [in town], apart from undercovers and you can spot them a mile off.'

'The powers that be are blinkered,' declared Ms Pink, adding that, 'the government need to install confidence in people...no one is taking leadership. This going to change as others have now noticed, and the Council have fixed all the CCTV cameras [in Area 51].

#### *Subtheme Two: Alternative Interventions*

A concerned Mr Red pointed out that, 'in town [Area 51] there were a lot of what the Police had called "transient" people just hanging out.' Mr Red mentioned that, 'the [local community hub] used to help out a lot of vulnerable people but had recently closed.' When asked if a drop-in centre would be a good idea Mr Red replied, 'oh yes defiantly, people need somewhere to go, they can't just hang out by the [local public house].'

Mr Purple describing a recent visit to Europe said, 'I saw several of these "drug rooms" (drug consumption rooms; DCRs) where drug users went to take drugs away from the public, maybe the UK Government should start to consider something like it as well.'

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Anti-Social Behaviour**

The general consensus from the study would be that ASB has had a significant impact on communities in Freetown, primarily public injecting, which aligns with previous research, (Kimber and Cusick, 2007; Rhodes et al., 2006, 2007; Taylor et al., 2007). One significant difference the findings in this study show is that public injection is more within the public eye, rather than the 'situational need to inject quickly to avoid the public attention, arrest, robbery and feelings of shame' (Rhodes et al., 2007; Tweed et al., 2007).

Several participants of Freetown made reference to discarded syringes and other drug related litter (DRL) again this aligns with past studies, especially with the escalation of DRL in public spaces. ASB Closure Orders of properties in various Areas of Freetown corresponds with recent literature (Bhokal, 2019; Shelter, 2020) and the 2014 ASB Act (2003 amended) criteria involving the implementation of ASB Closure Orders.

Some of the inquiry participants interviewed indicated that members of Freetown communities felt uneasy about going into town due to ASB and intimidation from gangs of youths in the town centre and a number of ASBOs and the later Dispersal Order have been issued to youths within Freetown. A new Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) had also been implemented in Freetown which would prohibit certain activities within public spaces. These new PSPO's aimed to regulate the use of public space and deal with any nuisance that is detrimental to the quality of life to any member of the community (PNLD, 2020). However, research carried out by Heap and Dickinson (2018|:1) argue that, 'PSPOs could create greater exclusion of individuals, intolerance and criminalisation of marginal groups.'

### **Drug- Related Crime**

The findings have shown that the drug related crime in Freetown to have had no significant impact in comparison to ASB. Open [public] drug dealing to be the greatest concern of the majority of the participants interviewed. Open street dealing had been reported by several of the participants. There has been a great deal of previous research and literature focusing on acquisitive crime and how drugs cause crime. The findings of this study show that acquisitive crime has had very little impact on the communities of Freetown. There had been no reports of any shoplifting in Area 51. One participant in Area 54 who reported a concentration of house break-ins over a short time period adjacent to an area used by drug users and dealers.

### **County Lines**

CL has received increasing attention from various UK media sources and government agencies. The findings of the present inquiry show that CL gangs have had some impact in most areas of Freetown. Recent research in relation to CL identifies a reasonable working definition for the CL phenomena, which aligns with the findings of the present studies). Findings from previous research suggest that systematic violence is used within the hierarchal structure of the CL gangs in order to maintain control. Findings in the present study differ from this and show that although there is evidence of a hierarchal management like structure within CL the biggest risk and threat of violence comes from local gangs who have been robbing or beating up runners from CL gangs (which also differs from local police and media reports presented within the rationale in Chapter One).

The findings show that the impact of CL on the communities in Freetown has led to a sense of resentment by local communities, although they were seen to keep themselves to themselves and the findings of the present study indicate that all the CL open air drug dealing took place took place in secluded places away from the public. Evidence of cuckooing occurring in Freetown aligns with previous research with reported instances of cuckooing being dealt with fairly rapidly by the Police Anti -CL team.

### **Reactions and Responses from the Police and Local Authorities**

In relation to ASBOs, Dispersal Orders, PSCOs and ASB Closure Orders findings from the present study align with previous studies concerning the implementation of the orders (Bhogal, 2019; Campbell, 2002; Millie, 2008; Parker and Coomber, 2009; Young, 2015). Differing from previous research the findings of the present study indicate that austerity cuts within the police force have made it difficult to implement the above interventions this was not only apparent to the Police but also to a number of participants.

## **CONCLUSION**

This inquiry explores the impact of ASB, DRC and CL on the communities of Freetown. In order to achieve this exploration a number of objectives were undertaken as set out in Chapter One. The findings show that the level of ASB in general has increased and had a significant impact on the communities of Freetown. A majority of the participants have put this increase in levels of ASB down to the influx of outsiders within the communities which has also become a housing problem. Participants reported that intimidation felt by some members of the community restricted daily activities such as shopping in the town centre or using public green spaces. Although open drug dealing had become a cause for concern the level

of DRC and primarily acquisitive crime had a relatively small impact on the majority of the communities. This differs from previous drug- crime research. The findings show that drug related violence is on the increase especially within the night-time economy and violent attacks directed at CL gangs from local gangs. Although aware of the activities of CL the impact of CL on the communities of Freetown would seem to be generally low with some local communities showing enough initial resentment toward CL to prevent gangs to fully establish in those areas.

In regard to interventions from the Police and Local Authorities evidence shows that ASB Closure Orders seem to be affective on a temporary level. ASBOs and Dispersal Orders issued to youths in Area 51 seemed to have very little effect. Many of the participants suggested that more police should be seen on the streets however these participants were also aware of the strain on the police because of austerity cuts with much of the available manpower being used to stop CL gangs establishing themselves in the Freetown area, however this research does show that austerity cuts in one sector, i.e., the Police, can affect the wider community. CCTV has also shown to be a useful deterrent when used in various locations.

Suggestions for future research include a) mixed method survey and qualitative interview research exploring the effects of ASB closure orders on local communities. b) Qualitative research, evaluating the effects of ASBOs and dispersal orders on local youth groups, exploring how these orders affect the socio-spatial experience and the possible alienation from public spaces of what Bavington (2007) describes as non-consumptive socio-spatial subcultures. c) Mixed method longitudinal case study evaluating the effectiveness of PSPOs. With an emphasis on the possible negative impact on marginalised groups who could be affected by PSPOs.

This inquiry presents a qualitative lived account of the impact of Anti-Social Behaviour, Drug -Related Crime and County Lines on local communities from a community lens which contributes to “filling the gap” in research. The exploratory nature of the research design also provides some foundation for future studies.

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