Portfolio Volume 1: Major Research Project

The Life of a Top Boy: A qualitative exploration of young, Black men and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of gang affiliation and trauma

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ABSTRACT

Rationale and Aims: There is speculation that young Black men (YBM) exposed to gang-affiliated violence are likely to have negative impacts on their psychological functioning, but not enough research has explored this. It is important that we hear from YBM themselves as experts in their lived experiences. The current research aimed to listen to YBM in London, examining trauma relating to gang-affiliated violence and how YBM make sense of their experiences.

Methods: This qualitative study utilised an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how eight YBM between the ages of 19-32 storied their lived experiences of gang-affiliated violence and trauma.

Findings: Three Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and eight subthemes were identified from the data. Together, the themes described the complex interlink of human experience marked by trauma, socially deprived environments, systemic abuses, discrimination, healing, and coping. Participants attempted to make sense of their longstanding traumas and the subsequent responses. These traumatising experiences elicited fear among other emotions. The persistent nature of violence in their communities created a sense of normalisation, and behaviours were adopted to navigate these threats. These threats were not only from peers but from the police also. Attempts were then made to cope with the ongoing threats of violence.

Discussion: Findings of this study were discussed in relation to the wider literature. This research produced new knowledge about how YBM exposed to gang-affiliated violence make sense of their experiences, and the trauma responses they portray which challenge traditional perceptions of trauma and PTSD. This research has the potential to influence developments in statutory services, as well as raising awareness and inspiring action. Clinical implications for working with this population were also considered.

Keywords: Trauma, Young Black Men, Violence, Gang affiliation, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

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First and foremost, I dedicate this thesis to Us Lot. Those from Endz. Those from The Culture. The mandem who continue to navigate spaces never designed for them. Big up yourselves! You've never been hard to reach, just easy to ignore. The world chooses to ignore you, but I will not!

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Boa Me Na Me Mmoa Wo (Adinkra symbol of Ghanaian heritage). This translates as **"Help me and let me help you."** This symbol represents cooperation and interdependence. It suggests that together we achieve more!

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

YBM- Young Black Men

APR- Annual Percentage Rate

IPA- Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

PET- Personal Experiential Theme

GET- Group Experiential Theme

CR- Critical Realism

DSM- Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

PTSD- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

BLM- Black Lives Matter

MPS- Metropolitan Police Service

CJS- Criminal Justice System

BAME- Black, Asian and Minority Ethnics

PRU- Pupil Referral Unit

JE- Joint Enterprise

PT- Perpetrator Trauma

CASP- Critical Appraisal Skills Programme

APA- American Psychological Association

PAR- Participatory Action Research

GT- Grounded Theory

NA- Narrative Analysis

DA- Discourse Analysis

TA- Thematic Analysis

UK- United Kingdom

USA- United States of America

SUK- Stick Up Kids

TZ- Terror Zone

RTM podcast- Realer Than Most

EMDR- Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing

NFA- No Further Action

NHS- National Health Service

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND LONDON IDIOMS

Mandem- an association to a group of friends/gang/family.

The culture- the community; our people.

Endz- your zone, your streets, your area that you live in.

Big up- an expression of support or encouragement; to give respect or to acknowledge someone.

Shoutout- a public expression of thanks or gratitude.

Ride out- going to a rival area to do harm.

Civilian- someone who is not aware of the roads, is not streetwise.

Caught slipping- to be caught off guard in a very bad way.

About that life- means to live a certain kind of way.

Tapped- not all there in the head.

Touch the area- to arrive; to display one's presence.

Bust- to incur severe physical damage; to violently hit someone.

Yute- meaning young adult or a child; term used to address someone.

Wet you- to harm someone in a severe way making their clothes all wet from blood.

Split- to cut.

24s- 24/7; every single hour of every single day.

Shanked- to be stabbed.

Shank- any crude, sharp weapon.

Hit the streets- appear on the streets, hanging out.

On point- on top of things, in control of the situation; cautious.

Caught up- dragged into a situation through no fault of their own.

Hood area- a lower income crime riddled area, an undesirable area.

Check you- questioning/interrogating someone.

Crud- violence, aggression.

Rush- getting beaten up by a group of individuals.

Hungry- to want lots of money and wealth.

Well fed- to have lots of money and wealth.

Feds- the police.

Gripsin- to grab some one or hold on to someone who doesn't want you to.

Opp- short for opposition; anyone against you.

Violated- when someone steps over the line, does or says something disrespectful; to take full advantage.

Roughed up- the object being described has been subject to physical violence.

Buss joke- to create laughter and to talk about something in a humorous way.

Bredrin(s)- a very good friend of yours; a close group of friends who you treat as family.

Crackhead- a habitual user of cocaine in the form of crack, who relies on it to sustain daily life.

Dead- something that is extremely bad or boring.

Firm it- to take something that is hard to bear.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

> "*I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering and humiliation. We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented*." (Wiesel, 1986)

I feel extremely fortunate and privileged to be authoring this thesis when my life could have been hugely different. I use my life experiences to shine a light on the marginalised voices that go unheard. My intersecting identities as a Black man, a trainee clinical psychologist and a doctoral researcher provide a sense of responsibility whereby it is my moral and ethical duty to use these identities to create reform and societal shifts in the narratives surrounding Black men. This requires me to challenge the inaccessibility of service provision and care for Black men. My anger, passion, and hopes have fueled this thesis. My core values around advocating for an equitable society have been engrained throughout this project. I pay homage to all the activists, rebels and troublemakers who built the foundation for this research to be a form of resistance and an instrument for storying untold, unheard, and unacknowledged narratives (hooks, 1989).

1.1 Chapter Overview

This research sits in the field of gang mental health. There is emerging knowledge detailing the prevalence and impact of mental health issues among Black men exposed to gang-affiliation. However, this knowledge is still sparse, with little attention being paid from the research community. I have made it my concern to explore the stories of young Black men (YBM) who experience gang-affiliated violence and the subsequent trauma this creates.

In this chapter, I begin by positioning myself and delve into my relationship with this research. I will highlight how this research is aligned with a critical realist epistemological framework. The terminology used will be explained. Following this, an overview of the background literature will be summarised to provide context to the research. I suggest

examining the sociopolitical environment of Black men and those who are gang-affiliated will be vital in understanding the psychological needs of this population.

1.2 Position of The Researcher

1.2.1 Reflexivity.

Is it ever possible to be located 'outside' of research? Charmaz (2014) would suggest no. She contends researchers cannot stand 'outside' or be separate to research. Reflexivity allows researchers to become aware and take ownership of how their beliefs, values, and experiences impact different research processes (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As an active contributor within this research, I see myself as a knowledge co-constructor. Openness is encouraged amongst qualitative researchers (Kapiszewski & Karcher, 2021), and because of this it is important to remain transparent about my position and influences within the current research. Therefore, I have chosen to modify the writing style typically used within academia. I will be writing in the first person to show a recognition of my involvement in co-constructing this research, as well as in the third person for my colleagues within the clinical world, policymakers, academics, and those who are more familiar with traditional academic writing. Writing in the first person is not the norm within academic writing, as it is assumed the self needs to be eradicated to conform to positivist objectivity (Hyland & Jiang, 2017). The very essence of this research stipulates a neutral, objective stance is not possible, especially when we consider the critical realist position of this research.

1.2.2 My relationship to the research project.

I am Black. I was born in South London in the 90s. My teenage years were at a time when South London boroughs had some of the highest rates of gang-affiliated violence and murder (Pitts, 2020). During my teenage years I saw myself as being gang affiliated. I also had friends and family who self-identified this way. My hometown Wandsworth was the bridge between two very prominent local gangs; SUK who resided in Battersea and Clapham Junction, and TZ operating from Tooting and Mitcham. These rival gangs had to pass

through Wandsworth if they were trying to 'ride out.' One bus separated these gangs. Young people living in areas heavily affected by gangs are likely to know those who are gang-affiliated, grew up with them in the area, schooled with them (Andell & Pitts, 2013). Even if people are not directly affiliated with a gang, they more than likely have interacted with somebody who is, possibly through violence. Gang violence is often directed at others who are also gang affiliated. However, 'civilians' living in violent communities are still at increased risk of being victimised by violence whether intentional or otherwise (Kelly et al., 2012). Gang-related issues affect more than just those directly involved which is why it should be an important concern for society. This highlights a justification for this research.

The culmination of my firsthand experiences directed my interest in exploring this research topic. Reflecting on my clinical experience spanning many years and locations, I have never seen anyone gang-affiliated seek formal support for their mental health. I am often left wondering about my position within a system failing in its provision of care towards these men; men I heavily relate to who are deemed 'hard to reach.' I am hoping for this research to amplify the voices of those easy to ignore, and to be used as a resource for statutory services to rethink how they engage with YBM in general.

1.2.3 Insider perspective.

Insider researchers are those who share similar characteristics or experiences with participants. They are seen as someone who can relate to community experiences and have a particular understanding about processes, identity, or language (Asselin, 2003). This can create a sense of safety, acceptance and increased trust towards the researcher meaning they are able to generate authentic data. However, it also means the researcher needs to be mindful of not making assumptions which could impact on the participant's meaning-making (Atfield et al., 2012). I recognise my bias in this research due to my closeness to the topic and have used bracketing to overcome this. Bracketing involves me acknowledging my biases and perceptions and minimising their impact on the research process. Using a reflective diary helped with this and allowed me to see instances where my lived experiences

could have impacted how I was interpreting the experiences of participants. From the inception of this research, it has been my intention to reframe narratives that exist around Black men and those who are gang-affiliated, whilst also wanting to improve service provision.

1.2.4 Epistemological position

The clarification and rationale behind my epistemological position is vital when thinking about how it impacts the methodology, analysis, and quality assurance (Carter & Little, 2007). Epistemology refers to the study of knowledge. It explores what is knowledge, how knowledge is acquired and produced, and how it is expressed (Greco, 2017). Ontology is the study of being. It addresses reality and what we know about the world (Hussain et al., 2013). I believe there is an external reality separate from an individual's subjectivity, whilst holding in mind that how people make sense of that reality and truth is socially constructed. Language, context and meaning making are vehicles enabling reality and truths to be described (Houston, 2010). This understanding of how I view the world favours a Critical Realist (CR) epistemology.

I was drawn to a CR epistemology as it claims a realist ontology and a constructionist epistemology. A realist ontology believes there is a single reality which can be studied, understood, and experienced as truth. There is a real world existing independently of human interpretation and conceptualisation (Reed, 2009). A constructionist epistemology believes truth and meaning arise from our engagement with reality. Reality is adapted and shaped for people to make meaning of the world and interpret it in a way that makes sense to them (Oliver, 2011). CR encompasses these perspectives as there is an acknowledgement reality is independent of us and yet it concurrently agrees knowledge of this reality is mediated through interpretation and human experience (Vincent & O'Mahoney, 2018).

1.3 Critique of Knowledge Production Processes

Current research paradigms which have become legitimised ways of knowing, are byproducts of an embedded, invisible whiteness (Almeida, 2015). This continues to be heavily influenced by colonialism and coloniality (Scheurich & Young, 2002). Western philosophical assumptions regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology are regarded as the norm, rather than an admission they are socially constructed (Chilisa, 2012). Academia is especially guilty of exclusively focusing on western paradigms and approaches. This means other epistemological ideas from other social histories have been ignored and excluded. Who gets listened to? How are they listened to? Why are they listened to? These are questions heavily influenced by the privileging of certain epistemologies. For me it was important to find more inclusive, more diverse research paradigms. I was inspired by the work I came across from Indigenous approaches which attempt to prioritise the marginalised. Indigenous paradigms involve emancipation from only hearing white, western European voices, emancipation from generations of silence, and the emancipation from viewing the world in one colour (Walker, 2015). This research is an attempt to take a critical and liberatory stance, by centring the silent voices of YBM exposed to gang-affiliated violence and overcome the biases which exist within mainstream research (Albert et al., 2020).

1.4 Access to Research

During this thesis, I struggled to find literature related to gang-affiliation and trauma from the Global South. The Global North and Global South reflect the political characteristics and socioeconomic status of countries around the world (Schmidt, 2020). The Global South consists of countries predominantly in Africa, Latin America, Caribbean, and Asia. The Global North comprises Northern America and Europe, as well as Australia and New Zealand (Demeter, 2020). Unfortunately, academic databases and university libraries continue to prioritise knowledge and research from the Global North at the expense of other knowledges (Collyer, 2018). Between 2010-2019, UK universities spent almost £1 billion on

journal subscriptions. However, more than 90% of those subscriptions were spent with five companies based in the Global North (Elsevier; Wiley; Springer; Taylor & Francis; Sage) (Lawson, 2020). If we are to take 'decolonising' seriously, libraries need to sign up to journals published in the Global South. There needs to be an understanding of what knowledge base is being produced in this region. It would have been nice to provide a more wholesome account of gang-affiliation and trauma by including literature from the Global South. With this issue in mind, it is hoped that academic institutions will provide students with access to alternative forms of knowledge originating from the Global South to enrich learning and research.

1.5 Terminology

Having a shared understanding of key terms and concepts is important. According to CR, language and meaning making are important tools in constructing realities. People have different ideas and definitions when thinking about concepts. Therefore, I encourage you to think about whether you agree with or challenge my interpretations. The terminology provided will help you see the lens and viewpoint I approach this research with.

1.5.1 Black.

The term 'Black' has been used politically and culturally to refer to people of African and Caribbean descent (Agyemang et al., 2005). It is a term both descriptive and political. Descriptive in the sense it is a skin colour categorisation used to describe populations with brown complexions believed to be of African ancestry. Political in that the term is used to express unified opposition to racism. The term was used to steer away from an insidious history to one of racial pride and power (Zamalin, 2019). This is why 'Black' will remain capitalised throughout the thesis. In this study, 'Black' describes people who self-identify as being of African or Caribbean descent.

1.5.2 Gang.

Any research exploring gangs should clarify its operational definition. The term 'gang' is used haphazardly in popular discourse, the media, and the CJS with its use being stigmatising and racist (Williams & Clarke, 2016). I am aware of how emotionally-charged the word can be and understand people will have different perceptions, beliefs, and values around the word especially when we know the ramifications for YBM's lives when this label is attached to them.

The term has been used in this research because it has become increasingly used within policy documents and is a term public policy is more familiar with (Barrows & Huff, 2009). The term has also been used because one hope of this research is to change the narratives for those who tend to put YBM into groupings such as 'gangs'. On reviewing multiple definitions, I am using the definition from Pitts (2008), based on research across three London boroughs. He identified gang as a loose, umbrella term. So, in this context I am referring to street gangs which are a street-based group of individuals of varying ages, often referred to as 'olders' or 'youngers' (Vigil, 2003), who: (1) see themselves and are seen by others as a distinct group; (2) engage in crime and violence; (3) have territory which they believe belongs to them (typically a housing estate, postcode, or town); (4) have some form of identifying feature (typically colours, signs, names); and (5) engage with conflict with other, similar, gangs.

1.5.3 Gang-affiliate(d).

The term gang-affiliate has been used to describe people who participate in gangs. It was used because its coverage is broad, and involvement can look different for people. It relates to people who may have a connection with a gang, are part of a gang, or are associated with gangs (Buckle & Walsh, 2013). There are times when the term 'gang member' has been used when citing authors who use different terminologies. Self-identification was used to determine individuals appropriate for this research.

1.5.4 Violence.

This research is focused on community violence inflicted by another individual or by a group of individuals (Kilpatrick, 2004). I have concentrated on physical violence which is the intentional use of physical force or power against another person. This can be threatened or actual resulting in a high likelihood of injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation (Heath, 2002). This definition emphasises that violence is not only a physical force but also involves threatened or actual power. Such power or force may be used against a group. The outcome of this type of violence is both physical harm and negative psychological effects.

1.5.5 Traumatic event.

The DSM-V (American Psychiatric Association, 2013) notes a traumatic event as exposure to actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violence. By exposure you could be a victim, a witness or exposed via learning about something happening to a family member or friend. The DSM-V does not include exposure as a perpetrator, which I believe should be acknowledged as a perpetrator is still exposed to the event of actual death or serious injury. Kerig et al.'s (2016) would support this notion as they found those who perpetrated violence were at risk of developing a range of posttraumatic reactions.

1.5.6 Trauma.

Trauma is a psychological and emotional response to a distressing situation which overwhelms a person's ability to cope and impacts their sense of self and who they are (Garland, 2018). This response can also harm a person's sense of safety and impact their ability to regulate their emotions and navigate relationships.

1.5.7 Post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

PTSD is a psychiatric diagnosis given when certain criteria within the DSM-V are met, based on the collection of behavioural, cognitive, and emotional responses to traumatic

events. These 'symptoms' are understandable and adaptive responses (Lewis & Marsden, 2021). The event itself does not determine whether something is traumatic but is dependent on the individual's experience of the event. This relates to this research as participants may not view their exposure to a traumatic event as traumatic.

1.6 Overview of Empirical and Theoretical Literature

This section begins by exploring the current and historical discourses and stereotypes that exist around Black men. Theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence regarding gangs in the UK who use violence, societal narratives of this population, and the mental health of those who are gang-affiliated will also be considered. All of this will be discussed whilst acknowledging the sociopolitical context in which Black men and those who are gang-affiliated exist.

1.7 "Autobiography": Discourses and Stereotypes of Black Men in the UK

"If you don't tell your story they gon' tell it for you

Who's on the panel? that's a rebel for you

God said chill, there's something special for you

I know you been through hell, so I got heaven for you"

(Autobiography- Ghetts, 2021)

A stereotype is a set of beliefs an individual or group may have about the characteristics or attributes of a group of people which then transcends to individuals within that group (Jussim et al., 2015). Since slavery, the social construction of the Black man in the western world has become one and the same with narratives of crime, violence, social failure, and anti-authoritarianism (Hinton & Cook, 2021). These stereotypes have become engrained within the fabric of western society's culture and history whereby it has become acceptable to assume that a criminal's social identity is Black even if their race is unknown (Fiske, 2017). The negative stereotypes surrounding Black men are constantly on show from

the media to the wider community. The consequence of this is that Black men are exposed to increased levels of prejudice. Instead of society including them within its remit, they become 'othered', with the intended outcome of Black men feeling dehumanised (Goff et al., 2008).

The police are a great example of an institution which continues to inform negative and unhelpful narratives that exist around Black men and is a powerful institution which continues to turn a blind eye to these social injustices (Shiner et al., 2018). The House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (2021) found that racist prejudice and disadvantage in all aspects of policing was an ongoing issue twenty-two years on from the Macpherson Report (Macpherson et al., 1999). The Casey Review concluded that the internal culture of the police was institutionally racist (Casey, 2023). Unfortunately, the negligent deaths of Black men such as Wayne Douglas, Mark Duggan, or Chris Kaba at the hands of the police was not enough for this review to have taken place. It took the kidnap, rape, and murder of a white woman for an independent review to occur exploring the culture and standards of behaviour from the police. Black Lives Matter (BLM) is a social movement in response to the numerous killings of unarmed Black people. It is a radical and activist intervention based on the premise that Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted. The BLM movement attempted to shine a bright light on the treatment and experiences of Black men. However, the deadly oppression of Black men is not a new phenomenon, it is just one that has been actively ignored. The negative societal portrayals of Black men continue to feed into discourses and policy regimes that disadvantage and shorten their life experiences (Banaji et al., 2021). The sinister and dangerous depictions of Black men have dire consequences on their realities and how they are understood and considered within society.

Data from the Police Powers and Procedures statistics (Home Office, 2022) confirms racial inequalities within police interactions with communities. Individuals who self-identified as Black were six times more likely to be searched than those from a white background, across England and Wales. They were 3 times more likely to be arrested than those who

identified themselves as white (Home Office, 2022). Between 2019-2020, 37,926 Black individuals aged 15-19 were stopped and searched in London. Of this overall figure, 36,502 were male (Metropolitan Police Service (MPS), 2020). Despite these alarming statistics, Black people had the highest outcome rates of 'No further action' (NFA) following a stop and search (73%) (Home Office, 2022). This data shows the disproportionate and systematic targeting of Black males and reinforces the unfounded notion that they are dangerous and need to be restricted.

The Lammy Review (Lammy, 2017) investigated the treatment of Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic (BAME) individuals in the Criminal Justice System (CJS). The review acknowledged that the disproportionate stereotyping of young Black boys and men as those who are gang-affiliated was a significant factor contributing to the high level of arrests, charges, prosecutions, and imprisonment of this population. As mentioned previously, Black boys and men are disproportionately labelled as being gang-affiliated, particularly in London. The Gangs Matrix is a database of suspected gang members in London. There are an estimated 3000-4000 individuals on this matrix from a London population of more than 8 million (Densley & Pyrooz, 2020). Amnesty International UK (2018) found that 80% of the individuals on this database were Black, with many having a 'zero-harm score' meaning they had the lowest risk of committing violence. Many of the issues identified in the Lammy Review remain stubbornly persistent and Black people remain overrepresented in the CJS (Ministry of Justice, 2020).

1.8 "Shellington Crescent": Gang Life in UK

"Floor him and earth him

I throw earth on an earthling

I do dirt, I'm determined

I do skrring and swerving

I do pull out, jump out in person disperse him"

(Shellington Crescent- Ghetts & Chip, 2021)

For long periods of the 20th century, gangs were perceived to be an American problem (Klein, 2001). The past few decades have seen large British cities manifest their own gang problem characterised by rivalry and high levels of violence (Fowler et al., 2009). Across academic and activist circles, increased interest has been shown towards gangs in the UK resulting in media attention, research, and policy responses (Williams, 2015). Former MPS Commissioner Ian Blair posited that violence from gangs was the biggest threat needing to be addressed in London after terrorism (Fresco, 2008). It has been predicted that since 2009, there have been over 700 young people killed, and more than half of gun and knife crime in the UK is attributed to gangs (The Centre for Social Justice, 2018). There are up to 70,000 people gang-affiliated in the UK, with estimates of around 250 gangs within London, equating to approximately 4500 gang-affiliated individuals (Whittaker et al., 2020). There has been a significant increase in gang-related deaths, yet the magnitude of the problem is still not clear because the spotlight on gangs has concentrated on the quelling of them as opposed to understanding them (Sharp et al., 2006). Research has tended to focus on their offending behaviours which reinforces the binary and negative narratives that those who are gang-affiliated are merely violent perpetrators (Beresford & Wood, 2016).

1.9 "IC3": Macro level narratives of the 'gang'

"Look in the mirror, I see king, I see me

I see who? I see what? IC3

Look in the mirror, I see king, I see me

I see what? I see who? IC3"

(IC3- Ghetts & Skepta, 2021)

Mainstream media outlets are notorious in their reporting of violence across the UK which involves knife and gun crime. This has garnered attention from academics and politicians. Young people have become the protagonists of sensationalist headlines claiming a rising gang problem, for example: *'Chilling moment gang of killers celebrate with hugs and high-fives after rival was gunned down in the street*' (Daily Mail, 2023); "*Four teenagers chopped off man's nose in battle to become town's drug lords*" (Metro, 2021); *'Sickening and appalling: Cops hunt London gang capturing and torturing foxes by setting them on fire*' (LBC, 2023); '*Gang break into FIVE houses and 'spray residents with acid' in terrifying crime spree'* (Mirror, 2023). Documentaries and news segments have surfaced about the exploitative and evil nature of gangs involved in violence. This has increased and maintained public fears, whilst endorsing an array of government responses (Hesketh, 2021). The result being a moral panic (Critcher, 2008).

1.9.1 Moral panic.

Cohen (2011) created a processual framework to explain the inception of moral panic and how it evolves through different stages (Table 1):

Table 1: The Stages of Moral Panic

Stage	**Procedures**
1. Emergence	This is where a phenomenon, individual or group arises and is labelled as a threat to the values and interests of a society.
2. The Media Inventory	The threat is shared widely across the mass media. An enemy of the state is discovered and is showcased to the masses using processes such as exaggeration, distortion, prediction, and symbolisation.
3. Moral entrepreneurs	Societal groups and organisations begin to diagnose the problem and highlight appropriate actions and responses to take. Moral entrepreneurs tend to be the media, politicians, law enforcement agencies and statutory services.
4. Experts	Those who have a standing in society are deemed socially accredited experts and they begin to diagnose the problem and provide solutions.
5. Coping and resolution	Moral entrepreneurs and experts work to put their hypotheses in to action, with some responses having no evidential basis whatsoever. Control initiatives are developed and exploited, with changes made to the law. If they are found to be inadequate and deficient, they are expanded. The moral panic can only end when the phenomenon disappears.

Media narratives of the gang follow this development within the moral panic framework. Before 2002, there was little if no media presence or interest relating to gangs. This shifted with widespread reporting of violence that came to be viewed as gang violence. With a slow and steady stream of gun fatalities, often involving YBM, the basis for a society experiencing new dangers and threats developed. Street crime disappeared overnight, and the emergence of the gang became rife, with gangs now becoming a new public enemy within society (Hallsworth, 2019).

1.9.2 The Media.

The media reporting regarding gangs has all the hallmarks of the processes Cohen (2011) identified in the media inventory stage of the moral panic framework (exaggeration, distortion, prediction, symbolisation). The media has been criticised for failing to admit and acknowledge that some cases of gang violence it reported were, on closer inspection, not gang-related whatsoever (Hallsworth & Young, 2008). This includes the death of 10-year-old Damilola Taylor whose murder prompted a sudden emergence of 'the gang' but he was murdered by two brothers. Despite this, the media continues to be careless in its use of the term gang and it has now become inclusive of young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds (McLean, 2019).

In the UK, media frenzy has blamed gangs for most social ills, whether it be an outbreak of dangerous dogs, the sexualisation and violence towards women, shootings, and the illegal drug trade (Hallsworth, 2019). The narratives around the London riots of 2011 were filled with stereotypes and in some cases racialised rhetoric (Elliott-Cooper, 2018). Gangs had a minor part to play in these riots, but they soon became the public enemy for the breakdown in social values which the riots represented (Medina & Shute, 2013).

The public's conception of gangs is one that has been fabricated and distorted by the media, leading to an increase in support for tougher legislation and more punitive measures for those found to be gang affiliated (Burney, 2009). With the excessive use of the 'gang'

label amongst policymakers, the media and law enforcement agencies such as the MPS, it is not surprising they have contributed to the moral panic seen in society (Hesketh, 2021).

The role of the media is important when thinking about gang affiliated violence, and thus its relevance to this research. Continued exposure to gang violence in the media can desensitise people to its real-life impact, making it seem less serious than it really is (Fanti et al., 2009). The fear generated because of the overestimated prevalence of gang violence has led to negative outcomes like increased policing, racial profiling, and systemic racism. What the media also doesn't acknowledge is that for those who have experienced gang affiliated violence, whether that be as a victim, witness, or perpetrator, seeing this violence depicted in the media can be re-traumatising (Brown et al., 2021).

1.9.3 Systemic Injustices.

By making youth crime synonymous with gangs, more young people have been caught up in the CJS under the guise of being gang affiliated. This has led to young people being disproportionately targeted by the police and increased media reporting. Mark Duggan, a Black man from Tottenham, was shot and killed by police in 2011. What followed was rioting, looting, deaths and almost 4000 arrests in the UK's largest cities. Diagnosing the riots and creating a culture of blame was deemed easier to accept than admitting the riots could be credited to the social exclusion, income inequality and depravation that young people often experience (Densley, 2013). Moral entrepreneurs and experts blamed gangs for the destruction caused and diagnosed the riots as a product of poor parenting and failures in education (Bridges, 2012). Gangs became the perfect explanation for an outbreak of criminal immorality, absolving society at large (Cottrell-Boyce, 2013). It appeared that most rioters and looters had no gang affiliation whatsoever, indicating a wider social issue at play. The gang label was used by the government to indicate that it was being proactive regarding crime, but also to deflect from the systemic injustices within society.

Societal narratives and policies relating to gangs could be considered as reactive and reductionist. It is concerning how the interventions seem to involve new powers to control and punish those affected by gang violence. Individuals are seen as the sole culprits of their actions, with families also having fingers pointed at them for enabling violence. However, gang violence is a result of political and social environments (Bacchini et al., 2020). It could be argued that instead, the problem is systemic, and the systems around young people should be held accountable for creating violent social environments (Gebo, 2016). Far too long have wider social structures escaped critical gaze. Gang violence is not a disease, but rather a symptom of an unequal society plagued with racism, inequality, and poverty (Cottrell-Boyce, 2013). While society allows communities to be plagued by these issues, the cycle of gang violence will continue.

This is important to bear in mind for this research as reactive policies and practices could inadvertently contribute to trauma for those who are gang affiliated, as well as their communities. Reactive policies such as increased police presence or harsher sentencing can sometimes escalate gang affiliated violence as power vacuums form when individuals are incarcerated (Andreas & Wallman, 2009). This leads to more violence as those who are gang affiliated vie for control. This escalation can contribute to a cycle of trauma within the affected communities. When reactive policies like heightened police presence or stop-and-search tactics are implemented, they can contribute to a sense of fear and mistrust in communities which is a form of collective trauma (Hirschtick et al., 2019). This is particularly the case in Black communities which are targeted and over-policed (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019).

1.9.4 Racist undertones.

When I think about the ways in which gangs are described, I visualise a group who are systematically dehumanised and made 'other'. They are seen as violent outsiders, driven by urges to commit crime, completely devoid of human attributes. To further examine what is so threatening about gangs, an evident feature appears to be that those who are gang

affiliated are almost always imaged to be from an ethnic minority in the UK, and in particular Black men (Joseph & Gunter, 2011). The gang label is heavily saturated with cultural and racial ties which cannot easily be separated (Alexander, 2014). Racism rears its head in narratives around gang affiliation which are often produced in white middle-class environments such as assemblies within parliament. What then happens is the notion of the gang becomes politicised as an ethnic minority problem or a Black community problem (Alexander, 2014).

Reification occurs when individuals or groups are unjustly treated as objects (Sewell, 2016). The viewing of gangs as objects has a function in that it allows the general population to feel removed from the issue. It is viewed as a problem affecting ethnic minorities in the UK and migrants. This results in the stigmatisation of certain individuals and communities. Young Black people are constructed though societal discourses as the primary culprits of gang violence (Williams, 2015). It has already been suggested agencies such as the MPS are positioned along racial lines, whereby racism manifests itself via the policing and punishing of Black males (Fekete, 2018). This formalises myths about Black criminality. Unfortunately, this means Black males are disproportionately subjected to a variety of dehumanising and fear-provoking tactics such as armed policing, stop-and-search practices, and multiagency forms of surveillance (Bridges, 2015, Williams & Clarke, 2016). Agencies such as housing associations, job centres, youth centres, and PRUs are required by a growing police state to identify and monitor those who are gang affiliated (Davies & South, 2023). This sharing of information means the racialisation of attributing the 'gang' label has a damaging effect on various aspects of YBM's lives (Densley & Pyrooz, 2020).

One example that demonstrates the interlink between Black and collective criminality, are the masses of YBM who have been imprisoned in the UK due to joint enterprise (JE) (Williams & Clarke, 2016). JE is a law which permits a group of people to be prosecuted for the same crime even if they had different roles in the crime, and even if they weren't in the proximity of the crime (Young et al., 2020). Nearly 79% of those from an ethnic minority

convicted under JE indicated they were labelled as gang affiliated during their trial compared to 39% of white prisoners (Bridges, 2013). Feeding into this disproportionality is the overrepresentation of YBM on gang matrixes, which provide prosecutors with ammunition to allege gang affiliation (Pitts, 2014). JE has become a weapon for control and punishment; and because gang violence is racialised, JE disproportionately affects YBM (Nijjar, 2019). They are bearing the brunt of this with their rights being infringed and curtailed, which impacts their mental health.

1.10 "Window Pain": The Mental Health of Those Gang-Affiliated

"I wish we left a bit earlier

Now my bredrin's dead and I've been arrested for his murder

Question after questions, they asked if I know Warren

I had tears in my eyes and all I could say was no comment"

(Window Pain- Ghetts & JayBay, 2021)

An area often overlooked in research is the relationship between gang affiliation and mental health. Research is starting to evidence how gang affiliated young people are disproportionately affected by mental health difficulties (Macfarlane, 2019). Khan et al. (2013) during health screening initiatives found 40% of gang members had severe behavioural problems and a quarter had a suspected mental health diagnosis. Coid et al. (2013) used standardised screening tools and found: 86% of gang members had antisocial personality disorder, 59% an anxiety disorder, 34% had attempted suicide, 25% had psychosis and 20% had depression. Gang membership increased the likelihood of developing all conditions except depression.

The relationship between gang affiliation and mental health is bi-lateral. Many of the factors attracting young people towards gangs relate to their mental wellbeing. Being in a gang may offer individuals the ability to have status, identity, and companionship (Wood,

2014). They provide support and belonging for young people who have weak relationships with family and friends (De Vito, 2020). Engaging in criminal activity is not only tolerated in a gang but becomes a group norm, providing cohesion and unity through shared risks, loyalty, and secrecy (Leverso & Matsueda, 2019). The gang provides an individual with more than just an outlet for criminal behaviours; it offers protection, social support, excitement, and the opportunity for power (Sandhu, 2020).

Gang members may suppress feelings of fear and anxiety, as these are emotions putting them at risk of ostracisation by the gang (Melde et al., 2009). Anxiety may be rife due to the increase in exposure to violence as well as the risks of arrest and conviction. Potential and actual involvement with the CJS can be anxiety-provoking for young people (Hayes & Bunting, 2013). Substance use also increases young people's risks of mental health issues (Meier et al., 2012), with alcohol and drug use being a central feature of gang life (Ariza et al., 2014). Substance use is a shared recreational activity but also serves the function of increasing gang members' confidence and numbing emotional stress (Hunt & Laidler, 2001).

1.10.1 The mental health of gang-affiliated Black men.

Turning specific attention to the mental health of Black men who are gang affiliated, Black communities are often exposed to high levels of discrimination, including unwanted police attention through stop-and-search and disadvantage (Aldridge et al., 2013; Singh & Burns, 2006), which can negatively impact mental health. When a YBM has been charged with a crime and is in custody, this is usually when their mental health needs are acknowledged (Barrett et al., 2006). Being in custody and visits to A&E following gang violence may be the only times when those who are gang affiliated encounter a health professional. The CJS and the NHS need to be better equipped to identify mental health problems relating to gang affiliated violence (Frisby-Osman & Wood, 2020). It is unsurprising Black men have negative attitudes towards statutory services who should be supporting them, when their experiences are drenched with racism, loss of independence and autonomy, and mistrust (Keating & Robertson, 2004). Their needs are not being understood,

recognised, or met which is why help-seeking rates are low amongst this population (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012).

1.10.2 Exposure to violence.

Violence is often considered the most typical characteristic of gangs and gang affiliation (Van Hellemont & Densley, 2021). Gang environments are rife with threats from other gangs, intra-gang conflict and the police, meaning those who are gang affiliated are often exposed to disproportionate amounts of violence (Decker et al., 2013). People are expected to be ready for violence at any time, whether that be violence for revenge or avenging disrespect (Densley, 2013). Violence also serves the function of validating masculinity, generating admiration from others and enriches reputation and status (Lauger, 2020; Harris et al., 2011). Being gang-affiliated increases the likelihood of exposure to community violence, living in a warzone and seeing dead bodies (Kerig et al., 2016). A study conducted in the UK found 90% of male gang members had experienced violence in the past five years, with 80% reporting at least three violent incidences (Coid et al., 2013). Most were found to have violent attitudes and be excited by violence, yet many also feared it.

Most have probably heard the phrase 'violence begets violence' but violence also begets victimisation. The most likely victims of gang violence are those who are gang affiliated (Katz et al., 2011). There is also an increased risk amongst this population to be both perpetrators and victims of violence (Taylor, 2008). A consequence of exposure to violence is a negative impact on mental and physical health (Fairbrook, 2013).

1.10.3 Trauma and PTSD amongst those gang affiliated.

Exposure to violence amongst those who are gang-affiliated puts them at greater risk of psychological trauma (Beresford & Wood, 2016). As a result, they are more likely to experience trauma responses outlined in the diagnosis of PTSD (Harris et al., 2013), with these individuals six times more likely than those who are not gang-affiliated to experience symptoms of PTSD (Petering, 2016). These 'symptoms' are understandable and adaptive

responses to the very dangerous environments they find themselves in. People must remain hypervigilant; they must numb themselves to survive. These responses are the byproduct of exposure to trauma, with PTSD being the collection of behavioural, cognitive, and emotional responses that have met certain criteria within the DSM-V. The more violence someone is exposed to, the greater these trauma responses will be (Abram et al., 2004).

Individuals exposed to violence are more likely to endure trauma responses or PTSD for longer periods of time (Kulkarni et al., 2011). Common responses people often report are re-experiencing traumatic events, avoidance, irritability, anger, numbness, and dissociation (Frewen et al., 2019). Due to the devastating nature of these, people can often be left feeling their environments are unsafe and threatening (Overstreet & Braun, 2000). To manage this, they engage in strategies and behaviours to minimise the impact of these symptoms such as fight-or-flight behaviours and hypervigilance (Bovin & Marx, 2011).

A phenomenon that has recently emerged is perpetrator trauma (PT) (Mohamed, 2015), where those who perpetrate violence experience trauma due to the acts they have committed (Kerig et al., 2016). This is common amongst those in the army and those exposed to combat situations (McGlothlin, 2020). The trauma responses tend to be emotional numbing and dissociation. These responses allow people to rationalise what they have done to others by dehumanising them or completely avoiding the thought of what they have done (Klein et al., 2006). Trauma responses in perpetrators may not develop for months or even years after the event, which can further complicate identification and treatment (Smid et al., 2014). Those who are gang affiliated may also suffer from PT (Valdez, 2021). PT does not tend to be acknowledged because the act of perpetration itself is often viewed as morally repugnant (McGlothlin, 2020). Violent perpetration could cause individuals to experience their own psychological injury and scarring (Gaston et al., 2022). Acknowledging the existence of PT amongst those who are gang affiliated opens new avenues of thought and could impact how statutory services respond to the needs of YBM who are gang affiliated, which are not currently being met.

1.11 Conclusions from Empirical and Theoretical literature

This section has emphasised the societal discourses impacting YBM generally, and those who are gang affiliated. There is a strong evidence base, supported by an impressive body of research, highlighting the links between gang affiliation and offending. However, in comparison, research on trauma and trauma responses amongst this population is limited. Even more so, there is a scarcity of literature focused on those who are gang affiliated in London, explicitly examining their beliefs, perceptions and experiences of gang affiliated violence and the subsequent trauma. This provides the rationale for the current study.

CHAPTER 2: SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a systematic review of literature relevant to the present study's research questions and aims. Available evidence examined in Chapter 1 highlighted the complexities those who are gang affiliated face, both individually and socially, whether that be increased scrutiny from government, interactions with police, racism, or increased levels of exposure to violence. Despite acknowledging the specific nature of these experiences, an understanding of a broader sense of Black men's experiences of psychological distress due to violence was absent within the literature. With increased levels of discrimination towards Black men, it is pertinent professionals listen to and learn from Black men's experiences to create supportive environments in addressing their mental health needs.

A systematic literature review (SLR) follows a comprehensive and rigorous process in which empirical evidence that meets certain criteria is identified, appraised, and synthesised to answer a research question (Anderson et al., 2020). The SLR uncovers gaps in knowledge which provide the rationale for future research to contribute to the existing evidence base (Snyder, 2019).

An initial scoping review on Black men's experiences of psychological distress was adopted. This was conducted to provide a snapshot of the volume, breadth, and type of literature available for synthesis relating to the research question. A range of bibliographical databases were used (including PROSPERO and The Cochrane Library). The scope revealed gaps in the literature related to Black men in the UK, and the absence of reviews regarding Black men's experiences of psychological distress due to community violence. No review on this subject has been done, providing the rationale for the current systematic review.

The aim of the SLR was to summarise and synthesise the relevant literature to answer the following question: ***What are Black men's experiences of psychological distress due to violence?*** Psychological distress refers to non-specific responses of stress,

anxiety, and depression. High levels may reflect mental health disorders (Riboni & Belzung, 2017). In this section, the literature relevant to the research question will be reviewed. The SLR will explore current understanding of this phenomenon, assess the quality of available literature, highlight gaps in knowledge, and provide recommendations from the findings.

2.1 Methodology

The systematic review adopted a meta-synthesis approach which uses rigorous methods to synthesise and integrate findings from existing qualitative studies to form new interpretations (Erwin et al., 2011). There is an abundance of quantitative research assessing psychological distress amongst Black men. To provide experiential context to this and to deeply understand these experiences, gathering qualitative evidence was deemed appropriate. Black men are often reluctant to seek support for mental health struggles despite them being prone to severe mental health issues (Tsoi-A-Fatt, 2010). This has led to an increased interest to understand the experiences and views of Black men. Qualitative research can offer a rich source of data focusing on in-depth and diverse individual experiences. This would provide a focus on the meanings and interpretations of the participants (Serrano-Gemes et al., 2020). Using qualitative research would allow me to bring a human perspective into the process of answering the SLR question. A SPIDER search framework, developed by Cooke et al. (2012), was utilised which addresses qualitative questions. Using this tool helped to develop search terms and clarify inclusion/exclusion criteria (Table 2).

Table 2

SPIDER Tool

SPIDER	
Sample	Black men
Phenomenon of **I**nterest	Psychological distress
Design	Interviews, focus groups
Evaluation	Views, experiences, beliefs, feelings

Research	Qualitative, mixed method

As the review focused on Black male adults, any research involving participants over the age of 18 was used. There was no maximum age range to allow for different perspectives. Participants of different ages may see psychological distress through a different lens, and I wanted to gather as many different perspectives as possible leading to greater validity. Research from countries with majority Black populations (countries in Africa and Caribbean) was considered. However, it was decided the stark differences of lived experiences (e.g., difference in experiences of racism and different perceptions of mental health) of Black people within western and non-western countries would have elicited difficulty when synthesising the findings. 'Western' in this context refers to all countries of western Europe as well as those countries shaped by western European culture such as the USA (Ferris et al., 2017). Research not conducted within western countries was therefore excluded. Studies not written in English were excluded. This was due to a limited time capacity and a restricted research budget that could not accommodate commissioning professional translators. Any research that focused on physical violence inflicted by another individual or group within the community was included. This could be violence from statutory organisations such as the police or other individuals in the community. Violence in this regard encompassed those who were victims, perpetrators, and witnesses. The witnessing of violence could be experienced directly (individuals being in the immediate vicinity of this violence) or indirectly (seeing this violence inflicted via media platforms). All other forms of violence were excluded. 10 years was used as the benchmark for publications to focus the literature search on current research, but it was also based on the sociopolitical landscape at the time prevalent in western cultures. For example, in the UK in 2011, Mark Duggan was shot dead by armed police in Tottenham. His killing sparked riots which spread across the UK. In the US in 2012, Trayvon Martin, an unarmed 17-year-old, was shot dead by George Zimmerman in Florida. In 2013, Zimmerman was acquitted of Treyvon's murder and the

hashtag #BlackLivesMatter (BLM) was used for the first time. In 2014, Eric Garner was killed after being put in a chokehold by arresting officers. When Michael Brown was killed by police a month later, the BLM movement gained international recognition. These pivotal moments are examples of community violence within the Black community, and those that elicited psychological distress. It was considered that published literature after these events would be of interest as Black men would have experienced distress because of these events, and researchers would have attempted to examine this possibility. The inclusion and exclusion criteria can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Literature Search Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	**Exclusion criteria**
• The study must contain a reference to experiences of psychological distress.	• The study focuses on participants under the age of 18
• The study must contain a reference to physical violence in the community as opposed to other forms of violence.	• Different outcome measure e.g., not psychological distress or mental health
• The study must include qualitative data from Black men which includes mixed methods.	• The study is solely quantitative.
• The study must be written in or translated into English	• The study highlights violence which isn't physical e.g., racism
• The study must be empirically based (e.g., not a review of previous literature)	• The study focuses on factors relating to violence rather than experiences of violence
• Study conducted in 'western' countries	

2.2 Search Strategy

An electronic database search was conducted using PubMed (27.2.23); Scopus (27.2.2023); PsychArtcles (27.2.2023), Medline (27.2.23); CINAHL PLUS (27.2.23); and Social Care Online (27.2.23). These databases were chosen to acknowledge the evidence

base within a variety of disciplines relevant to the question, including medicine, nursing, social work, and applied social sciences. Each database had specific search parameters which were used to focus specifically on research applicable to the review question. Table 4 shows the search parameters used for each database. Ideally, I would have preferred to use 'Title/abstract/keywords' on all the databases but the search parameters did not allow for this.

Table 4

Search Filters Used in Systematic Literature Search

Database search parameters used	
PubMed	Title/abstract
Scopus	Title/abstract/keywords
Psych Articles	All fields
Medline	Abstract
Cinahl plus	Abstract

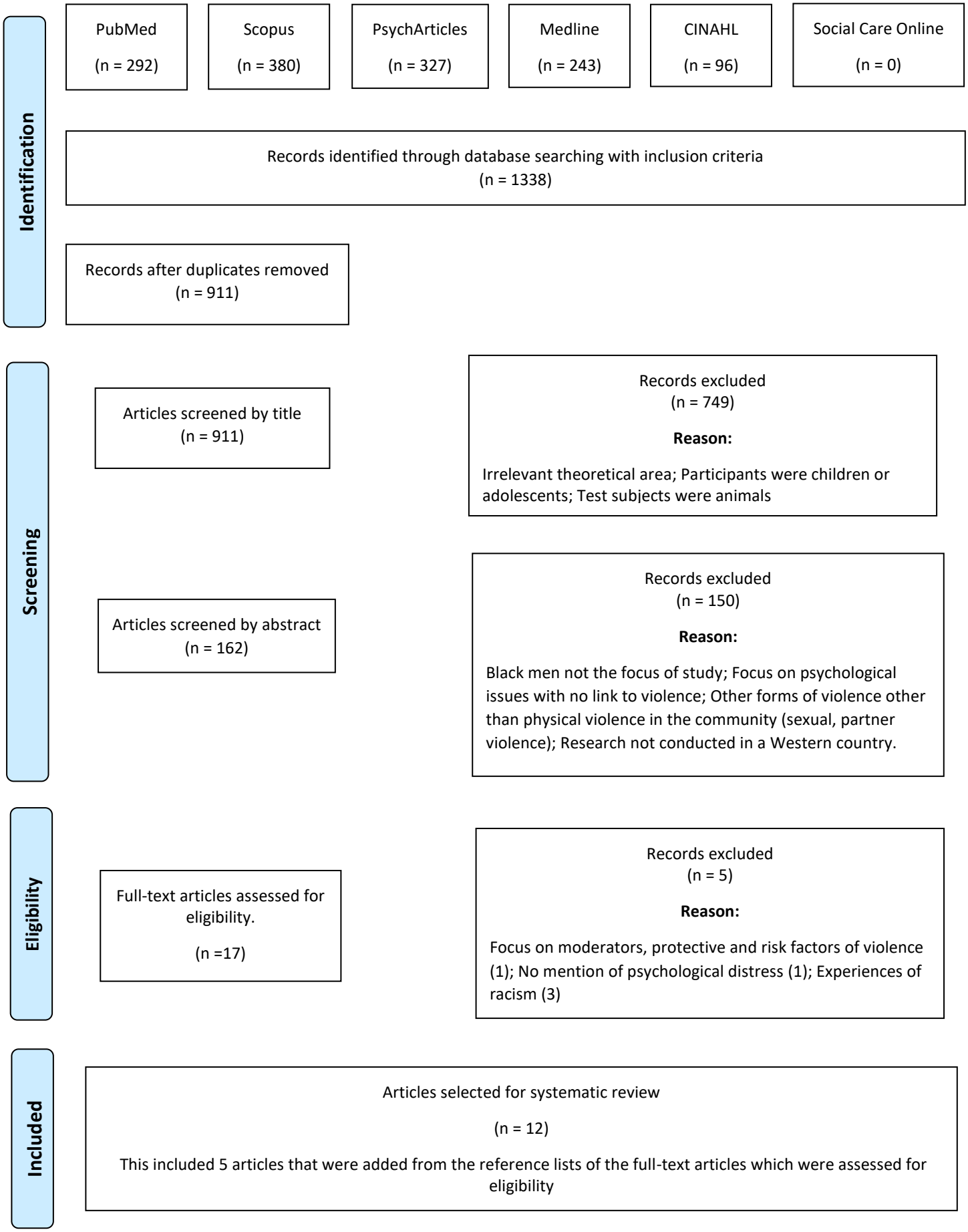
Once the database searches had been completed, alerts were produced to stay aware of recent and relevant literature up to the point of analysis. A concept-based approach was incorporated to find keywords and synonyms associated with Black, men, psychological distress, and violence (McGinn et al., 2016) (Table 5). Databases were used to identify subject headings and thesaurus terms which expanded the search terms. Other terms were identified through reading literature obtained from the scoping search. Key terms were adapted using speech marks and truncation to obtain all relevant literature. Boolean operators 'AND'/ 'OR' were combined within the search terms to yield suitable papers in answering the research question.

The SLR search uncovered 1338 papers. The papers identified were initially screened based on the title. The abstract was reviewed if the title was vague. Duplicate articles were then removed, leaving the remaining articles to be measured against the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Screening these papers led to the identification of 162 potential studies. Reading the abstract and full-text searches led to further exclusions based on exclusion criteria within Table 3. Reference lists were also explored for further literature useful in answering the research question. The PRISMA flow chart (Moher et al., 2009) in Figure 1 outlines the process of selection of papers.

Table 5: *Search Terms Used in Systemic Literature Search*

Concept 1	**"Black"**	**OR**	African* OR African-American* OR African-Caribbean OR Black-British OR African* OR Caribbean*
		AND	
Concept 2	**Men**	**OR**	Man OR Male* OR Masculin* OR Father* OR Dad*
		AND	
Concept 3	**"Psychological Distress"**	**OR**	"Mental health" OR "Emotional distress" OR Distress OR Stress* OR Disorder* OR "Mental illness*" OR Trauma* OR Mental OR Wellbeing
		AND	
Concept 4	**Violence**	**OR**	"Exposure to violence" OR Aggress* OR Brutality OR Fight* OR Force*

Figure 1: *PRISMA Diagram*



2.3 Studies

The literature review identified 12 suitable papers that met the inclusion criteria and focused on Black men's experiences of psychological distress linked to physical violence in the community. The Black men included spanned different age groups (18-84) and all studies were carried out in the USA. All included studies used a qualitative methodology and focused on the experiences of Black men, with one having a mixed methodology design (Bauer et al., 2020). A summary of the study characteristics, findings, strengths, and limitations are in Table 6.

2.4 Quality Assessment

Critical appraisal is the systematic process of assessing the strengths and limitations of empirical evidence, allowing for an assessment of its quality in answering a research question. The diverse nature of qualitative research means it is often difficult to critique (Aveyard, 2019). The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist is a comprehensive tool for appraising qualitative research methodology. It provides detailed instructions to assess the rigour, credibility, and relevance of research (Kuper et al., 2008). It was used as it is a) recommended by Cochrane and the World Health Organisation to synthesise qualitative evidence (Noyes et al., 2018); b) considered user-friendly for inexperienced qualitative researchers (Long et al., 2020); c) devised to be used for health-related research and has an extensive evidence base (Carroll et al., 2012) and d) used to appraise the quality of studies for a meta-ethnography synthesis (Atkins et al., 2008), which is the approach taken for this SLR. Table 7 demonstrates how each paper met the CASP criteria.

Table 6

Summary of Studies Included in the Review

Title, Author & Country	**Aim**	**Participants/Sample**	**Data collection**	**Data analysis**	**Summary of findings**	**Strengths (+) and limitations (-)**
"Their Help Is Not Helping": Policing as a Tool of Structural Violence Against Black Communities Wendel et al. (2022) USA	To illustrate Black youth's perceptions of police violence, how they make sense of it, and their responses to it.	Purposive sampling N= 53 Age range: 10-24 years (only the data from those 18+ were used)	Individual qualitative interviews	A constructivist analytic approach guided data analysis (Charmaz, 2006).	Narratives regarding experiences with police highlight the physical and psychological violence enacted by police who come into their community. The long-term implications of persistent violence these youth endure has implications on their physical and mental health and well-being.	+ In-depth, rich data from participants + Large sample of Black males + No conflict of interest + Offers limitations, areas for future research and clinical implications of the study + Multiple analysts reduced the risk of individual bias + Co-production- a cohort of youth from the area were hired to participate in development activities + Reflexivity- The research team met consistently to reflect on interviews + Participants were compensated for which acknowledged the time and effort provided - The data analysed was not collected to address the specific research goals of this study. - No elaboration on original study findings

						- There was a wide age range spanning several developmental stages which could influence participants' experiences, sense-making, and response to police violence. - Participants recruited from one geographical location (West Louisville)
"We are our own counselor": Resilience, risk behaviours, and mental health service utilization among young African American men Bauer et al. (2020) USA	This study examined resilience, trauma-related risk behaviours, and use of mental health services among a sample of YBM who experienced traumatic events,	Purposive/Convenience sampling in community sites N = 55 Age range: 18-30 years. Average age: 23 years	Quantitative surveys on traumatic events, resilience, risk factors 6 semi-structured individual interviews 9 focus groups composed of	Mixed methods Hierarchical linear regression Phenomenological approach	Exposure to trauma significantly predicted risk factors. Resilience did not moderate this relationship. Resilience did not predict use of mental health services.	+ Large sample of Black males increasing representative power + Utilised mixed methods to understand individual factors affecting resilience + An independent research assistant was used for coding which increased validity of findings + Eligibility criteria were consistent across both interviews and focus groups + Participants were compensated for their time and provided a meal as part of the focus group session. - Lack of depth and breadth in data from focus group - Researcher does not own positionality within the research

			2-13 participants			- Unclear whether those who had semi-structured interviews were compensated for their time
Beyond PTSD: Black Male Fragility in the Context of Trauma Singletary (2020) USA	To explore Black males' experiences of recurring violence, and to examine whether existing diagnostic conceptualisations of PTSD capture this unique traumatic experience.	Purposive sampling in community centres and throughout neighbourhood common areas N = 12 Age range: 18-38 years. Average age: 25 years	2 focus groups consisting of 5 and 7 participants	Thematic analysis	Exposure to recurring violence altered the psychological disposition and functioning of participants. Hypervigilance was a strong theme amongst the participants based on the code of the streets. Internalised stigma was a significant factor with this.	+ The researcher aimed to not use leading language + Rigorous approach to analysis + Rigorous quality control + Interpretative stance- reflective journaling was used to record personal thoughts and feeling + The paper uses the language of the participants - No mention about conflict of interest - Participants not compensated for their time - Does not offer limitations or areas for future research
Emotional Responses to Unintentional and Intentional Traumatic Injuries among Urban Black Men: A Qualitative Study	To explore Black men's emotional responses to trauma in the context of intentionality	Purposive sampling in trauma centre N = 74	semi-structured, qualitative interviews	Thematic analysis	Black men revealed persistent exposure to community violence and distrust of others. Emotional responses differ by intentionality of	+ Large sample of Black males increasing representative power + No conflict of interest + Participants compensated for their time + Good quality control for analysis + Acknowledgement of what future research should explore

Jiang et al. (2018) USA		Age range: 18-84 years. Median age: 33.5 years			traumatic injury among Black men. Intentional injuries were related to chronic violence and limited social support for recovery.	+ In-depth tables of participant demographics, how participants were injured, and themes. - The sample was drawn from a larger study but no mention of which one - Data limited to one geographical location (Philadelphia) - No mention about conflict of interest - Participants not compensated for their time - Does not offer limitations or areas for future research
Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Context: Examining Trauma Responses to Violent Exposures and Homicide Death Among Black Males in Urban Neighbourhoods Smith & Patton (2016) USA	To examine the presence and expression of traumatic stress symptoms among young Black men who experienced the homicide death of a loved one.	Purposive sampling N = 37 Age range: 18-24 years. Average age: 20 years	semi-structured interviews	Grounded theory	Participants reported experiencing DSM-V defined posttraumatic stress symptoms. Hypervigilance was most frequently experienced and expressed as an adaptive strategy	+ Phenomenological variant of ecological systems theory (PVEST) was used to situate and interpret findings, draw implications from a psychosocial frame applicable at multiple levels of society, and explore how behaviours differ across contexts. + The data was drawn from a larger qualitative study, and this is referenced + The first author partnered with community organisations to determine need resulting in

						psychoeducation and support groups over 18 months. + Prolonged engagement with community and young men + Participants were compensated for their time + Participant language used + Acknowledgement of what future research should explore - No longitudinal data- cannot assess the frequency of traumatic experiences over time to explore coping strategies - Reducing researcher bias was not adequately acknowledged
Shook Ones: Understanding the Intersection of Nonfatal Violent Firearm Injury, Incarceration, and Traumatic Stress Among Young Black Men	To explore how survivors of gun violence express symptoms of traumatic stress	Purposive sampling N = 11 Age range: 18-30 years.	Focus group (n=6) Individual semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	Participant experiences of traumatic stress changed their identity. These experiences influenced participants' recovery from trauma, ability to maintain social	+ A phenomenological variant ecological systems theory framework was used to acknowledge psychological and social factors. + Funding sourced for experts by experience in the field of hospital-based violence intervention programs (HVIP) to be co-investigators. + The findings from the focus group informed the interview questions

Richardson et al. (2020) USA					relationships, and HVIP engagement.	+ Participants were compensated for their time and travel expenses covered + Consent procedure outlined + Both interviewers were Black men with high levels of trust and rapport with the survivors + The results from the data analysis were shared with all participants + Acknowledgement of future directions + Anonymous reviewers were used to provide feedback on the paper + No conflicting interests - 45% of participants attended the focus group- their experiences might not represent the wider sample - The HVIP where the study took place was not formally evaluated for its effectiveness in reducing trauma - Small sample size reducing representative power
Survivors of gun violence and the experience of recovery	Exploring recovery experiences of survivors of gun violence.	Snowball/purposive sampling N = 20	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	Survivors of gun violence described feeling unsafe following injury. They experienced isolation, a need to	+ Community-based participatory research (CBPR) approach was implemented + Members of the academic research team had over 15 years of experience

O'Neill et al. (2020) USA		Age range: 20-51 years.			carry a firearm, and did not typically access mental health support.	working with Black community leaders + Participants were compensated for their time + The whole team developed the semi-structured interview guide + Participants were provided with ample choice of interview location + An acknowledgment that having a white woman interview all participants could have created outsider influence and so a Black man conducted 35% of the interviews + Coding team had a breadth of knowledge and were from different professions + The results from the data analysis were shared with all participants + Interview guide included for transparency + The results were used to develop a HVIP - Big time gap since injury between the participants. This ranged from under 1 year to over 30 years. - Some participant recollections were subject to significant recall bias

"That's My Number One Fear in Life. It's the Police": Examining Young Black Men's Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting from Police Violence and Police Killings Smith Lee & Robinson (2019) USA	To examine young Black men's experiences of police violence	Purposive sampling N = 40 Age range: 18-24 years. Average age: 20 years.	Semi-structured interviews Ethnographic methods (participant observation; field notes)	Grounded theory	Participants witnessed and experienced police violence from childhood. They met diagnostic criteria for trauma exposure. Police violence elicited distrust and reminded participants of their vulnerability to police violence.	+ Informed by critical race theory and stress and coping theory + Large sample of Black males increasing representative power + The data was drawn from a larger qualitative study, and this is referenced + Pilot interviews shaped the questions used in the study + The interview schedule was reviewed by multiple people in the field + Mock interviews were used to enhance data quality + Chronologies of Loss timelines were used to facilitate memory recall and collect longitudinal data + A feelings chart was used to support participants in finding language that accurately and descriptively communicates their internal state. + Prolonged engagement with community and young men + Participants were compensated for their time + Rigorous coding process with triangulation + Statement of positionality included

						+ Masculine norms about emotional expression acknowledged at the start of interviews to provide a safe space, free of judgment to express emotion + To minimize issues of power and hierarchy, the interviewer dressed in casual attire and spoke in + a conversational tone free of academic jargon. + Acknowledgement of future directions + No conflicting interests - Doesn't account for older men's experiences - The interview data collected was not intended to focus on policing - Participants were recruited from GED and job readiness training centres- may not have gathered a sample representative of those most likely to be victimised by the police
Black Male Hunting! A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Secondary Impact of Police Induced Trauma on the Black Man's	To explore indirect experiences of Black males who heard, read, or viewed the police shooting an	Snowball and purposeful sampling N = 62	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	Participants reported post-traumatic stress symptoms because of viewing, hearing, or reading about this fatal shooting.	+ Large sample of Black males increasing representative power + Offers limitations, clinical implications, and areas for future research - Participants were not compensated for their time.

Psyche in the United States Lipscomb et al. (2019) USA	unarmed Black man.	Age range: 18-65 years Average age: 30 years			Three major themes emerged in the study: (1) emotional responses of Black men; (2) behavioural and psychological trauma responses (3) injustices around the systematic and intentional targeting of Black men	- Analysis methodology is unclear - Data is limited in depth and breadth - How ethical issues were managed is not addressed - Researcher did not divulge their relationship to the phenomenon under investigation and the influence of this on data analysis
Peer homicide and traumatic loss: an examination of homicide survivorship among low-income, young, Black men! Smith (2013) USA	To investigate young Black men's experiences of peer homicides. To explore how this group grieves and recovers from the trauma of losing peers.	Purposive sampling N = 40 Age range: 18-24 years	Semi-structured interviews and field observations	Grounded theory	Chronic and unpredictable violence positioned participants as vulnerable to experiencing violence	+ Thorough detailing of methodology, processes, and analysis + Epistemological position highlighted- social constructionism + Participants were compensated for their time + Chronologies of Loss timelines were used to facilitate memory recall and collect longitudinal data + Statement of positionality included + Pilot studies were used + To minimize issues of power and hierarchy, the interviewer dressed in casual attire and spoke in + a conversational tone free of academic jargon.

						+ Acknowledgement of having an insider perspective + Rich data from participants + Sample was representative of young men nationally and locally + Acknowledgement of future directions - The interviews only focused on peer homicides with high impact, neglecting the overall accumulation of peer homicides - Big time gap between the time since last death. Some people still in acute stages of grief. - Limited age range of men's experiences
Post-Discharge Needs of Victims of Gun Violence in Chicago: A Qualitative Study Patton et al. (2019) USA	To understand the needs of violently injured patients and support systems to improve health outcomes and reduce the impact of gun violence.	Purposive sampling N = 10 Age range: 18-40 years	Semi-structured interviews	Grounded theory	Patients wanted mental health support in the form of counselling for themselves and their family. The victims of gun violence felt there was a big gap in their provision of	+ Informed consent mentioned + Interviewers have more than 10 years of qualitative training in urban settings. + Participants were compensated for their time + No conflicts of interest + Acknowledgement of future directions - 1 female participant - No identified commentary from female participant

					care and rehabilitation.	- No clarification of the age range of participants - Small sample size
'Sharing things with people that I don't even know': Help-seeking for psychological symptoms in injured Black men in Philadelphia Jacoby et al. (2020) USA	To describe how Black men perceived their trauma symptoms and the need for professional mental health support.	Random sample N = 32 Age range: 18-67 years Average age: 38 years	Semi-structured individual interviews	Thematic and structural narrative analysis	Black men may be more susceptible to psychological symptoms after exposure to traumatic events. Participants identified multiple barriers to seeking professional mental health support.	+ Large sample of Black men spanning a wide age range. + Multiple analysts reduced the risk of bias + Mixed-qualitative methodology + Considered the intersection of race and gender in the perception of mental health care + Acknowledgement of future directions + Clear clinical implications - Broad definition of professional help' – participants had different definitions to researchers. This posed a threat to the construct validity under study - Screening process was vague - Participants not compensated for their time - Researcher does not own positionality within the research

Table 7

Critical Appraisal of Included Research

Critical Appraisal of Qualitative Studies Assessed Using CASP tool										
Paper	**Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?**	**Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?**	**Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?**	**Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?**	**Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?**	**Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?**	**Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?**	**Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?**	**Is there a clear statement of findings?**	**How valuable is the research?**
"Their Help Is Not Helping": Policing as a Tool of Structural Violence Against Black Communities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Cannot tell	Cannot tell	Yes	It contributes to existing literature on systemic racism in the CJS, the relationship between community and police, as well as harm to Black men. There are policy implications for policing and its impact on Black communities.

"We are our own counselor": Resilience, risk behaviours, and mental health service utilization among young African American men	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	This study examined resilience, risky behaviours, and mental health among YBM exposed to traumatic events. Participants reported multiple traumatic events and a large proportion endorsed risk factors.
Beyond PTSD: Black Male Fragility in the Context of Trauma	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	The findings further our understanding of hypervigilance and how this is perceived by Black men. It also highlights the significance of racial trauma and internalised stigma.
Emotional Responses to Unintentional and Intentional Traumatic Injuries among Urban Black	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	The findings indicate how traumatic events present additional challenges, such as interactions with the perpetrator of the

Men: A Qualitative Study										assault and with the police. This can then lead to emotional responses such as anger and worry.
Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Context: Examining Trauma Responses to Violent Exposures and Homicide Death Among Black Males in Urban Neighbourhoods	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	The current study enhances the current knowledge of traumatic symptoms among Black males by exploring how they cope with traumatic experiences. The study provides a nuanced perspective on trauma responses.
Shook Ones: Understanding the Intersection of Nonfatal Violent Firearm Injury, Incarceration, and Traumatic Stress Among	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	This study places the experiences of young Black men into context. The findings reveal different traumatic responses used by individuals that may be overlooked by

Young Black Men										mental health researchers and practitioners.
Survivors of gun violence and the experience of recovery	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	Yes	Yes	The study highlights the various reactions that occur during recovery periods in response to a disrupted sense of safety.
"That's My Number One Fear in Life. It's the Police": Examining Young Black Men's Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting from Police Violence and Police Killings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	Yes	Yes	The study examines the nuanced, untold stories of young Black men's exposures to police violence. The findings have important implications for research, policy, and practice with Black men.
Black Male Hunting! A Phenomenological Study	Yes	Yes	Yes	Cannot tell	Yes	No	No	Cannot tell	Yes	The findings inform practice whereby clinicians should treat clients who

Exploring the Secondary Impact of Police Induced Trauma on the Black Man's Psyche in the United States										show signs of suffering from PTSD symptoms, yet do not completely meet the diagnosis criteria. Failing to recognise traumas that are embedded into the psyches of Black men, clinicians are failing to capture significant information about their clients and the ways in which they navigate the social world.
Peer homicide and traumatic loss: an examination of homicide survivorship among low-income, young, Black men!	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	This research increased our understanding of violence exposure across the life course. It presents recommendations in conducting successful research with a "hard to study"

										population of young, Black men.
Post-Discharge Needs of Victims of Gun Violence in Chicago: A Qualitative Study	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	This study explores implicit biases and the many ways that these biases impact trauma care.
'Sharing things with people that I don't even know': Help-seeking for psychological symptoms in injured Black men in Philadelphia	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	The findings emphasise help-seeking in Black Men. Social networks are seen as fundamental in creating support and encouraging Black men to seek professional mental health support.

2.5 Quality Evaluation of the Literature

The CASP tool does not have a scoring process. However, it is advised that if the first 3 questions cannot be answered with a 'yes', then the research is likely to be of poor quality. This was not the case for any of the studies used within this research. All of them had evident aims which helped to evaluate the relevance of methodological choices. They all had research designs which were appropriate in addressing their respective research aims. Semi-structured interviews and/or focus groups were used within all the studies. Most studies had specific methodological strengths, which increased their credibility, trustworthiness, and rigour, leading to moderate-high quality ratings. There was one study (Lipscomb et al., 2019) with a low-quality rating. I took an inclusive approach and included all relevant literature including studies with low quality scores. This was done to avoid punitiveness towards research where authors may have failed to describe the methods in sufficient detail to determine quality criteria had been met. A lack of reporting does not necessarily constitute poor research (Aveyard, 2019). I did not want the appraisal process to become an exercise in judging the quality of a published article rather than the research procedure itself (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). I also decided on an inclusive policy to avoid omitting research of potential value to the synthesis (Aveyard & Bradbury-Jones, 2018).

Purposive sampling was the most popular recruitment strategy used within the studies. This method was appropriate to the aims of the research and generated a wide spread of Black men from different environments and contexts. The methodological choices made by researchers was sound in most of the studies. There was a particular issue with Patton et al. (2019) who reported a sample size of 10 but employed grounded theory. Moser and Korstjens (2018) suggest grounded theories require 20-30 participants.

It was uncommon within these studies for the researcher to consider their relationship with the participant group. This was only done in a quarter of the studies. Of those three studies where researchers critically examined their own roles, biases, and

influence on the research (O'Neill et al., 2020; Smith, 2013; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019), the first author was the same person in two of them. Having an 'outsider' perspective was acknowledged, prompting O'Neill et al. (2020) to use one of the other researchers, who identified as being a member of the participants' community, to support data collection. They reflected on the main interviewer being a white woman and how this may have impacted the data collection process. The implications of this may have helped to increase internal validity.

Most of the studies addressed ethical considerations such as informed consent and anonymity. It was hard to assess if ethical standards had been maintained and if the study had sufficiently addressed issues such as confidentiality, debriefs and risk of harm. A few of the studies mentioned approval from a committee. O'Neill et al. (2020) were the only researchers to explicitly mention that the results from the data analysis were shared with all participants.

All 12 of the studies provided explicit statements of findings linked with the research objectives. The findings were specific to their contexts but still encompassed the experiences of Black men regarding psychological distress from community violence. Findings focused on harm caused from community and police violence, risk behaviours from those with trauma, signs of trauma, and feeling unsafe. The next section will provide a meta-ethnography of the findings, holding in mind the homogeneity and heterogeneity in narratives shared by the participants.

2.6 Synthesis of Main Findings from Literature Review

Meta-ethnography was used to synthesise the qualitative findings. This was chosen as it is in line with the aims of the thesis to develop a conceptual understanding; and follows the interpretative approach taken across the thesis. A meta-ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988) involves re-conceptualisation of original papers by considering them as a whole, and greater than the sum of their parts. The results of a meta-ethnography should be completely

different from the data within the studies because it is interpretative rather than aggregative. Interpretive meaning meta-ethnography builds meaning through integrating the data. Participants' direct quotes of their experiences of the phenomena (in this case, psychological distress) are first-order constructs. The author's analysis and interpretations are seen as second-order constructs. Third-order constructs are the synthesis of my interpretations of the second-order constructs (Toye et al., 2014). Seven stages have been outlined for synthesising with a meta-ethnography (Table 8).

Table 8

Stages of Meta-Ethnography

Stage	**Procedures**
1-2	These two stages relate to the formulation of the research question, searching and identification of relevant studies. It is during the third phase where the synthesis process begins.
3- Reading the studies.	I repeatedly read the included studies and familiarised myself with the key concepts. I became familiar with the content and detail of the studies. Key themes were drawn out during initial reading. I then extracted the first and second order constructs from the studies.
4- Determining how studies are related.	During this stage I noted the key concepts that were used in each study and thought about the link between them. I looked at similarities and differences. Concepts were then developed to act as thematic descriptions of the data presented within and between individual studies.
5- Translating studies into one another.	This stage I generated the third-order 'meta-themes'. Concepts were compared to generate nuanced themes whilst retaining the concepts presented within the original accounts. I approached this by arranging the studies from the highest rated paper to the lowest from the quality appraisal process.
6- Synthesising translations.	During this phase, I viewed all the studies as a 'whole' to generate a broader, interpretative reading of the meta-themes. The aim was also to develop a line of argument presented in the discussion.
7- Expressing the synthesis.	I communicated the synthesis in written form due to the intended academic audience. In addition to my conceptual understandings of the studies, I included quotes from the participants of primary studies to ground the review in their lived experiences.

The study with the highest quality rating was used as the 'index study' and was the first study from which concepts were translated into other studies and therefore shaped the analysis (Atkins et al., 2008). This was the research conducted by Smith (2013). First-order constructs represented quotes from the participants, and second-order constructs which were the authors' interpretations, produced four interrelated themes (third order constructs): An overview of each study's contribution to the third-order constructs is provided in Table 9.

Table 9

Contribution of Included Studies Towards Themes.

Paper	**It's normal': Growing up and living in a violent neighbourhood**	**The experience of violence exposure on the mind and body**	**Strategies to survive psychological distress and violence**	**Expressions of emotion**
Peer homicide and traumatic loss: an examination of homicide survivorship among low-income, young, Black men! Smith (2013)	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Survivors of gun violence and the experience of recovery. O'Neill et al. (2020)		**X**	**X**	
"That's My Number One Fear in Life. It's the Police": Examining Young Black Men's Exposures to Trauma and Loss Resulting from Police Violence and Police Killings. Smith Lee & Robinson (2019)		**X**	**X**	**X**
"We are our own counselor": Resilience, risk behaviours, and mental health service utilization among young			**X**	**X**

African American men. Bauer et al. (2020)				
"Their Help Is Not Helping": Policing as a Tool of Structural Violence Against Black Communities Wendel et al. (2022)			**X**	
Beyond PTSD: Black Male Fragility in the Context of Trauma. Singletary (2020)	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Emotional Responses to Unintentional and Intentional Traumatic Injuries among Urban Black Men: A Qualitative Study. Jiang et al. (2018)	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms in Context: Examining Trauma Responses to Violent Exposures and Homicide Death Among Black Males in Urban Neighbourhoods. Smith & Patton (2016)	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Shook Ones: Understanding the Intersection of Nonfatal Violent Firearm Injury, Incarceration, and Traumatic Stress Among Young Black Men. Richardson et al. (2020)	**X**	**X**	**X**	**X**
Black Male Hunting! A Phenomenological Study Exploring the Secondary Impact of Police Induced Trauma on the Black Man's Psyche in the United		**X**	**X**	

States. Lipscomb et al. (2019)				
Post-Discharge Needs of Victims of Gun Violence in Chicago: A Qualitative Study. Patton et al. (2019)		**X**	**X**	
'Sharing things with people that I don't even know': Help-seeking for psychological symptoms in injured Black men in Philadelphia. Jacoby et al. (2020)		**X**	**X**	**X**

2.7 Findings

The meta-ethnography produced four interrelated third order constructs: a) '*It's normal': Growing up and living in a violent neighbourhood*; b) *The experience of violence exposure on the mind and body*; c) *Strategies to survive psychological distress and violence*; d) *Expressions of emotion*. The third-order constructs are described below using illustrative quotes from participants to support the findings.

2.7.1 'It's normal': Growing up and living in a violent neighbourhood.

This theme relates to being born and raised in an environment where violence is an everyday occurrence. Black men discussed the young ages they were exposed to community violence and felt this exposure had taken them off course regarding prospective developmental and life course trajectories: "*You not supposed to see no murder at a young age. You not supposed to see a murder, period" (Smith, 2013, p.119).* The persistent nature of violence across participants' neighbourhoods meant as children they quickly acclimatised to the environment and witnessed violence as the norm. This did not change, with the men continuing to be exposed to violence in adulthood (Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2020).

The Black men identified with being from low-income, urban contexts. They saw their environment as a warzone. Every day was a battle for resources, respect, safety, and survival on the very same streets where they live, learn, work and play (Smith, 2013; Singletary, 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016). There was no reprieve from the violence and trauma as they remained situated within these neighbourhoods (Smith, 2013; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016). Some were able to distance themselves and live in an environment where the violence was tolerable.

> *But at the part we were in, we didn't get to see all of that. It was probably like a couple blocks up the way where all the violence was. You could like hear the gunshots and hear the police sirens and stuff. Nothing I couldn't handle (Smith, 2013, p.140).*

For those living in relatively safe areas, this perception of safety was undermined by the threat of violence just across the street. It was always in proximity (Smith, 2013; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016; Richardson et al., 2020).

Participants reported that violence had changed, becoming more menacing over time. There was no longer a code that came with violence. Daylight nor the company of family protected individuals from violence, nor did it protect them from witnessing and experiencing trauma (Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016). Being exposed to violence was a function of growing up in the wrong place at the wrong time. These are factors participants had little control over. Economic disadvantage and determinants of violence in low socioeconomic environments meant Black men faced increased risk of violence exposure, and traumatic stress (Smith, 2013; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016; Richardson et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Because of the violent nature of their environments, conversations typically reserved for older adults or those with terminal illnesses were happening for Black men. Participants' cumulative exposures to violence generated an understanding of their vulnerability as Black

men. They were conversing about death and dying because this was their reality: "*I knew what songs they wanted to play for their funeral 'cause that's what they would always tell me" (Smith, 2013, p.220).*

One of the trauma responses amongst this group was foreshortened future. Individuals did not expect to have a normal life span. Many men believed that Black men die young (Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016). This perception of only having a few potential years to live impacted their behaviours, which included intentionally becoming young fathers (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019; Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016; Richardson et al., 2020).

2.7.2 The experience of violence exposure on the mind and body.

This theme relates to the psychological and physical experiences which follow from exposure to violence. The Black men across all studies expressed experiencing what might be seen as post-traumatic stress symptomology due to violence exposure. Being easily startled, re-experiencing and avoidance were symptoms affecting this group (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020). The traditional diagnostic criteria for PTSD did not adequately capture the complexity and chronicity of trauma in the lives of these Black men. Given the pervasive nature of PTSD symptoms amongst this group, many perceived their behaviours as normal. They were seen as an inevitable byproduct of the streets (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Jacoby et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Exposure to violence often led to the constant activation of the fight-or-flight response to protect participants from the threat of violence. People would attempt to flight from the situation; whenever there was a perceived threat, the default reaction was to get up and run. Occasionally freeze would occur, which left people frozen as they were witnessing violence (Smith, 2013; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019; Singletary, 2020). The context in which the trauma response occurred also made a difference. Trauma reactivity expressed as running away, particularly from the police, led to increased vulnerability to police violence (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019).

Flashbacks and nightmares were distressing trauma responses leading to both emotional and physical reactions (Jiang et al., 2018; Patton et al., 2019; Jacoby et al., 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016). "*Flashbacks. Memories. Anxiety attacks. And my leg be hurtin'. I hear somebody talk about how they got shot. It just… any little thing that I hear, it just set me off" (Jiang et al., 2018, p.5).* With the flashbacks and nightmares came sleep issues. Participants reported serious changes in their ability to fall asleep and their quality of sleep (Richardson et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Jacoby et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016).

2.7.3 Strategies to survive psychological distress and violence.

This theme relates to the different ways in which the Black men in these studies attempted to deal with the psychological ramifications of the violence they were exposed to. Posttraumatic stress symptomology and responses to trauma often contributed to their decisions to use substances. People were struggling with memories and thinking about the violence they were privy to. Substances became a central coping strategy to manage trauma responses which increased due to the pervasive nature of their violent environments (Smith, 2013; Singletary, 2020; Bauer et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016; Jacoby et al., 2020). Black men across the studies masked their grief and trauma through substance use, with the most common substance being cannabis. Cannabis was used to escape daily realities of poverty, violence, and feelings of hopelessness. However, when cannabis was no longer sufficient in helping to manage these feelings, stronger substances were used (Xanax, ecstasy, Percocet, alcohol). Participants discussed drugs in a very casual manner highlighting the normalisation and habitual use of substances (Smith, 2013; Bauer et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016).

Due to the violent nature of their environments, many Black men resorted to restricting peer groups to a small circle of friends who they could trust with their lives: "*If you ain't got no loyalty in life, you don't really have too much, for real. Loyalty and love and respect. You gotta have them three*" (Smith, 2013, p.126; O'Neill et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018). The men put their bodies and minds on the line, as they risked their physical and

psychological safety to battle it out for one another to build trust. Some men went further and socially isolated themselves from friends and family to manage feelings of vulnerability (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2020).

Trust was an important factor for the Black men in these studies. Having trusted relationships in their communities provided support in dealing with psychological distress and violence. The men wanted to speak to professionals, but a sense of tension followed this. They needed trust to share their experiences and they didn't feel this was possible, limiting the opportunity for them to deal with their psychological distress. (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2020). A fear of being judged, as well as health professionals having little to no concept of the context in which they live were additional barriers (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2020; Patton et al., 2019; Jacoby et al., 2020; Jacoby et al., 2020).

Hypervigilance was one of the main coping mechanisms for this group of Black men (Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Richardson et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019). Living in a violent environment with a persistent threat of danger required them to be "*ready for whatever*" (Singletary, 2020, p.529). They constantly observed their environments to anticipate and quickly react to danger and violence. Hypervigilance therefore became a practical strategy to protect them from violence. The group's use of hypervigilance was not episodic, but rather a state of being (Smith, 2013; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016). In the same way they were alert to potential community violence from others, they were also aware they had to remain vigilant regarding police violence (Smith, 2013; Smith & Patton, 2016; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019; Wendel et al., 2022; Jiang et al., 2018). Their ability to react and respond to police violence was restricted. The societal power and authority of the police to produce ongoing consequences meant Black men were obligated to accept the physical and psychological pain perpetrated by the police. The lack of control, defencelessness and helplessness resulting from the power differential heightened the traumatic nature of these

encounters. Losing loved ones to police violence created an additional set of anxieties about safety and mortality (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Limited resources to change this misfortune perpetuated the trauma these Black men experienced on a regular occurrence (Smith, 2013; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). Instead of seeing the police as protectors from violence, they were perpetrators (Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019; Wendel at al., 2022).

Avoidance was another common strategy employed (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016; Richardson et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019; Jacoby et al., 2020). The group of Black men responded to traumatic loss and violence with cognitive avoidance and efforts to forget or minimise experiences. There was a practiced experience of "*brushing it off*" (Smith, 2013; Singletary, 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016). In addition to cognitive avoidance, physical avoidance was apparent. Their movement in neighbourhoods was restricted with efforts to avoid areas which evoked memories of violence they had been exposed to. The participants' violent communities created scenarios where neighbourhoods became synonymous with cemeteries. Reminders of loss and environmental triggers made navigating neighbourhoods an uncomfortable and exhausting process. Avoidance became a strategy to manage trauma and avoid having to deal with grief (Smith, 2013; O'Neill et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016).

Those that experienced violent injuries felt vulnerable, which was exacerbated by no longer having a reputation to fall on and the loss of respect from peers. To mitigate no longer feeling invincible, participants started to protect themselves by carrying weapons to avoid "*getting caught slipping*". The need to carry a weapon was driven by fear and no longer feeling safe, but also was a motivation to project strength. It became a protective factor to mitigate future harm and the symptoms of PTSD (O'Neill et al., 2020; Bauer et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Jiang et al., 2018).

2.7.4 Expressions of emotion.

This theme relates to different emotions evoked when exposed to violence and how they are expressed. After being exposed to violence, participants initially felt shocked and disbelief. Feeling shocked was the most common emotional response the group presented when being attacked or receiving news about a loved one being attacked or killed. The lack of anticipation surrounding deaths in particular elicited shock as there was no time to prepare themselves for the loss (Smith, 2013; Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Grief was still very intense and seemed to be deepened by years of independent attempts to process loss, as people did not seek formal support for dealing with their grief. Confronting the reality of loss required people to acknowledge their loved ones had gone which was not easy. Expressions of loss and grief showcased themselves through collective and individual grief rituals such as wearing memorial t-shirts with the deceased's face or watching videos of the deceased (Smith, 2013; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019). These rituals helped the men accept the reality of their peers no longer being around. The harder job was responding to the pain of the loss. If those that died were civilians or did not partake in community violence and so were not "*about that life*", or people were killed by the police, a sense of injustice accompanied the grief (Smith, 2013, p.133; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019).

Hearts of stone were developed following traumatic exposures to violence. To protect themselves from pain and vulnerability, the group of Black men avoided and numbed themselves from emotion, often through substance use (Smith, 2013; Smith Lee & Robinson, 2019; Bauer et al., 2020; Singletary, 2020; Smith & Patton, 2016). They presented very little emotion or affect when discussing death and violence. Many expressed difficulties in expressing emotion because of their feelings of emotional numbness.

Interlinked with previous themes are feelings of fear and distrust. The group of Black men viewed the world as a place filled with danger everywhere which impacted their self-

preservation. A lack of trust coupled with the realities of violence in the community meant people felt very paranoid (Smith, 2013).

Anger as an emotion was very prominent, alongside fearlessness. Masculine norms where anger is seen as an acceptable emotion to portray was evident (Smith, 2013; Jiang et al., 2018; Smith & Patton, 2016; Richardson et al., 2020; Lipscomb et al., 2019). The men wanted to be seen as tough and fearless in the context of the chaos they were in: "*It aint no fear, no sadness, none of that. It was just an angry emotion*" (Smith, 2013, p.131). They felt angry about being victimised by the police, angry loved ones had been killed, angry about the cards they had been dealt, angry that being Black had left them with no support.

2.8 Clinical Implications

This review highlighted important implications for clinical practice and service delivery when working with Black men and their psychological distress due to violence. It is vital the conceptualisation of trauma and PTSD is adapted to encompass the lived and living experiences of Black men living in violent communities. Currently, PTSD frameworks tend to focus on past traumas, thereby failing to validate and acknowledge the current, real danger Black men must navigate on a consistent basis (Singletary, 2020). It does not capture the significant traumas and the traumas yet to occur. The current framework is inadequate as it does not include an understanding of the ways Black men describe their mental health symptoms and their use of culturally rich terminology (Richardson et al., 2020). The alternative expressions of traumatic stress amongst Black men may be overlooked by clinicians. Screening and assessment tools should be informed by language that Black men use to describe traumatic stress symptoms (Smith & Patton, 2016).

Services need to appreciate the complex forms of trauma Black men are exposed to. If no adaptations are made to current conceptual frameworks to explain the numerous trauma responses from this population, many of these behaviours and 'symptoms' are likely to appear to others as sociopathic or antisocial, limiting the support they should be receiving

(Singletary, 2020). Professionals should remain mindful of the different contexts in which trauma may arise for Black men. By not recognising secondary trauma, professionals are failing to acknowledge significant experiences their clients go through to navigate their social worlds (Lipscomb et al., 2019).

Black men experience multiple traumatic stress symptoms due to chronic exposure to violence. Participants' coping strategies highlight the absence of mental health support readily available to Black men impacted by violence in their communities. Service providers need to develop therapeutic spaces that allow Black men to feel safe to discuss their violent experiences. Policy responses from mental health services should focus on building safety and establishing trust. Given Black men frequently move within and across systems such as education, and the CJS, the fact that trauma responses remain undisclosed is problematic and emphasises the need to develop better systems of care for this population (Smith, 2013).

Primary mental health care services in the UK tend to work with diagnoses and symptoms within the DSM-V (APA, 2013). If services were to view police violence as a traumatic stressor, this could support the detection of PTSD symptoms and trauma responses occurring from police interactions. This would advance understanding of the impact of this on communities, particular the Black community who are systematically targeted by the police. Recognising and publishing this form of trauma in a future DSM would hold services and society accountable for mitigating against this systemic problem affecting Black communities. An outcome could be co-creating interventions aimed at healing Black men from the resulting pain of police violence, protecting them from trauma perpetrated by statutory services. The current PTSD model needs to go beyond the individual, to acknowledge the existence of community-based trauma and institutional trauma which impacts individuals and society.

2.9 Evaluation and Conclusions of the Systematic Literature Review

This review is the first to examine published literature exploring Black men's experiences of psychological distress associated with violence. The findings synthesised offer a needed contribution to the understanding of Black men's mental health, highlighting the physical and emotional burden Black men carry due to repetitive exposure to community violence. A particular strength of the studies included was the exploration of psychological distress from an individual, family, community, and systemic perspective. The studies highlighted the dangers of remaining prescriptive with issues such as PTSD and how this is not always directly applicable to certain populations. The studies also highlighted the dangers of viewing Black men through a Eurocentric lens and not appreciating how trauma responses are viewed and expressed culturally. However, the findings should be approached with caution as they are specific to localised populations within the USA. There are recognised nuances in British and American experiences, meaning extraction from the USA context might overlook the sociocultural and racialised experiences of Black men residing in the UK (Myrie & Gannon, 2013).

2.10 Rationale for Current Study

All the studies included in the systematic review were conducted in the USA, emphasising the need for current research on the experiences of Black men in the UK. The synthesised studies did not mention the gang affiliated status of participants. Previous literature has suggested that gang involvement increases the likelihood of witnessing and perpetrating violence in the community (Naldrett & Wood, 2020), and of being violently victimised (Melde et al., 2009). This exposure to violence can elicit significant and severe trauma responses, leading some to meet the criteria for a diagnosis of PTSD. Despite the prevalence of gang affiliation in the UK, research is limited in comparison to the USA (Hallsworth & Young, 2004). Little is known about the mental state of those who are gang affiliated here in the UK (Wood & Alleyne, 2010).

Societal attention on gang affiliation has focused on perpetration of violence with minimal thought to the psychological wellbeing of this group (Beresford & Wood, 2016). Whilst one expects those on the receiving end of community violence to suffer trauma, researchers rarely explore whether those who are gang affiliated, whom can be perpetrators, witnesses, and victims of violence experience trauma. There is speculation being gang affiliated and involved in violence is likely to have a negative impact on psychological functioning (Beresford & Wood, 2016), but not enough research has explored this. It is paramount we build an evidence base which looks at people who are gang affiliated, particularly YBM, who are most at risk of being deemed criminals. This should be done in a holistic/contextual way, especially with a cohort often villainised and marginalised from society. It is important we hear from Black men themselves and provide platforms such as research, where they can be seen as experts in their lived experiences with capacity to inform service provision and policy. As mentioned previously, the voices of Black men have not been heard. The current research aims to listen to these experiences, again providing more rationale for its utility.

2.11 Aims of the Research and Research Questions

This research aimed to examine the experience of trauma relating to gang affiliated violence for YBM in the UK and how they make sense of their experiences. The research will explore the following research question: ***What are YBM's experiences of trauma related to gang affiliated, physical violence?*** Young adulthood is used to describe those aged 18-35. The vast majority of 18–29-year-olds, and 30–35-year-olds in the UK count themselves as 'young' (YouGov, 2018). This provided rationale to use this age range and to label it 'young'. Ashby (2020) also found being male, being aged under 35 and being Black were powerful predictors of being systematically targeted by institutions such as the police, creating more rationale for using this age group and understanding their experiences.

Four further sub-questions will be explored:

1. *How does the environment of YBM affect their trauma?*
2. *How do YBM make sense of their experiences of violent situations?*
3. *How do YBM make sense of trauma/PTSD?*
4. *How do YBM manage trauma from exposure to violent situations?*

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview

This chapter outlines the processes of investigating the research questions. The research design is outlined, including the rationale for the use of IPA, its theoretical underpinnings, and epistemological relevancy. The recruitment and data collection processes will be presented. This chapter also addresses ethical considerations and the expert by experience consultation which took place. The concluding section outlines data analysis and a quality appraisal of the current study.

3.2 The Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research methods explore the quality and texture of people's subjective experiences (Willig, 2017). This research was devised to explore how YBM make sense of gang affiliated violence and trauma. To achieve this, participant reflections detailing their subjective experiences was sought to produce rich data which may not have been obtained using quantitative methods (Hennink et al., 2020). A qualitative approach was deemed to be most suitable to encapsulate and contextualise rich information on the lived experiences of participants and for me to understand their sense-making (Padgett, 2016).

I was conscious of the limitations with quantitative methods. I did not want the voices of YBM to be reduced to numerical, statistical data. This would have limited my ability to make sense of contextual factors impacting their experiences. I am very much aware that when safety and comfortability are facilitated, Black men have strong, loud voices. However, society often curtails them and denies them opportunities to be heard. This research then became a unique opportunity to magnify the voices of YBM and contest societal narratives about YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence using qualitative methods to interpret their realities.

3.3 Consideration of Alternative Methodologies

Multiple qualitative methods, especially those privileging an in-depth focus on individual experience, were considered when exploring what design could best answer the research questions. A brief outline of these methodologies and rationale for the final choice of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) follows:

3.3.1 Participatory action research (PAR).

PAR focuses on individuals having dual roles where they are participants in research as well as research collaborators. PAR empowers participants and critiques systemic structures that disempower groups such as YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. It looks to find ways for these structures to be reformed (Halilovich, 2013). This method was well-fitted in answering the research questions and aligned with my values. However, the approach is known to require a lot of resource and labour (Kemmis et al., 2014) which was in limited capacity for me. I didn't feel I could do PAR justice with the time-constraints of this doctoral thesis.

3.3.2 Narrative analysis (NA).

NA focuses on storytelling from individuals and the process in which stories are presented based on narratives available to them (Smith, 2016). This method was considered because it values the subjective construction of accounts and focuses on how individual stories are co-constructed and interpreted within their social worlds (Frosh & Emerson, 2005). However, NA's focus on how experiences are storied, who they are constructed for, and their purpose was not felt to be completely suitable (Burck, 2005). IPA's ability to consider narrative as part of a wider process of sense-making was important for this study's research aims (Smith, 2011).

3.3.3 Grounded theory (GT).

GT constructs theory to generate explanations of social phenomena (Starks & Brown-Trinidad, 2007). GT provides a means of developing explanatory frameworks and develops theories in areas where there has been little research attention (Burck, 2005). However, my research aims were to privilege and give voice to the meaning and sense-making of participant experiences (the 'what') rather than the processes (the 'how'). IPA felt a more suitable fit to achieve this.

3.3.4 Discourse analysis (DA).

DA focuses on linguistic patterns in communication (Smith & Thompson, 2015). The emphasis is on language and how it is used. Language is analysed in relation to sociohistorical contexts (Cheek, 2004). DA and IPA share similarities in that attention to detail and language is valued. However, DA focuses heavily on the use of language in describing experiences (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008), whereas IPA views language as complimentary to conceptualising and sense-making in experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Because DA tends to focus on linguistic and discursive constructions, it was not used. It would have shifted the focus of centring the voices of YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence.

3.3.5 Thematic analysis (TA).

TA explores multiple experiences and creates meaningful patterns amongst data which is why it was considered (Braun et al., 2022). However, using TA would have resulted in broader descriptions of individual experiences (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011). The aim of my research was to study lived experiences in detail, with a more idiographic and interpretive focus. Therefore, IPA was considered most suitable.

3.4 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is experiential because it explores human experiences directly from the point of view of those experiencing the phenomena of interest (Reicher, 2000). It seeks to understand how individuals make sense of their social worlds (Smith, 2015); and the meaning attributed to experiences (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). IPA views individuals as embedded pieces within a relational world, and people create meaning when attempting to respond to this relational world (Willig, 2013). IPA research views participants as experts in their experiences, combining the phenomenological process of 'giving voice' and the interpretative process of sense-making (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

The next section will provide readers with the theory underpinning IPA to further provide understanding and justification for its use. IPA has three theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Smith et al., 2009).

3.4.1 Phenomenology.

Phenomenology is the study of experience from a first-person point of view (Connelly, 2010). IPA allows for an exploration of people's understanding of their experiences, seeking to gain an 'insider perspective' (Smith & Osborn, 2007). It gave me the opportunity to get a close and detailed understanding of YBM's experiences of gang affiliated violence and how they make sense of it. I as the researcher am an important part of the phenomenological experience. As human beings, we are all inescapably a 'person in context' (Narvaez, 2013). My value systems, beliefs and experiences will influence my position as a researcher. My experiences are always connected intersubjectively, meaning I am always 'in relation to' others and their interpretations.

3.4.2 Hermeneutics.

This approach relates to interpretation (Finlay, 2014). It is based on the premise that simple descriptions of experiences are not possible as every communication involves interpretation. It is impossible to interpret the world of others without an acknowledgement

that biases and preconceptions will inevitably shape these interpretations (Ho et al., 2017). IPA researchers are involved in constructing experiences with participants (Griffin & May, 2012). The interpretative element of IPA urges researchers to be explicit with readers about their biases and preconceptions, and the processes used to mitigate against these. (Smith et al., 2009). Reflexivity became a necessary tool in understanding my contribution to the interpretations being made.

When using IPA, the researcher engages in 'double hermeneutics', which is an acknowledgement that the researcher attempts to make sense of participant stories whilst the individual is also trying to make sense of their own experiences. 'First-order' meaning-making occurs when participants themselves attempt to make sense of their experience. 'Second order' meaning making occurs from researchers hearing and interpreting the direct experiences of participants. They attempt to make sense of the participant making sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). As gang affiliated violence and trauma are deeply connected with my experiences, IPA felt necessary whereby I could recognise participants' processes of interpretation (hermeneutics), whilst acknowledging my own process of interpreting these interpretations (the double hermeneutic).

3.4.3 Idiography.

An idiographic approach is a thorough, systematic in-depth analysis committed to detail. It is concerned with each participant's uniqueness and the lens is focused solely on the individual (Smith, 2015). It also emphasises the value of people's personal accounts and perspectives, in their own contexts and on their own terms (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Single cases can be intrinsically interesting and reveal factors that would be neglected in a group. IPA has an interest in understanding experiences of particular people in particular circumstances, and a belief this is best achieved by focusing on single cases to be analysed individually before making comparisons.

3.4.4 Limitations of IPA

I have provided a thorough rational for the appropriate use of IPA within this research. However, it is still important to highlight its limitations. IPA relies heavily on the use of language. It requires participants and researchers to have the necessary language to capture, share and interpret experiences (Willig, 2013). This felt vital within this study with the London slang and cultural idioms used. I questioned what the outcome would have been if I didn't share the same 'language' as participants. IPA also assumes the use of language is enough to express the complexity of participants' experiences. Participants may not be able to verbalise the nuances of their experiences adequately.

A tension occurring within the use of IPA is dualism. On one hand, researchers are expected to be committed to idiography and value individual experiences of sense-making. On the other, they are also expected to find connections amongst these experiences. For each theme generated, quotes from several participants should be included to hold on to first-order constructs highlighting direct experiences (Tuffour, 2017).

3.4.5 Reflexivity.

The theoretical underpinnings of IPA complemented my critical realist epistemological position to this research. I was seeking greater clarity and understanding of YBM's experiences whilst acknowledging my strengths and limitations in having direct access to their reality. Due to my insider perspective, I was aware my personal biases may have impacted the analysis of the data and the construction of the findings. Therefore, it was important for me to remain as transparent as possible by completing a reflective diary (Appendix A). I was mindful of how my perceived similarities with participants could have led to me making numerous assumptions about their experiences. However, I also held in mind I was an outsider, being a trainee clinical psychologist and having a lived experience at a different time. These identities of being an inside-and-outside researcher may have conflicted with one another (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). I considered how my understanding

of trauma responses has informed my world view and how I interpret others' engagement with the reality of trauma and PTSD. This kept me aligned with the critical realist epistemology underpinning this thesis. Transparency and leaning on my supervisory team helped with addressing my interpretations. To further consider the potential influence of my insider researcher position, and to enhance the rigour of my study, my primary supervisor coded a transcript, which then allowed us to compare interpretations. With my supervisor being a white woman, it was helpful for me to explore her interpretations and my potential influence on the findings. Even though there were personal interpretations influenced by our different social identities and life experiences, there was congruence between our understanding of the contexts behind the participant's experiences and the felt emotion elicited from reading the participant's transcript. This helped validate the efficacy of the bracketing process and my attempts to be somewhat objective.

3.5 Expert by Experience Consultation

Having individuals with lived experiences relevant to a phenomenon of interest is invaluable in improving research processes and outcomes (Trivedi & Wykes, 2002). I was fortunate to be put in touch with two individuals who described themselves as former gang members from South London. They were willing to be consultants as they had insight into gang affiliation. It was important the consultant roles did not feel tokenistic, and payment was offered for their time and wisdom in the study.

The feedback from consultants was valuable in highlighting what was experienced positively and what improvements could be made. The consultations consisted of refining the questions which I had developed, to ensure the language and concepts used were accessible. Discussing the questions with my consultants and seeing their responses to the questions brought the research to life. It developed my skills of active listening and curiosity when listening to somebody else express their lived experiences and the emotions that come with it. The consultation afforded me the opportunity to think about the clarity and length of my questions, which informed the interviews.

3.6 Recruitment

Participant recruitment was achieved using purposive sampling, a non-random sampling method that identifies individuals best placed to discuss the phenomenon of interest (Etikan et al., 2016). As the group of participants required in an IPA is small and specific, recruitment tends to occur through referrals from gatekeepers and by other participants (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Due to the target population for this research and time pressures to complete the work, it was anticipated recruitment would be the one of the biggest challenges. For this reason, the recruitment strategy was thorough, and a multitude of recruitment strategies were employed. A research flyer (Appendix B) and research video were created (Appendix C), emphasising the importance of distributing different forms of information.

3.6.1 Social media.

The initial phase of recruitment consisted of advertising the research via social media. The platforms chosen were LinkedIn, Twitter, TikTok and Instagram. Research accounts were created for the sole purpose of recruitment, which were then closed when recruitment had come to an end. I chose these social media platforms because of their considerable reach, and they provided a space for anonymity if people wanted to contact me to discuss the research (Bender et al., 2017). The social media accounts of third sector organisations and charities with access to potential participants were contacted via their social media pages. A charity contacted me through Twitter and the Founder/CEO gave me his phone number and email address to contact him. This recruitment strategy produced all participants.

Popular influencers were also contacted via these social media platforms, and I distributed the research flyer to them. I did this because influencers have the power to reach a vast number of people whilst influencing opinion on phenomena. Influencers speaking about mental health struggles can encourage the public to seek support (Horgan &

Sweeney, 2010). By approaching influencers, it was hoped they could help overcome the potential stigma and secrecy surrounding mental health amongst YBM who are gang affiliated. Influencers were approached from a variety of fields encompassing Black British culture, such as those in the music and radio industry, those on podcasts, and those working in fashion and comedy. The research flyer was shared with influencers to see if they would be willing to promote the research amongst their followers. Details of how to directly contact the researcher were included. Unfortunately, no influencers responded to my invitations.

3.6.2 Email.

The Fighting Knife Crime directory (Fighting Knife Crime London, 2023) was used to find organisations in London working with those exposed to gang-affiliated violence. The term 'gang' was searched within the directory and the organisations generated were contacted via email. An email template consisted of a thorough description about the research and included the research flyer and a link of the video (Appendix C). Youth offending services and integrated gang units in London were also contacted this way.

Once organisations and gatekeepers made contact from emails and the available advert, a time was arranged for an informal discussion via the phone or online. This allowed people to better get a sense of who I am and my ethos/values. These discussions allowed for introductions, providing further information on the study and inclusion criteria for participants. The outcome of this was organisations and gatekeepers forwarding my research to other organisations they felt could be helpful with recruitment.

3.6.3 Challenges in recruitment.

One of the biggest challenges with recruitment was a lack of response from organisations and gatekeepers. I found myself regularly sending emails waiting for a response, which often did not come. Some organisations responded after several emails. Something I became aware of in January 2023, 5 months before this thesis was due, was my emails had been going to people's spam/junk folder. As my university email address is

not widely recognised, it was being filtered into spam/junk. This meant for months, people were unaware of my email and thus research. My emails going to spam/junk could have contributed to the lack of response I was receiving. Nobody responded to the research flyer and video posted on social media. YBM may have not wanted to get involved thinking they may incriminate themselves by participating.

3.7 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria provided homogeneity without being too restrictive (table 10). As the research in this field is heavily limited, broadening the approach made more sense than having a specific focus in mind (e.g., only looking at those of a certain age or living in a certain area of London). There is a lot of research exploring gang affiliation amongst those in their teens and under 18. The justification of including participants over 18 was to access the views of those who may have spent more time being gang affiliated and thus were more likely to have experienced psychological distress and related mental health problems. With research showing Black males struggling to talk about their experiences, it was presumed those over 18 would be more sufficient in providing reflective and honest responses to the research questions. Participants were excluded from the study if they had an open, ongoing criminal investigation. This was to minimise any possible disclosure of explicit details relating to a criminal investigation which would need to be reported to the police. I assumed the participants who conformed to the inclusion criteria would also speak English. Even though this assumption was validated by the participants, it was nonetheless an inclusion criterion that should have been stipulated. Participants would be required to speak English because of the reliance of language and meaning making in IPA (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 10:

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Interview Participants

Inclusion	**Exclusion**
Identify as male	People who have an open, ongoing criminal investigation
Aged 18-35 years old	Anyone in prison
Identify as Black or from African or Caribbean Heritage which includes dual/multiple heritage	Anyone under 18
Identify as a member of, or affiliated to a gang in London	
Have been exposed to violence because of gang affiliation	

3.8 Participants

In total 8 YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence were recruited, consistent with the recommended sample size of six to ten participants for sufficiently rich data analysis within a professional doctorate (Smith et al., 2009). All participants were provided by the same third-sector organisation. The Founder/CEO contacted all the participants to let them know about my research and provided them with the participant information sheet and consent form. If they were interested, we had an initial discussion about the rationale behind the research and its aims.

All participants were male, with participants aged between 19-32. Pseudonyms and ages of participants are presented in Table 11. To enhance inclusion and collaboration, participants were given the opportunity to select their own pseudonyms in the form of a country. This helped maintain anonymity, with participants expressing appreciation of this.

Table 11

Participant Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	**Age**
ZAMBIA	32
TRINIDAD	22
JAMAICA	21
AMERICA	19
BRAZIL	19
ISTANBUL	28
GHANA	32
SOUTH AFRICA	32

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Hertfordshire Health and Human Sciences Ethics Committee (protocol number: LMS/PGT/UH/05089) (Appendix D). Participants were provided with the ethics protocol number on the information sheet and contact details of who to contact with concerns about the research.

3.9.1 Informed consent.

Prospective participants were sent the participant information sheet, which outlined the aims and rationale of the research, what they could expect from participant involvement and how the information provided would be stored and used (see Appendix E).

Building a rapport with participants is helpful to put them at ease and to start gaining trust (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I felt it was important for me to have informal conversations beforehand to begin this process. Before interviews took place, participants were again reminded of the details on the participant information sheet. If happy to proceed after making an informed decision, they were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix F).

3.9.2 Right to withdraw.

Participants were made aware should they wish to withdraw their interview, they had up until the analysis process had begun. This ensured there was enough data for analysis as the loss of interviews at this stage would have resulted in the flawed use of IPA.

3.9.3 Confidentiality.

Information regarding confidentiality and its limits were provided to participants, both verbally and in writing. The interviews were held with only the researcher and participant being present. All interviews took place in the same location which was a spacious room with art on the wall, a TV, and a PlayStation. Privacy was ensured by giving the gatekeepers a 90-minute window in which they couldn't disturb the interview. The room was soundproof and was away from the entrance. Participants also had their backs to the door so if anyone walked past, they wouldn't be easily identifiable. All participants provided pseudonyms, ensuring no data was personally identifiable. They were not asked for identifiable information, with every effort made to protect their confidentiality. I informed participants that the findings would be written up in the form of a dissertation, which would include anonymised interview transcripts. I also let them know of my plans to disseminate the findings at conferences, and within publications, and that their anonymity would remain intact.

3.9.4 Data protection.

I stored the electronic data on an encrypted external hard drive, only accessible to myself. All physical data collected was scanned to an encrypted laptop and stored in the encrypted external hard drive. The physical data was then shredded. I informed participants of this process to remain transparent with how I was managing their data. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), all the data originating from participants (audios, transcriptions, codes) was kept securely to maintain confidentiality.

3.9.5 Inducement.

£20 vouchers were provided to participants to thank them for their participation. The issue of inducement had been discussed with the research faculty, my supervisory team, and my consultants. As this is a population sometimes engaged within nefarious activities that can produce substantial amounts of money and wealth, the amount provided was not considered financial inducement. I wanted to offer it as a sign of respect for their time.

3.9.6 Potential Distress.

Before interviews commenced, I asked participants to share any specific needs or requests they could think of to make the interview more comfortable, and accommodations were made. Example requests included providing food and drink and reviewing the interview schedule in advance (Appendix G). All participants were shown the interview schedule, so they were aware of the topics being covered. This appeared to put them at ease. Providing explicit information about the interview schedule also meant they were in a greater informed position to explore their participation. Questions were based on searches of the existing literature relating to the research question and in line with IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 2009). These were then adapted in consultation with my research team. The research team considered the potential emotional impact of the questions, devising strategies to limit potential distress. Breaks during the interview were offered so participants didn't feel obliged to just sit with possible unease and discomfort. It was also emphasised to participants they did not have to talk about anything they did not feel comfortable with. None of the interviews were paused or discontinued as there was no evident distress portrayed by participants. Following the interview, all participants were provided with the debrief sheet (Appendix H) and support services in case they were feeling distressed after the interviews (Appendix I).

This project is very close to my heart and as a result I felt I had to be aware of my own emotional wellbeing. Being aware and feeling emotionally present within the interviews helped me be more curious but also helped me challenge the normalisation and

desensitisation I was coming across. By being conscious of my own emotions, I felt I was doing justice to this research and the sense-making that occurred. The reflective journalling helped with this, as did socialising with friends and frequent trips to the gym to physically release tension.

3.9.7 Risk.

During informal discussions before interviews and before consent forms had been signed, I reminded participants of the boundaries of confidentiality and that if I was concerned for their safety or the safety of others, I would have to breach this confidentiality. They were also informed if they disclosed criminal activity, I had a duty of care to contact the police. This was a tough conversation to have with this client group's mistrust of healthcare professionals and statutory services. The research team contemplated possible risks occurring to both the researcher and participants. Certain safeguards were employed to minimise these potential risks in the form of a risk assessment, including consideration of the location of the interviews and checking in and out with my research supervisors (Appendix J). No risks occurred from any of the participants!

3.10 Interviews

Within IPA there is a search for first-person subjective accounts of specific embodied life experiences. In-depth interviews are considered the most suitable source of data to gather rich, first-person accounts of phenomena (Smith & Nizza, 2022). Semi-structured interviews were used within this IPA research because they allow researchers to be curious and explore lines of enquiry whilst having the flexibility to adapt questions which provides a fuller, richer account of experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2015).

3.10.1 Data collection.

IPA interviews should be conversational in nature (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008), which can then lead to participants telling their individual narratives using their own words (Smith et al., 2009). Podcast equipment was used because it was considered as a positive

way of inducing engagement and provides a relaxed environment to discuss intense topics. There has been an uprise in podcasts from those previously gang affiliated (e.g., Ok Let's Talk (Tricky, 2022-present), RTM podcast show (Young Spray, 2021-present). Traditional interviewing styles with the use of a dictaphone were deliberately avoided to not mimic police interviews, which participants may have been exposed to. The hope was not to mirror such traumatic environments.

The interviews began with closed questions collecting ages and information about gang affiliation and trauma. My primary supervisor and I questioned whether to collect this data verbally or through pre-interview questions. I decided collecting this data verbally would support rapport building and familiarise participants with the interview process. Open questions were used to provide an in-depth exploration of the participant's experiences, prioritising the sense-making process. Prompts were used if participants expressed confusion about the question or if there was silence, which encouraged more reflection and exploration. Follow-up questions were used to gather additional information on aspects I found interesting but had not been elaborated on. This was also to check clarification, to ensure I was not making assumptions about what had been said. This allowed me to authenticate their meaning-making and experiences without straying into the territory of analysis or interpretation (Smith et al., 2009).

Flashcards were also used for engagement and to support participants in articulating their understanding. They contained words related to the research questions (Area, Safety, Gang-affiliated, Attacked, Police, Threats, Witness, Committing Violence, Trauma/PTSD, Unusual experiences, Managing Trauma/PTSD, Talking to People, Anything Else). These were used as visual aids when questions were asked as people often struggle to articulate their involvement in violence or the emotional impact of a violent event (Harding, 2014). At the end of the interview, participants were asked whether there was anything else they wanted to say that wasn't expressed. Participants were also given the opportunity to feedback their experience and I left time to answer any questions or concerns.

Participants were offered a choice of face-to-face or online video interviews. All interviews took place in person, which meant non-verbal communication could be observed (Archibald et al., 2019). All interviews were in the same location provided by the gatekeeper, which was a third sector organisation. As mentioned previously, the location adhered to privacy and confidentiality protocols. This was deemed to be a safe environment. As I am aware of the importance in meeting this client group where they are at, I remained flexible agreeing to interviews on appropriate days (weekdays) and at appropriate times (9am-5pm) chosen by the participants and gatekeeper. Interviews lasted between 22-87 minutes.

3.10.2 Reflections on the interviewing process.

After each interview I made use of a reflective diary, noting possible themes that arose, how I was feeling before, during and after the interview and what kind of rapport I felt I had built with each participant. Ellingson (2017) recommends detailing physical responses as well as emotional responses occurring from interviews. The reflective diary allowed me to think about how my own embodiment might have impacted the research process and my interviews. I was aware of moments of connection and disconnection which guided my reflections.

3.11 Data Analysis

Guidelines for IPA recommended by Smith and colleagues (2009) were followed, alongside ongoing consultation with the supervisory team and IPA workshops facilitated by Rachel Starr, an IPA expert from Birkbeck university. Several stages have been outlined for conducting analysis in IPA research, which was adhered to in the current study (table 12). This was by no means a linear process, but rather a cyclical and iterative one, moving back and forth between words and sentences, individual transcripts, and overall findings – the part and the whole (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 12

Stages of IPA analysis

Stage	Procedures
1	This stage required me to formulate research questions based on my phenomenon of interest and required me to think about my subjective perspectives on this topic.
2	I chose a homogenous sample with direct experiences of the phenomenon who could express their sense-making.
3	I conducted semi-structured interviews with participants and transcribed the interview data.
4	The data was analysed by 1) familiarising and immersing myself in the participants' direct experiences. I listened to each recording multiple times, and then read each transcript multiple times. 2) Descriptive, exploratory comments were made, 3) which was then followed by creating experiential statements. 4) I repeated the same process for all 7 other transcripts. 5) I then identified experiential statements across all accounts. 6) I found connection and clustered experiential statements into Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) and Group Experiential Themes (GETs) with subthemes.
5	I produced narrative accounts of the GETs using direct quotes from participants to ground the research in their lived experiences and to magnify their voices. These GETs provided a coherent framework to understand the experience of gang-affiliated violence and the subsequent trauma/PTSD.
6	I then made connections back to the existing literature and acknowledged my subjective perspectives.

3.11.1 Reflections of data analysis process.

Immersing myself in the primary data allowed me to capture the essence of what I believed was shared. Any initial thoughts or comments noted from the interview were recorded in my reflective diary in attempt to bracket these distractions as much as possible from what was said by the participant. I found it helpful to discuss my exploratory notes and experiential statements with my primary supervisor for the discovery of new perspectives. I used Microsoft word throughout the analysis process, developing exploratory notes and experiential statements, which subsequently led to the formation of PETs and GETs (Appendix K). Turning my exploratory notes into experiential statements required a high level of abstraction and conceptualisation in my attempts to understand and make sense of

participant experiences whilst trying to stay grounded to the data (Smith & Osborn, 2015). It was important I reflected on my interpretations and experiential statements. I regularly cross-checked these against the direct quotes from participants to ensure they remained authentic. This was me attempting to move from specific parts (words) to the whole (sections of text) in a circular hermeneutic manner (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Finding connections between PETs and then grouping them one interview at a time, allowed me to judge similarities and differences. In keeping with the idiographic commitment of IPA, I attempted to bracket any conceptions formed from the previous interview and returned to focusing on the interview at hand. When thoughts about a previous interview came up whilst analysing the existing one, I would record these comments separately.

3.12 Assessment of Quality of Current Study

Yardley's (2000) four-component framework is commonly cited within IPA research to assess the quality of qualitative research. It is offered as an appropriate tool used to check the validity of an IPA study. This research was assessed with this framework to assess quality.

3.12.1 Sensitivity to context

IPA acknowledges that societal and macro-level influences impact individual sense-making, as well as the relationship between researchers and participants (Smith et al., 2009). An SLR was incorporated to explore societal and historical discourses surrounding Black men and their experiences of physical violence and psychological distress. The SLR paid homage to the available research on this phenomenon, but also highlighted gaps in knowledge about gang affiliated violence which the current study sought to explore. This created a rationale for the relevance of my research questions (Tracy, 2010). The current research aimed to understand the sociocultural experiences of YBM, acknowledging sensitivity to context.

Attention was paid to the individual needs and preferences of each participant, with the acknowledgement of language being an example. This helped with ensuring participant experiences were respectful and accessible (Tracy, 2010). The power dynamics between the expert participants and myself was carefully considered. The participants' storytelling and experience was always at the fore, but at times I took the lead and guided the interview to ensure the data collected was still relevant in answering the research question.

3.12.2 Commitment and rigour.

Commitment to the study was demonstrated by immersing myself in the data and transcribing and analysing the interviews. I independently coded an interview and so did my supervisor, and the results were compared. This was beneficial for us to see how experiential statements and themes had emerged from the data. I am confident in my interpretations of the transcripts, but I am also aware this is my perspective. Others viewing the transcripts will interpret them differently.

Choosing IPA for my methodology shows a commitment to rigour, given it is rooted in theoretical underpinnings of hermeneutics. Immersion and interpretation led to me spending a lot of time with the data. I showed an acknowledgment and awareness of my positioning in relation to the research. I was careful in my efforts to employ a strict process of analysis, using the IPA groups led by Rachel Starr.

3.12.3 Transparency and coherence.

Transparency is a fundamental prerequisite of quality research. I have attempted to provide transparency through the thorough detailing of the methodological and analytical processes. I have also attempted to be transparent in my findings and presenting them in a clear and coherent manner. I have owned my theoretical positions, my experiences, and assumptions as the principal researcher (Tracy, 2010). My constructed view of the experiences of YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence is influenced by my experiences growing up. My gender, ethnicity, social class and understanding of gang life in London all

contribute to how I see the world. Transparency has also been demonstrated with comprehensive examples within the appendices. The introduction and SLR provide a coherent, funnelled argument on the relevance of this research. Ultimately, the coherence of this research is in the hands of the reader and will be judged accordingly. What I will say is that rationales, the choice of methodology and the choice of analysis to answer this research question have been made explicit.

3.12.4 Impact and importance.

Research should be far-reaching and have utility. These are factors that define the value of good, quality research (Yardley, 2000). Qualitative literature surrounding the experience of gang affiliated violence and psychological wellbeing is still in its infancy but there is a growing body of researchers seeking to explore this phenomenon. I am confident this research has authentically captured the voices of all participants. I hope it can resonate with many other YBM who have never been afforded the spaces to share their stories. The introduction provides a dire picture of how services are not meeting the mental health needs of those exposed to gang affiliated violence. The in-depth exploration of experience and sense-making has provided greater understanding of this community issue. In my mind, there is little doubt of the importance and impact of this research.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This chapter presents the findings of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) of eight YBM's experiences of trauma related to gang affiliated violence. Through different stages of analysis and interpretation, three Group Experiential Themes (GETs) and their subthemes were identified. This chapter will focus on providing an understanding of each GET, using direct quotes from participants to evidence my interpretations and keep the research grounded in the lived experiences of experts.

As discussed previously, my influence within the analytic process is acknowledged. My attempts to make sense of participants' sense-making are based on my own perspective of how I view and interpret the world. This view is aligned with the critical realist epistemology within this thesis. Despite this, I have done everything in my power to offer a credible and coherent account of the lived experiences and sense-making of participants. My account provides one interpretation of how YBM experience gang affiliated violence, trauma, and PTSD. I am aware other researchers will inevitably generate alternative themes to those presented (Snelgrove, 2014). None are right or wrong: they are an extension of our interpretations and sense-making but also of the safety and comfortability of participants to express authentic sense-making. The findings represent the degree of convergence and divergence within and across themes and participants' accounts (Table 13).

Table 13

A summary of the GETs and Subthemes

Group Experiential Theme	**Subtheme**
The Continuous Dance with Fear: Understanding Trauma in an Unforgiving Environment	The Imprint of Trauma The Unspoken Normalisation of Living with Violence The Tapestry of Emotional and Behavioural Responses

Through the Prism of Systemic Injustice, Environment and Power	Walking the Tightrope of Socioeconomic Struggle In the Maze of Power and Bias The Labyrinth of Systemic Injustice
On the Road to Recovery	Finding Order and Calm within the Storm The Ebb and Flow of Expectations and Realities of Therapy

4.1 Group Experiential Theme 1: The Continuous Dance with Fear: Understanding Trauma in an Unforgiving Environment

This theme delves into the intricacies of life as a continuous and often terrifying dance with fear, highlighting the deep-seated and multifaceted nature of trauma occurring from gang affiliated violence. From understanding the complex dynamics of trauma and PTSD to strategic thinking within dangerous environments, this theme shows how individuals manage to continue their dance with fear, transforming and adapting as they journey through an unforgiving socioeconomic environment.

4.1.1 The imprint of trauma.

This subtheme discusses the profound imprint of trauma and its psychological consequences, developed from exposure to gang affiliated violence. It shows how participants make sense of their experiences and the chronic nature of these hardships. The YBM in this research attempted to make sense of concepts such as 'trauma' and 'PTSD'. Attempts were made to define trauma, "*seeing it as consistent because if you don't deal with it or acquire help for it or process it then it's going to be with you forever… and it's very real" (Ghana)*. Participants articulated what trauma meant to them, with an emphasis on the longstanding nature of it. Istanbul, South Africa, and Zambia gave a similar account to Ghana, speaking about the lasting imprint of trauma. The narratives of these four participants suggest an awareness of trauma shaping their identity and psychological state over time:

I would define trauma as more or less the harsh experiences, or the rough experiences one has … um, something that like holds … I would say trauma is something that stays with them, comes back … might come and go …um, that's part of trauma (Istanbul).

so, for me, I think trauma is just lived experiences that sit in your sub-conscious … but they form part of your everyday habits without you realising sometimes (South Africa).

Yeah, it's just like triggers that have changed you over the course of time (Zambia).

As a result of exposure to gang-affiliated violence, some of the participants believed they had PTSD: "*I know from past experiences that I've been through… I've got some sort of PTSD … like you just have flashbacks, and you just think about the times that's happened before" (Jamaica)*. Participants described their own understandings of PTSD, for example Brazil related it to overthinking and stress, whilst also acknowledging its wide range of potential triggers.

It's what PTSD means innit … get me … you're just over-thinking … you're stressed … after a while it's gonna take an effect on you…. but the thing is, PTSD … it can be caused by anything really. It's like it just depends on who you are and how you take things (Brazil).

Brazil's excerpt emphasises the importance of individual interpretation and emotional processing in the development of PTSD.

Trinidad and Istanbul both used metaphors to portray their understanding of PTSD: "*PTSD is like – here's a book and here's all the bad things that have happened, and the book is just flicking, it flicks, flicks… and every page is a picture or a little like action of something bad that's happened…"* (Trinidad). This suggested PTSD involves vivid and intrusive memories which are difficult to forget or move past. Istanbul used a metaphor of PTSD as "*a scratch from an incident that you might have dealt with… it's the aftermath that*

you deal with from that incident that stays with you more long-term". He acknowledged the transformational effect of PTSD on his character, indicating the all-encompassing nature of PTSD which can affect various aspects of self-perception and social interaction. *"That's what I would say PTSD can do due to the trauma that you have faced it then affects the sort of character, it has different impacts and changes on you".*

Istanbul has been diagnosed with 'PTSD' and Trinidad with 'Complex-PTSD' which he said was a "*disease"* that "*infested your mind and body"*, and one in which "*you can't escape"*. This suggested a sense of powerlessness and lack of control over his own thoughts and emotions. Based on his description, I interpreted PTSD as a condition caused by deep and scarring traumas so intense, they stick in your mind.

> *It can be like you're re-living completely something that's happened in the past... and it can fuck up your sleep, it can break you down, it can even make you more violent, it can even make you suicidal because it's like you keep re-living these traumas, and it was already as bad as it was the first time (Trinidad).*

Whilst there was an element of acceptance from Trinidad regarding a formal diagnosis, both Zambia and Istanbul resisted this categorisation. Zambia saw his reactions as adaptations and a "*natural reaction"* to his violent environment and circumstances rather than a mental health disorder.

> *It just needs to be understood that that is a way of life… it's just you adapt to your environment… I don't feel I personally have PTSD and all of these things … it's just the mind's natural reaction to work with things that you've been through (Zambia).*

Istanbul suggested there was a significant shift in his mental state following his introduction to the concept of trauma and PTSD; the knowledge gained appeared to have

made him more aware of his psychological experiences, causing a shift in his internal narrative and self-perception.

> *Since I was stabbed, I didn't really think I had it – and I feel like because this was kind of even thrown on me and I started LISTENING to it … it started messing with me because up until the stages of the trauma I dealt with, if I didn't know anything about it, I felt like it wouldn't have been on my mind, the mental side of things (Istanbul).*

Ghana explicitly linked gang affiliation and the potential for trauma:

> "*I guess being gang affiliated would mean you would have naturally been through things that you shouldn't have been through or shouldn't have experienced … it can be something as simple as someone getting stabbed in front of you, where, because you're gang affiliated, you can get stabbed by being affiliated. You could be there when your people are stabbing people".*

His comment asserts that being gang affiliated would often entail experiencing situations inherently traumatic, reflecting an understanding that the connection between gang involvement and trauma is highly likely and an ordinary part of life for those gang affiliated.

Participants also shared their observations of how trauma manifests behaviourally in people exposed to gang affiliated violence. Various "*behavioural problems" (Istanbul)* and characteristics were listed. Ghana described excessive consumption of substances suggesting a means to escape pain or current reality. He also discussed changes in personality and cognition, referring to them as '*tapped*'.

> *Excessive smoking of cannabis. Alcohol … like excessive alcohol consumption to I guess take the pain away, or I guess to make themselves go to sleep, or to make themselves not be a normal being and go somewhere else mentally, not be conscious of the current situation right now if that makes sense, to*

take their mind elsewhere. I think another one could be if someone was 'tapped'… I know this person is not all there … it could be someone's appearance. It could be the way they speak; it could be what they're speaking about (Ghana).

Istanbul, Jamaica, and Zambia all spoke about seeing paranoia and people be "*mad anti-social" (Jamaica)* as behaviours they witness in those exposed to gang affiliated violence.

Some of them are anti-social, so they're not sociable. They don't really trust people. They don't want to go out. Paranoia … isolates himself … they take extra measures (Istanbul).

Like some people would be anti-social, you know what I mean... and that's like one sign that I know that someone's going through something (Jamaica).

Istanbul and Trinidad also witnessed increased aggression and violence as a response to trauma experienced from gang affiliated violence:

…it made me like prone to being violent like I know, if I have to cross that line of being violent, it's not going to be something that scares me (Trinidad).

Another way of how I look at things and people who are dealing with trauma and PTSD is how they react to people – they become violent, and we don't always necessarily understand why they're violent, why they are now the biggest gang members, why they feel like they have something to prove... it's because of some of the traumas (Istanbul).

All the participants spoke about the profound and enduring impact of trauma resulting from gang affiliated violence, stating *some of these things have stayed with us for years (Istanbul)*. They acknowledged the presence of trauma in their lives and the inevitability of it, seeing it as a "*part of life everyone goes through" (Brazil)*. They showed an understanding that "*everyone just takes it in differently" (Brazil)*, and that *"it'll just come out in various ways,*

at different times and like at different points in different situations" (Ghana). Trauma impacting individuals differently was a sentiment also acknowledged by Istanbul. However, his understanding of trauma emphasised its ability to shape one's identity: *Trauma is something that can affect someone in so many different ways … um, trauma plays with a person's identity (Istanbul).*

Brazil described a deep-seated fear and stress linked to the environment he grew up in. This was reflected in the physical symptoms of a racing heart experienced as soon as he got back to his local area:

> *it's got to the point now my heart just races naturally… soon as I touch the area or if I know I'm coming to the area, my heart's racing. I've left the area once, yeah… the calm I felt like I didn't have to worry about NOTHING because I knew that I was just good, just in a good place. Touch the area again (clicks his tongue) … boy! Heart was racing. I didn't want to leave the house (Brazil).*

There seemed to be a consensus that trauma is not just about the superficial scratches visible struggles leave, but also about the deep indelible marks engraved into people's lives. Istanbul was grappling with the effects of trauma due to his daily reminder in the form of his physical scars after being stabbed multiple times. The frequency of similar violent incidents in his environment would often trigger painful reminders of his own experience:

> *I feel like in your mind, you feel like, yeah – it's happened – even though you're dealing with it … "ah, yeah, but it's happened already like, why are you still talking about it?" … that sort of attitude. Not for me inside, not for me internally … I think about this every day … I deal with it every day. I look at my scars in the mirror every day and even if I don't think about it, it's going to come eventually (Istanbul).*

Continuing to illustrate the theme of the imprint of trauma, Jamaica described the harrowing reality of living amidst deaths, potential imprisonment, police brutality and "*other*

traumas". His tone and language hinted at being overwhelmed by his exposure to traumatic events.

> *you know how it gets with deaths and … going to … like going to jail and all these things like that … it's those … you've got them traumas and other traumas in the ends and that…it's just so much (Jamaica).*

Participants also provided a window into their inner world, allowing me to see how trauma can dramatically alter one's sense of self and perception of reality. The effects extend beyond the immediate aftermath, continuing to shape life experiences long after the traumatic events have passed.

> *Yeah, yeah … I think … I think to a certain extent it does follow me because even though I'm in this new place, I'm still wary I might see someone that I know (Istanbul)*
>
> *when I go to places, I'm way more wary of my surroundings … I'm very conscious of even what conversations I engage … do you know what I mean, especially if it comes to that gang culture stuff (South Africa).*

Overall, this subtheme delves into the sense-making processes for those who have been exposed to gang affiliated violence and indicates the complexities of living with PTSD and how traumatic events, particularly those deeply rooted in gang affiliated experiences, leave enduring imprints on daily life.

4.1.2 The unspoken normalisation of living with violence.

This subtheme captures participants' experiences of a harsh reality where gang-affiliated violence is a constant presence leading to issues with trauma and PTSD. It highlights a reality where the abnormal becomes normalised; violence becomes a relentless companion to their environments: *"It's normal innit… because after a while, youre just immune to it … it's just like everything is normal … some people will say like this life is not normal, but I think it's normal" (Jamaica).* The

ways in which participants spoke about this normalisation wasn't about acceptance but rather an adaptation to an unfortunate reality. Normalisation appeared to help participants navigate their everyday lives within a context of constant threats to their safety and well-being. America referenced his block as a "*fucking shoot-out range",* indicating the extreme violence he is privy to. His interview presented his ongoing awareness of violence in his environment which is constantly heightened by the presence of death and danger, which he perceives as a normal part of life. The language he used demonstrated his internalisation and acceptance of violence and death as part of everyday existence: "*We hear it like, it's local you get it… its around us…. So, we're alert … A couple hours later you see the news … you see reh teh teh is dead … like it's life … it's normal (America)*. Ghana's interview also expressed viewing gang affiliated violence as the norm and an accepted behaviour within his community. He reflected on his conditioning, revealing how his prior experiences have shaped his responses:

> *you know when you hear that so-and-so got stabbed, or so-and-so died, or so-and-so got shot … it's a story that you keep hearing over and over again. So, you start to normalise it. You know, it's not a shock to me. I'm not surprised. I'm not … and that's being a product from the environment… we've been exposed to so many things so young that everything becomes normal to you …that's how we live, that's where we're from, so, yeah, that's normal. Someone gets stabbed – yeah, that's normal (Ghana).*

Istanbul, Brazil, and Trinidad all attempted to better understand this normalisation and reported their perceptions. Istanbul alluded to the harsh reality that the normalisation of violence "*makes us tougher"*, suggesting a form of resilience borne out of necessity.

> *You know when you've been through those sort of things and you've accumulated a number of them incidents, it's like you kind of just live through it, like it's nothing,*

even though it is something. It makes us stronger in a way because we dealt with that very early (Istanbul).

Brazil shared generational differences in the perception of what is considered 'normal'. He suggested older individuals recognised certain experiences or conditions as abnormal, while his own generation considered them as normalised.

Probably like the older lots, yeah, they would call it that innit because they know that's not normal innit … our generation, they just … it's normalised (Brazil).

The language used by Trinidad indicated a sense of frustration and cynicism towards the normalisation of violent language and behaviour. For him, threatening language was common and often used as a form of venting anger.

A lot of the time yutes just get mad angry – "I'm going to wet you, I'm going to split …" … like it's day-to-day TALK now, "Oh I'm going to kill you!" What are you going to do? Are you going to plan to come to my house? This aint no mafia film, you aint gonna do that (Trinidad).

This subtheme shows the extent to which abnormal, distressing, gang affiliated violence has become normalised. The language used to describe these situations is calm, composed, and desensitised. This is a reality in which threats, and physical harm become a constant, recurring theme. Normalisation has become a byproduct of the traumatic environments they have been exposed to.

4.1.3 The tapestry of emotional and behavioural responses.

This subtheme sheds light on the nature of reactions stemming from gang-related incidents. Individuals caught amidst this violence experience a range of emotional upheavals. These emotional responses, in turn, manifest in a variety of behaviours.

The constant state of alertness, paranoia and hypervigilance in participants led to feelings of unsafety and failure to feel secure: *"you could probably never feel safe living in the ends"* (Istanbul). Both America and Istanbul spoke thoroughly about paranoia. America felt he was constantly paranoid "*Paranoid 24s"* and equated this with PTSD. The interview with Istanbul also highlighted the persistent "*element of paranoia"*, which indicated his past traumas continue to influence his present.

Trinidad and Istanbul reported feeling shocked by the gang affiliated violence they had experienced: *there was a lot of shock, and it was like a word of depleted, it takes away a certain amount of energy" (Istanbul).* Trinidad's shock and surprise from his stabbing occurred "*because it was from someone that I was cool with"*. It also came from seeing his own flesh, indicating a detachment from his own body and a sense of disbelief. He could have been dissociating from the physical reality of the injury to distance himself from the pain and trauma associated with the event.

> *when I got shanked in my hand, I remember seeing my flesh, and the first thing I'm thinking is… "Rah why's it white like that?" It was just mad… it didn't hit me straight away (Trinidad).*

Some of the participants spoke about fear. They acknowledged fear is often perceived as a negative emotion but can also serve a positive function keeping people alert and prepared in potentially dangerous situations. *so, I don't walk in fear. No … let me not lie, men like to do bravado … there is fear, but it's calculated fear … like you'd be a fool not to be scared (South Africa)*. Trinidad reflected on the universal nature of fear, suggesting no one can be truly fearless in the face of a threatening situation involving a weapon. Rather, individuals act in self-defence out of fear of harm or death.

> *A lot of guys won't mention it because fear is perceived as a bad thing. If you get in a shank fight, or a man's got a knife, and you got a knife, you're going to stab that person because you'd rather not get stabbed yourself – you want to live – that, there,*

is fear. You are fighting in fear. People just perceive fear as– RUN! It's not the case (Trinidad).

Trinidad and Ghana engaged in perspective-taking and reflection, considering the consequences of the violence they have perpetrated towards others. Emotions such as guilt, embarrassment and shame were mentioned when they spoke about the gang affiliated violence, they had enacted which they perceived to be unjust.

just imagine if my family knew what I did – do you know what I mean? And how I would feel if somebody did that to my child and them kind of things there (Ghana).

So, if I feel I've overdone to you, compared to what you did to me, I will feel bad, or if it's someone that I know and like I just let out my anger on them unjustly and like I did it over the top, then yeah, I feel guilty (Trinidad).

All participants revealed certain behaviours reflective of heightened vigilance and cautiousness. There was an exaggerated intensity of behaviours to detect threats, which in an environment such as theirs could be seen as a survival instinct.

I always park my car in a way that's easy to get out. I do a reverse park into a space; I make sure it's a thing where I can just drive and go. I'm not trying to come and do a manoeuvre … in case anything happens, it's easy access out (Ghana).

So, when I step into a room now, I need to know where the exit is. I need to know everyone in the dance… I can't be caught by surprise (South Africa).

I'd never sit with my back to the door … even right about now I'm sitting with my back to the door … when someone walks past, I can FEEL it (Zambia).

These protective measures depict their continuous strategic efforts to minimise potential threats. There was a personal code of caution and vigilance in the face of potential danger, seeing these behaviours as necessary for self-preservation. They all emphasised the importance of strategic thinking and deliberate choices to minimise risk. Ghana, South

Africa, and Zambia wrestled with whether these behaviours were manifestations of trauma or PTSD, or simply streetwise behaviour. There was a degree of disconnection from the idea their behaviours could be trauma responses. They didn't acknowledge the need for precautions may itself reflect living in a threatening environment which can be traumatic.

> *being from the ends … ANYTHING can happen so, prevention is better than cure, park the car in a way where it's (makes a speeding off noise) … and don't park right outside… is that PTSD? Is that trauma? I don't know, or am I being street-wise? … am I just being street-wise if I need to come for my car? (Ghana).*

> *When it's past 12 midnight, and I'm coming home and there's no one on the street and I'm about to enter my house, I always look over my shoulders. Because I feel like there might be someone lurking outside. I don't think that's PTSD (South Africa).*

Ultimately, this subtheme prompts us to recognise the humanity within those involved in gang affiliated violence, by getting us to acknowledge the vulnerable side of these individuals. This exploration unravelled the intricacies of emotional and behavioural reactions showing how YBM are affected by this deeply entrenched issue.

4.2 Group Experiential Theme 2: Through the Prism of Systemic Injustice, Environment and Power

This theme reveals the ways in which systemic biases, power dynamics, and experiences with injustice impact YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. From their hostile environment to socioeconomic struggles, these experiences not only shape their worldview but also profoundly impact their sense of self.

4.2.1 Walking the tightrope of socioeconomic struggle.

This subtheme reveals the trials and tribulations due to socioeconomic adversity. It presents a vivid portrayal of a battlefield where socioeconomic conditions are formidable adversaries and individuals as the tenacious warriors navigating this landscape.

America, Ghana, Jamaica, and South Africa all spoke to this socioeconomic struggle regarding location and the inevitability of being "*caught up"* (America) in troubling or challenging situations due to geographical and social associations you "*"get involved"* with *(America).* Gang affiliated violence was considered unavoidable "*because of the area we lived in, we couldn't avoid it" (Brazil) and the "birth lottery"* (South Africa), highlighting the impact of socio-geographic circumstances on life trajectories. Most of the participants expressed a sense of fatalism, noting the mere act of being born in a specific area exposes individuals to violence and the reality of constant conflict and danger in environments: *"it's a warzone, innit. Everywhere around me is a warzone… I just know like the borough that I'm in – it's a warzone" (Jamaica).*

> *I just get caught up, like where you live … and then other people out there from other blocks say you're from this block … then you get involved… its long (America).*

Trinidad and Ghana both used imageries to describe the negativity and bleakness of their environments. *"Concrete"* came up for both participants, symbolising a harsh, chaotic, challenging environment. Ghana touched on the presence of drugs, crime, and poverty, implying these were commonplace and expected elements of his environment and how criminal activity offered immediate gratification due to a lack of long-term prospects.

> *but the area itself – it's sad to say – but a typical story of an area filled with drugs, I guess money but money in a negative way … but it was a lot of lost young boys and girls who are in search of instant gratification with a lot of things – whether that be make money to go and buy a car, to go out and buy a chain, or to buy nice clothes. So, the area itself was always like a concrete jungle in a way where we're here, but this is all we know. So, crime was there, poverty was there (Ghana).*

> *Because it's a shithole! It's ugly! It's just blocks and surrounded by drugs, thieves, violence, police, you know. If I'm going to be poetic here – Black and grey, concrete – everything's just miserable (Trinidad).*

Istanbul used the metaphor of a "cage" to describe his environment, an image denoting confinement, and a lack of freedom.

> *My ends … I don't live there anymore thank God for that … It's like it's a cage … when you're living and where I'm from … you don't get to really SEE the other side. Or you don't understand that there's an extended part of the environment … we're more caged into our neighbourhood and the people that are in it, and the type of people that are in it as well (Istanbul).*

Due to the harsh environment filled with gang affiliated violence and trauma, participants expressed a common aspiration to escape this challenging environment. Physical relocation was seen as a symbol of personal growth and progress. Ghana and Trinidad emphasised the social and cultural importance of '*getting out of the ends'*, signifying the achievement of socioeconomic progress and avoidance of violence.

> *as I get older, nah, I don't want to be in run-down hood areas, like, I want to leave … I can't say me growing up in these areas was good for me (Trinidad).*

Poverty, as connected with the class system in the UK, consistently came up amongst the participants' accounts: "*our crud comes from poverty … there's a class war …it's a class thing"* (South Africa); "*Someone gets stabbed – yeah, that's normal. Whereas from someone else's area, let's say somewhere like Kingston, or Twickenham, them areas there you're not going to hear them kind of things" (Ghana).*

There were nuances in participants' accounts, depending on resources available to them. For example, living in the comfort of one's own home and room, but also experiencing the overcrowded conditions of friends' flats showed different socioeconomic realities within a shared geographical context, as illustrated by Ghana:

> *I lived in a house – I didn't live in like a block or an estate … but that was a coin's throw away from my house … the end of my road or opposite my house there was blocks and there were estates where a lot of my friends are from. So,*

I kind of had I would say like a mixed experience. So, I would be in the blocks with the mandem, and we were chilling, and whatever, and I'd get to go home to my house if that makes sense, to my own room, to my own space. But having that experience of going to my friends' houses who lived in flats which was maybe like over-crowded, family members in there".

Even though Ghana was exposed to environments filled with socioeconomic struggles, his account was different to America's. Ghana had more resources to fall back on.

Due to socioeconomic struggles, it was common for participants to engage in criminal activity to lift their economic standing: *it makes life … it makes things easier … it makes things easy, because a man's living a shit life already, you think I care about selling drugs? I just wanna make bread. I just wanna get rich – that makes things easier (Zambia).*

This points to the intersection of socioeconomic status and criminal activity. South Africa and his group showed visible wealth gained through both legitimate and illegitimate means, which incited envy and resentment leading to conflict. These markers of wealth and success contributed to the tension and rivalry within his community.

so, we're making money legit – working, understand finance, like APR's and all of that stuff and then there's fraud money involved as well. So, in our area there's gang affiliations all around and they're hungry is the best way to put it. We weren't hungry… we had the freshest plates, the freshest whips, so we're having fun. So, other people have started to see we're well-fed making noise (South Africa).

The impact of race/institutional racism was also linked to socioeconomic differences, where some participants compared their experiences to white individuals. For example, America contrasted his life of hardship and struggle, to the experience of white people: "*A black guy that's been through it… most of these white yutes won't get it – they've had it easy, they've got it on the table for them… they can go to mumsy or a family member that's got them. We can't do that … we gotta go out there, get it".*

This reveals a perceived lack of familial support and resources, leading to a sense of necessity to fend for himself in a challenging world. South Africa portrayed a relationship between racism, power, and economics, reflecting a nuanced understanding of these social issues for Black men.

> *if I'm a billionaire and if I have access to whatever I want and you call me a nigger, what does that really mean to me? If you think I'm a piece of shit, but I can do whatever I want how much of an impact does that word have a hold on me? NOTHING. So, racism has to be tied to power and economics before you can call it … are you being deprived of making money? is it stopping you from having influence in a certain thing? The reason why racism is real … the majority of us come from poverty (South Africa).*

This subtheme provides a portrayal of the gruelling socioeconomic struggle. It illuminates the participants' understanding of their personal journey on the tightrope of socioeconomic adversity. This walk is marked by systemic inequality and economic hardship.

4.2.2 In the maze of power and bias.

This subtheme explores violent encounters with the police, painting a vivid picture of these experiences and their profound impact. These encounters are often marked by stark power dynamics and entrenched biases, with the police wielding significant influence.

Brazil, Istanbul, South Africa, Trinidad, and Zambia all illustrated their personal encounters with the police, showcasing experiences of violent, aggressive, and confrontational policing.

> *rugby tackling, like when they rush you and they put the cuffs on you. Or like gripping you up bare, moving you here, moving you there, like violently, like pushing and stuff (Trinidad).*

So, I ran into the upper stairs and then the feds, when you've run now, they're going to be rough now …so my man's moving all rough and that… I've had my phone in my hand, but he's tried to snatch my phone out of my hand, but I've like gripped it and that … and then he's there saying, "Stop resisting," and all of that … next thing you know he's just trying to fight me and that … some big guy bruv (Brazil).

Istanbul, Trinidad, and Zambia reflected on police group violence, questioning the necessity of it particularly when there was an imbalance in numbers and age:

"I feel like if there's bare of you, you have no need to do that – to have six of you … at the time I was 19, if there's like six of you, why are you lot all roughing up one human being for… I just view it as unnecessary (Trinidad); "But because of my size, my name and everything that comes with it, they called like 15 officers just to stop and search me! Yeah, it just went left, next thing you know they're trying to drag me to the floor and stuff like that over a e-scooter, I was flabbergasted" (Zambia).

Istanbul believed the force used by the police was excessive, especially given his age at the time, highlighting an imbalance of power and a strong sense of injustice. He attempted to consider the perspective of the police officers involved, but still questioned the necessity of their actions against a young boy. The perception of the incident as traumatic is implied by his use of the word *"force"*, suggesting physicality and the use of overwhelming power.

The force that was used. Remember, I said I was only 14 – young, vulnerable boy, the amount of police they use to like tackle you – I'm not with someone who has a weapon or something like that … so, that's part of why I say 'abuse of power'… a 14/15-year-old boy, like what could be done to prevent this from happening, or how could this be avoided is how I would be looking at it (Istanbul).

South Africa described a strong resistance to the excessive force employed by the police, emphasising a systematic flaw in the understanding and application of this power. He

indicated a keen awareness of the social contract theory, emphasising that the police's authority is derived from the people. This theory stipulates that individuals have created an agreement with the police in which they agree to give up their power to enforce their own rights and entrust this power to the police for it to be used to benefit the public (Cohen, 2022). South Africa perceives the police as failing in this agreement, resorting instead to undue violence and force. The emphasis on appropriate use of power underscores his desire for a fair, just system where the police are respectful of individual rights and dignity.

> *I've said this to police officers a few times… "You lot have the power to enforce the law – we don't! "We gave you that power so remember how you are using your power" … "all these situations where you are using excessive force, it's not necessary". You lot have the power, but you're misusing the power. I don't understand why you lot think it's necessary to be using excessive force and then use the fact that, "Oh you don't know how dangerous the person is." Well, that's why we've given you the power, so you find measures and means to be able to do it, correctly. DO YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN? For me that's a very, very poor excuse and you should figure out ways to do this in a manner that is appropriate (South Africa).*

Brazil also portrayed his perspective on the power dynamics between YBM and the police. He believed the police want to instil fear; "*they want you to be scared of them*", which he defiantly resists, asserting his decision not to be intimidated ("*we're not going to be scared of you*"). His reference to taking "*the piss out of you"* reflects a rebellious attitude towards the police, underlining his resistance to being controlled or subdued. He also equated the presence and role of the police with opposing gangs ('*Opps*'), viewing them as an additional threat rather than a source of protection. He implied the police abuse their power and act arbitrarily, leading to a perception of unjust targeting and discrimination.

> *It's the same thing as like the opps will pull up or whatever. This time, yeah, it's not a thing where like you can run and do all of these things or jump in and that. They're*

just another opp … they just got the authority to actually do something to you… they can literally spot a guy and just be like, "Yeah (clicks his tongue) … don't like him, he's hitting a cell tonight" … he didn't even have to have anything on him (Brazil).

Trinidad spoke in detail about the perceived freedoms of police officers and his acceptance of this reality. His interview expressed a normalisation of police misconduct due to its frequency with no negative consequence. There is a lack of accountability for police actions and victims of police violence feel powerless to seek justice. Trinidad also mentioned a lack of trust in the justice system to hold police officers accountable for their actions.

I know the police have certain freedoms where they can push it a bit and get away with it because they are police officers. It's just how it is but the thing is, unfortunately, a lot of us on the outside, don't know the laws of what the police can actually do. They can bend it to a certain extent, they can push you around, they can rough you up a little bit, hold your hand, pin you to the car and stuff like that and we've seen that so like its accustomed as police behaviour and they never get into trouble, so I'm assuming they are legally allowed to do that… And you can't go to the court and say, "They pinned me to the car", "So what!" Or "They rugby tackled me to the ground and cuffed me", "So what!" (Trinidad).

Trinidad and Zambia spoke of the profound impact these experiences have on individuals' lives. Zambia used a metaphor of a cat and mouse game to highlight his relationship with the police. It is an adversarial relationship with each side trying to gain an upper hand to disrupt the other's day. As a result of his previous experiences and cultural narratives, he rejects any form of social interaction with police officers.

I didn't grow up in a lifestyle where we called the police, or talked to them, they're not my fancy … I don't feel comfortable … there was rap line and I like it - "I don't feel comfortable, round a constable" … I don't believe in having any interaction. When

they walk past you and they think they're Mr. Postman Pat and say 'hello' … just put my head down and keep it moving (Zambia).

Trinidad described fear being a consequence of these encounters. He related this fear to recent scandals and unpredictability. The language used indicated his experiences with the police caused significant distress.

It was also the fear of what the police can do especially now the amount of scandals the metropolitan's being caught with and stuff like that … it's just not a healthy time between the BAME community and the feds. It is probably all-time high tension since the Windrush generation… it's BAD. So, it's just unpredictable and I think when you're facing civil servants who are unpredictable and an institution that's unpredictable and they're supposed to be predictable, it's actually scary (Trinidad).

With this unpredictable nature of the police force, came fear and anxiety of the potential for collusion and cover-ups. The fear of unknown outcomes and the possibility of being mistreated or harmed added to the sense of unpredictability, creating a sense of mistrust towards the institution meant to be predictable and safe. His description of police behaviour as gang-like suggests he views the police as an institution unaccountable and operating outside of the law. Trinidad views the police as agents of oppression rather than protectors of the community.

And it's just the unknown factor of you don't know how this is going to go, and the feds they cover for each other ALL the time – that's why a lot of these police officers get away with rape, this, and that, all of this now because it's like a gang – they all cover each other, they know … You might not do anything in the wrong, but if you are hiding that person's crimes, you're also part of the problem. And so, getting roughed up, this and that … you don't know if they're all going to collude and say, "We're not going to tell no one, delete the footage off the camera – they won't know, this and that,", it's just very unpredictable (Trinidad).

In the Maze of Power and Bias provides an in-depth exploration of the profound violent experiences which participants have undergone with the police. It delves into the stark realities of these experiences, giving a comprehensive understanding of the significant impact of power.

4.2.3 The labyrinth of systemic and racial injustice.

This subtheme delves into the complex, often challenging terrain of systemic and racial injustices individuals navigate in their daily lives. This labyrinth is not just a physical landscape; it is a social and emotional one marked by systemic biases and racial discrimination.

Participants drew attention to the experiences and perceived safety risks of their environment simply based on being Black. Istanbul and Jamaica acknowledged YBM face significant scrutiny and potential conflict when navigating unfamiliar environments. Istanbul suggested other demographics, like older white women, may not face the same degree of conflict or risk, reflecting an implicit understanding of societal power dynamics and protective privileges for white people.

> *So, like another young Black man that's not from my area … not anyone could just come in because someone's going to check you, and ask you what ends you're from, and if they don't recognise you are from this area it could cause some conflict and problems. But if we are looking at sort of anyone, like maybe an older White lady, I wouldn't really say she would share the experience of being robbed or mugged, or anything like that (Istanbul).*

Trinidad described a sense of self-stereotyping among YBM, where they question and profile other YBM but do not do the same to white or Asian individuals. This creates an environment where individuals from those demographics can feel safer, while YBM face scrutiny and potential danger. Trinidad saw this as the result of subconscious biases and stereotypes individuals may not be aware of.

> *It's funny because you see like road yutes and stuff … if you're a white boy, you're pretty much fine. Black yutes will stereotype their own people or even yutes that are mixed with Black … man see a Black yute – "where you from? Where this? Where that?" If you're white, or even if you're Asian, sometimes it's like you're just a civilian (Trinidad).*

Both Brazil and Istanbul offered a candid account of racial profiling. Brazil shared experiences of being targeted due to being Black and his age, associating his identity with suspicion and criminality. The comparison to "*white kids*" emphasises his belief in racially biased treatment.

> *they violated … we were walking from a shop, and they see us. They're saying, "we're stopping you because of robberies… there's robberies happening", and murders … we literally had just come from the shop … they pull up, they see two black kids, black yutes together … pulled us. It's bullshit … started searching my shit… seeing if our phones were stolen … it's mad … just because we're black. You know, if that was two white kids, they would have just LEFT them (Brazil).*

Istanbul also made a comparison to the experiences of a white man, indicating a shared experience and understanding within his community.

> *Absolutely, absolutely. I'm sorry, but we hear this all the time – we're not going to find them act like this to a white man and he's clearly panicking about something … they're going to leave him alone or they're going to be concerned (Istanbul).*

Istanbul used the phrase "*trained from young"* to indicate the racial divide as an integral part of his upbringing and shared communal knowledge. "*I don't think any young Black male will tell you of a decent encounter with the police"* generalises his experiences and emotions, pointing to broader systemic issues and racial disparities. "*They're not our friends*" strongly illustrates the emotional divide and perceived adversarial relationship between the police and his community.

Trinidad offered a perspective of racial profiling and perceived injustice within the criminal justice system. His tone conveyed frustration and anger towards the systemic biases leading to racial disparities within prison.

> *You just got to look at the statistics of people of colour getting prosecuted and put in jail for misdemeanours. Black people only make up 3 million out of the UK which has a 68 million population. I think Asians make up 4 million. Yet I think nearly 50% or something mad like that of the UK prison population is of Black and Asians. 75% of that 50% are Black, 25% are Asian – that's an INSANE stat for a population – you put 4 + 3 – that's 7 million out of 68, yet 50% of that are in jail. 50% of that are in jail!! (Trinidad).*

Trinidad also shed light on his evolving understanding of racial disparities in crime rates and policing practices, as well as the impact of societal stereotypes. He reflected on his prior belief most knife crime and violence are carried out by Black people, indicating a widely held stereotype associating Black individuals with violent crime. He revealed this stereotype was false, reflecting acknowledgement of misinformation, and highlighting the importance of education in challenging and transforming bias.

> *I was of the thing of I get it because most knife crimes and violence is carried out by Black people, like Black yutes in the inner city, and they told me, "No, it actually ain't!" They said a lot of the violent crime is done by White boys, yet I think it was like you're 14 times more likely, if you're Black, or mixed, to get stopped and searched for knives or drugs compared to White boys … So, all you've got to do is look at the prejudice (Trinidad).*

4.3 Group Experiential Theme 3: On the Road to Recovery

This theme illustrates the transformative journey individuals embark upon, from grappling with their trauma to healing and personal growth. Participants were optimistic about healing from their trauma. They suggested recovery was possible: "*I feel like there's a*

cure for it, and I think the first stage of that cure is the acceptance. Knowing that you have trauma, and you have PTSD" (Ghana). There was an expression of hope suggesting resilience and an optimistic outlook despite their hardships: *"I would hope so. I hope so. Yeah – there's hope. I have to hope… it's good to hope" (Jamaica).*

4.3.1 Finding order and calm within the storm.

This subtheme recognises the adaptive strategies employed by participants to help them cope with their experiences of gang affiliated violence. The participants learnt to adapt and manoeuvre amidst the chaos, using their own internal compass and strategies to find a sense of order and direction in their lives.

Talking as a coping strategy came up frequently for Ghana, Jamaica, Trinidad, and South Africa, but this differed: *If it's to a loved one, a close friend, family member or getting professional help (South Africa)*. They recognised the limitations of traditional gender roles and sought to break away from expectations they should be stoic. Ghana pointed out the coping mechanism of humour and banter to process past traumatic events with his male friends. His recurring use of phrases such as *jokey way*, *banter* and *buss joke* signals the reliance on laughter as a tool to cope with and discuss past occurrences to neutralise their emotional gravity. The minimisation and trivialisation of circumstances surrounding traumatic experiences appears to be an effective way of discussing such events. He also described his positive experience with a podcast recording, drawing parallels between this experience and therapy. He perceived the podcast as therapeutic because it allowed for the expression of thoughts and feelings, leading to a process of self-reflection and discovery. Ghana expressed preference for a relaxed, informal setting, which promotes a sense of comfort and encourages open conversation.

> *But at the same time, that [the podcast] was therapy. Because I got to get things off my chest … I got to speak on my thoughts and that helped me to process things. I*

remember answering some questions thinking, "Oh, that was actually mad!" Because I'm actually talking about it, as opposed to like internalising it (Ghana).

Jamaica also agreed with talking as a healthy strategy and would do so even when no one else was around or willing to listen. Although he was concerned about being perceived as mad, hinting at societal stigma associated with self-talk.

But it's like when I want to talk about pain stuff, it's like man don't really have anyone to listen … so not in a mad way … I wouldn't say I talk to myself, but sometimes I do because it's like, if you don't talk or say anything, you're just gonna hold onto everything, and its gonna bottle up. People can call me mad if I sit there and talk to myself, but I wouldn't literally have a conversation with myself. But I'd just say what's on my mind at the moment (Jamaica).

Trinidad and Zambia showed a willingness to seek emotional support from women to cope with emotional distress: *I have female friends who I will lean to for more emotional support than I would my bredrins*. Despite Zambia's inclination towards maintaining a tough, unyielding persona, there was an underlying need for emotional support. His desire for comfort expressed as wanting "*a little cuddle"* represents his search for solace and reassurance during times of distress.

I'm feeling a bit sensitive … I'm feeling violated, might not be the most confident … yeah, a little cuddle, maybe something else might brighten my day … I'm just trying to brighten my day because it's not a nice feeling at the end of the day… You're a bit sad, so you're just trying to do shit to brighten your day (Zambia).

Whilst some turned to talking, others remained silent. Jamaica suggested a familiarity with mental health struggles among his peers, but also noted a reluctance and inability for individuals to articulate their experiences: *like even my friends and that, they deal with mental health and that, but they never say they're dealing with mental health*. He emphasised a barrier to discussing these issues and a culture of silence surrounding mental

health issues in his social environment. This could be an extension of societal discourses regarding who can express emotions or talk about their feelings. With this came a façade to hide inner turmoil. Jamaica implied this phenomenon of masked emotional struggle was widespread. Trinidad implied he went through a similar process, underscoring the need to release emotions when he returned home:

> *I'll randomly, sometimes just start crying … be on the verge of a breakdown, and I'll hold it until I get home and then I'll release it (Trinidad).*

> *I realised like you see people that are mad-happy, they're not really happy … I used to be mad-happy but now I said to myself, "I'm putting on a front … for what?" It doesn't make sense! Man's got so much going on but man's trying to smile … I'm not happy (Jamaica).*

Trinidad did not view the issue of men not talking as a significant problem or a barrier to seeking emotional support. He speculated this would become easier when older, which was shared with Ghana: *I feel like it becomes more common and it happens when we're older and we have kids (Trinidad); back then as well, it wasn't really common to speak about your feelings, especially to another boy (Ghana).*

Relocation was a strategy used by the older participants to manage their responses to traumatic events. Zambia, Ghana, Istanbul, and South Africa all distanced themselves from the violent, gang affiliated environments contributing to the lasting effects of trauma. This points to the impossibility of overcoming trauma when continuously exposed to triggers: "*The environment is definitely a way that can be affecting someone if they don't get out of it soon enough… sometimes you need to change your environment that you're in. Take yourself out of it they say" (Istanbul); "I moved away … that was to help with the PTSD, I moved away, yeah. Like I don't live in the thick of it… But you can't heal in the place that you was hurt" (Zambia).*

Overall, this subtheme brought to life how individuals continue to live, adapt, and grow even in the face of the lasting echoes of trauma. It is a testament to human resilience, resourcefulness, and the indomitable spirit of finding order amidst the storm.

4.3.2 The ebb and flow of expectations and realities of therapy.

This subtheme illuminates the experiences individuals had within therapeutic spaces. In exploring the nuanced dynamics of therapy, the analysis gave a deep understanding of the role therapeutic interventions play in the journey towards healing, and how individuals perceive, navigate, and respond to their mental health struggles within this framework.

America, Zambia, and Brazil were very sceptical when talking about therapy and mental health professionals: *obviously there's therapy and stuff, but I'm kind of on the fence on it (Zambia)*. They didn't see the benefit, especially as they saw trauma and PTSD as an unvoiced reality where its implications are privately endured. America felt these issues occurred "*behind closed doors"* in secrecy and privacy, pointing towards a reality where the impact of gang affiliated violence is typically unshared. Trinidad also shared this sentiment: "*like how many times you seen someone have a mental breakdown – probably not a lot but they probably have it a lot of the time when they're at home".* Brazil felt it was a pointless process because mental health professionals wouldn't be dealing with the core issues at hand, such as the violent environment they are frequently exposed to*: "There's no point still … you're telling them – what can they do about it? They ain't gonna do anything" (Brazil).*

Jamaica and Ghana on the other hand expressed an explicit desire to talk about their experiences and feelings, and the potential value of speaking to a professional who could provide advice on managing their trauma and PTSD resulting from gang affiliated violence. Jamaica's use of phrases like "*get off my chest"* and "*things can change"* reflected a yearning for relief of his current emotional and mental state. He also felt if he had a positive experience, he could inform his peers for them to also try it out.

> *there are some things that I need to speak about to someone, to get off my chest … I already feel like I know what I need like. Therapy or counselling – that's what I feel like I need… sometimes, you just need someone to speak to or that's professional so they can give you advice and what's the best way to deal with how you're going through things (Jamaica).*

Ghana valued the idea of having someone just listen without judging. He considered professional intervention as beneficial, indicating his belief in the effectiveness of formal therapeutic interventions in managing and overcoming trauma and PTSD from gang affiliated violence: "*getting professional help I guess to find steps and ways to now eradicate that … that's where the professionals come in. And then obviously give you the steps and guidance".*

Therapy was experienced as a complex process laden with individual expectations and beliefs. Ghana and Trinidad shared their expectations and disappointments about therapy. Trinidad had high expectations for therapy, hoping it would heal him completely but found it did not. His account portrays the complexity of the therapeutic process, and how it may not always bring about the desired outcome but can still have positive effects.

> *Actually, it did, but it helped it in a weird way. I expected therapy to heal me, and it didn't really heal me, so, I was like, "Fuck it, I'll just live with it." But what therapy does do is help me deal with it better (Trinidad).*

Participants spoke about their individual real-time experiences within therapeutic interventions, from their interactions with professionals to their feelings of progress or stagnation. America, Ghana, and Trinidad conveyed their dissatisfaction with the therapeutic approaches employed by mental health professionals.

America viewed traditional therapeutic methods as impersonal and futile, given the perceived lack of understanding by the therapist regarding his lived experiences.

I've tried … It's dead man. They asked me personal questions, asked me how my lifestyle is. I don't know how its gonna benefit man, benefit man's mental health. You're not there when I'm going through my shit you get me … pointless, I'll be real it's pointless… they aint lived the life … we're literally speaking to a professional and he's writing down… he ain't lived the life you've lived … he ain't gone through the things you've gone through (America).

America's disconnection from therapeutic professionals was also based on cultural and racial differences. He perceived therapists as not only being distant from his own experiences, but dismissive and mocking of this struggle. The use of racially charged language indicated his feelings of being stereotyped and dismissed based on being Black. The strong suspicion of negative comments happening behind closed doors indicated his deep distrust.

They're all white!! They're all white!! They're the ones that just laugh it off … "this nigger" behind closed doors… you know they're saying the mad ting behind closed doors (America).

Ghana reflected on the existing stigma surrounding therapy among Black men and how his experience served to reinforce these prejudices rather than challenging them. His account implies the need for therapists to be aware of the cultural nuances and challenges facing Black men in therapy. Asking open-ended questions left Ghana feeling very frustrated and disillusioned with therapy. With Black men struggling to articulate their feelings and experiences due to their gender and culture, this approach appears counterintuitive. Guided therapeutic experiences may be more beneficial in the first instance, directing the conversation and teasing out feelings and experiences.

At the start of every single session, and maybe it's the protocol, but I don't think it's right – they ask you, "So what do you want to talk about today?" And the reason I

don't think it's right is because, naturally, Black men, in general, DON'T WANT TO TALK! Me getting there already is a plus! I find it hard to talk (Ghana).

Trinidad's dissatisfaction came from the traditional, NHS' way of providing therapy and counselling. This way of working was not helpful and did not recognise the challenges of YBM not wanting to talk. Trinidad appreciated unique therapeutic strategies such as going out to eat during therapy sessions, which contributed to a sense of comfort and made the process more enjoyable.

I think the NHS way of they put you in a white room, and just you and someone who you don't know at all … it can be a bit disconnected. Because I feel with like psychologists, therapists – they're robotic, they're very cliché-like. It's like they're programmed to say things dependant on what you say, and it's like they have it written down where they say it to everybody but when [professional] gave me this person that I'm with, it feels WAY more genuine. I feel like I'm speaking to a human being. Plus, I like being in there, I feel more comfortable in this environment than I would do in the fucking hospital talking to somebody… Sometimes he'd even take me to go and eat whilst we were having the therapy sessions, so it made it more comfortable. I like more unique strategies to therapy instead of the BASIC fucking thing you know you're going to get, and it makes it easier because you're enjoying the food whilst talking about something horrible, instead of just sitting there in a room … just silence, talking to a robot about horrible things. They make it more realistic (Trinidad).

This subtheme shows the ebbs and flows of participant expectations and lived experiences of therapeutic spaces and the role these dynamics play in their mental health journeys.

Participants' accounts show the immense effort required for individuals to recover from trauma and PTSD from gang affiliated violence. It is not a quick or simple process. The

YBM in this study emphasised the importance of support in the healing process, reinforcing the idea that trauma recovery isn't a solo endeavour but one requiring a network of supportive individuals and resources.

> *It's a strong and a long-winded effort to do so, and for me the person needs a lot of support … needs to process a lot of things … and they need to be willing to commit to what it's going to take to allow themselves to be better (Istanbul).*

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Overview

The current study explored YBM's experiences of trauma related to gang affiliated violence and resulted in three Group Experiential Themes: **GET 1:** *The Continuous Dance with Fear: Understanding Trauma in an Unforgiving Environment;* **GET 2:** *Through the Prism of Systemic Injustice, Environment and Power*; **GET 3:** *On the Road to Recovery.*

This chapter explores the research findings in relation to existing literature. Strengths and limitations of the research are considered as well as the importance of clinical implications and what can be done now the findings are imprinted on the minds of readers. The chapter ends with my honest and personal reflections and a conclusion. The specific individual GETs are explored in more detail.

5.2 GET 1: *The Continuous Dance with Fear: Understanding Trauma in an Unforgiving Environment*

YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence in London face unique challenges which increase the likelihood of developing mental health difficulties. Listening to their voices deepens our understanding of how YBM feel in the aftermath of exposure to a traumatic event, and their traumatic stress symptoms when exposed to gang affiliated violence. Consistent with other studies, the findings of this research highlight exposure to traumatic events are associated with posttraumatic distress among YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence (Raby & Jones, 2016; Valdez, 2021), with multiple traumatic stress symptoms described by participants, which corroborates findings in prior research (Alegria et al., 2013; McCart et al., 2007).

The findings indicate a variation in responses to gang affiliated violence. All participants met DSM-V criteria of responses to trauma and PTSD (APA, 2013), which has been found to be the case in previous research (Smith & Patton, 2016; Rich & Grey, 2005). Intrusion (intrusive thoughts), avoidance, negative alterations in cognition and mood

(flashbacks, aggression, fear), and alterations in arousal (heart palpitations) were present in the current research, with participants providing rich narratives about these responses and the context behind them. However, previous studies have viewed these trauma responses as maladaptive (Williamson et al., 2015; Ogle et al., 2016). This research maintains that some responses to traumatic stress from gang affiliated violence offer relief from the risk of both physical and emotional pain stemming from violent encounters. The necessary avoidance, hypervigilance, and fear participants articulated are adaptive coping strategies within the context of chronic threats to physical and psychological safety in their environments (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2008). Hypervigilance dually acts as a symptom of trauma as well as a coping strategy protecting YBM from exposure to gang affiliated and police violence. The findings regarding paranoia contribute to the existing literature, where those who are exposed to gang affiliated violence are particularly vulnerable to paranoia (Freeman et al., 2013). Living in an environment with chronic, persistent gang affiliated violence will cause individuals to develop a heightened sense of threat, which promotes the development of paranoia (Wood & Dennard, 2017). These responses then become functional and not pathological, which is important when considering the utility of DSM-V descriptions of symptoms for this population (Smith & Patton, 2016).

The findings also support the literature stating those who are gang affiliated become desensitised to chronic violence, becoming emotionally numb (Gaylord-Harden et al., 2011). This desensitisation and normalisation are a response to the imprint of trauma, and are adaptive in the short-term, but increase risk for subsequent violence if they become a habitual response (Mrug et al., 2016). Previous research has found emotional numbing and aggression are likely to occur with exposure to community violence (Kennedy & Ceballo, 2016). YBM within this research had become accustomed to violence. Desensitisation is likely to be masking the trauma experienced by those exposed to gang affiliated violence (Kerig et al., 2012). The lack of a holistic, conceptual framework explaining different

responses of exposure to violence, means trauma responses from gang affiliated individuals are labelled as sociopathic or antisocial.

Participants viewed exposure to gang affiliated violence as normal, however the research findings suggest their responses to trauma and violence were far from normal. Consistent with other research, hypervigilance was the most reported trauma symptom (Mendez et al., 2023; Nugent et al., 2012). The accounts of participants' lived experiences of gang affiliated violence and trauma offered rich narratives likening everyday experiences to warzones (Densley et al., 2020). Participants likening their violent environments to the experiences of army veterans serves as a barometer for the severity of this violence, and subsequent traumatic stress.

5.3 Through the Prism of Systemic Injustice, Environment and Power

The accounts from YBM in this research provide us with an understanding of the connection between environment and health. Gang affiliated violence in the community is exacerbated by structural violence and social determinants of health (Eitle et al., 2006). The findings provide insights into how violent environments contribute to traumatic stress symptoms amongst YBM. Participants gave frequent examples of gang affiliated and institutional violence prevalent in their environments, as well as the chronic nature of these threats. The fear generated from the unpredictable nature of this violence is consistent with previous findings on YBM and community violence exposure (Paxton et al., 2004; Rich, 2009). The narratives of the YBM in this research demonstrated that those exposed to gang affiliated violence living in 'endz', there was no 'post' to their traumatic stress experiences (Hertz et al., 2005). YBM are in a constant state of hypervigilance, with their bodies constantly activating the fight-or-flight response (O'Dea et al., 2017). Trauma and exposure to traumatic events is an inevitable reality demonstrated within the narratives of participants. This is supported by previous research exploring the toxicity of environments in which the recurring nature of violence and the constant threat to safety and mortality results in overexposure to traumatic events (Smith & Patton, 2016). Living in low socioeconomic

environments with chronic violence offers no respite from traumatic stressors and can increase risk of re-traumatisation and future violent events. The narratives of the YBM in this sample articulate that when it comes to violence, psychological distress and wellbeing, location matters.

Structural and social injustices, such as racism and class inequality, contributed to the participants' everyday experiences of trauma. In this research, YBM's narratives regarding police violence provided insights into the relationship between their trauma experiences and their interactions with the police, which supports the research completed by (Pryce et al., 2021). Police interactions were seen as a chronic and traumatic stressor. The presence of police signified danger amongst participants (Staggers-Hakim, 2016). Participants disclosed personal narratives of police violence in the form of racial profiling, harassment and aggression which is consistent with previous qualitative studies documenting YBM's interactions with the police (Brunson & Miller, 2006). Not only were participants needing to be hypervigilant for gang affiliated violence but also for violence perpetrated by the police. The inability to resist or exert violence again police victimisation meant participants were left feeling helpless and out of control. The power differential of having authority figures impose their dominance exacerbated the traumatic nature of these police interactions. Participants felt powerless to hold the police accountable for their actions. This therefore brings into question the position of hypervigilance and paranoia as symptoms. The participants expressed a necessity for these responses as a form of self-preservation. This was reinforced by participants themselves questioning whether these responses were trauma, PTSD, or simply necessary survival strategies, which is a pertinent question this research brings up.

Low socioeconomic environments are identified as areas where residents are more likely to be exposed to gang affiliated violence and traumatic stress (Raby & Jones, 2016). Participants spoke about individual and community struggles with poverty, growing up in poor communities and the interlink with gang affiliated violence, which supports previous literature (Beech et al., 2021). The experiences of participants demonstrate location and

environment as chronic stressors with profound implications for mental health recovery. Participants in this research had limited opportunities to access mental health services which meant they were left to struggle independently with unaddressed trauma.

5.4 GET 3: On the Road to Recovery

Black men are less likely to access formal help-seeking practices to address mental health issues (Lindsey & Marcell, 2012; Keating, 2021). However, some of the participants showed interest in seeking professional help for their trauma symptoms and posttraumatic stress. The findings also highlighted important nuances regarding how participants experienced therapeutic support. Where therapy was useful, strategies were employed to provide a sense of comfort and relatability. Going out to eat during sessions was an example mentioned. Participants also wanted mental health professionals to be active collaborators within the healing process as opposed to simply listening and wanting the individual to dictate the topic of conversation. This is an important finding for how clinical psychologists respond to the needs of this population.

From a young age, boys are socialised to reject vulnerability and to be tough. For YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence, toughness is a key protective strategy (Lawson, 2013). This protective strategy and perceived masculinity could be masking the presence of trauma symptoms, especially in environments with chronic threats of danger (Slegh et al., 2021). The findings regarding silence support this narrative that YBM need to show strength and independence in the face of distress (Matthews et al., 2013). However, it is important to illustrate this research highlighted the ways in which YBM did access and seek support, despite acknowledgement of a pressure to fit with dominant masculine identities. There was a willingness to seek emotional support, with it being a protective factor against the debilitating nature of trauma and PTSD (Ozer et al., 2003).

To address this need, we must accept the juxtaposition that those exposed to gang affiliated violence can be both violent perpetrators and vulnerable victims. There is a need

for both the perpetrator and victim statuses to be acknowledged when those who are gang affiliated encounter the CJS or health systems (Coid et al., 2013).

5.5 Strengths and Limitations

This research is the first IPA study focusing on the qualitative accounts of trauma responses from YBM in London exposed to gang affiliated violence, and their sense-making within these experiences. It has brought innovation to the field, offering a rich detail of a phenomenon rarely considered within the research literature (Pyrooz & Decker, 2019). Although the small sample size of this research cannot provide generalisability, it does offer a detailed, nuanced account of YBM's experiences of trauma related to gang affiliated violence. These accounts provide a rare opportunity for greater clarity and understanding of these phenomena.

Another strength of this study was the recruitment of a 'hard-to-reach' population. Research communities often label YBM from low socioeconomic backgrounds as a 'hard to reach' or a 'hard to study' population (Berger & Langton, 2011). Their narratives and stories are never included within the research sphere. This research challenges these 'hard to reach', 'hard to study' notions by grounding itself in YBM's voices.

This study is also subject to limitations. My data cannot state with any certainty the origins of the elevated trauma and PTSD symptoms amongst my participants. I did not assess their trauma histories, and therefore cannot be certain trauma symptoms expressed originated from gang affiliated violence. However, research shows violence exposure leads to higher current and lifetime PTSD symptoms (Kulkarni et al., 2011). Since those who are gang affiliated are frequently exposed to violence, these individuals appear to be at higher risk of developing PTSD symptoms (Decker & Pyrooz, 2010). Even if their symptoms pre-dated their gang affiliation, it is highly likely that exposure to gang affiliated violence would have exacerbated pre-existing problems.

Whilst IPA studies aim to recruit relatively homogenous samples, it is important to question whose voices might have been lost or excluded because of my recruitment approach. A failure to sufficiently develop relationships with gatekeepers and YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence prior to me conducting the research may have been an issue (Clark, 2011). My recruitment route using one charity may have biased the sample by including individuals who actively seek third-sector support, as well as limiting the experiences geographically.

5.6 Participant Inclusion

The level of involvement from participants and consultants differed at different stages of the research. For me it was important that the experts by experience consultants had an active role in the decision-making to ensure outcomes felt appropriate and relevant to YBM. Consultants were instrumental in the development, design and undertaking of the research. They helped to focus the research question to one that reflected the needs of YBM. They also informed the communication material to better suit participants and provided guidance about recruitment strategies. However, participants and consultants were not included in the analysis of findings.

Member checking involves returning the data to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (McKim, 2023). IPA cautions against member checking as it can be perceived as a conflict to the epistemological commitment of producing interpretative data (Smith et al., 2009). This is because of the inherent subjectivity of IPA whereby no two individuals coding the same transcripts are likely to precisely replicate one another's analysis (Gauntlett et al., 2017). By using IPA, I was coming from a phenomenological perspective, making this research about my interpretations of the data. It was felt that member checking and refining my themes with participants would have been inappropriate with IPA analysis which is why participants and consultants were not included in the analysis stage (Larkin & Thompson, 2011).

Participants were informed that I would be in touch at a later date to think with them about how this research should be disseminated. I will encourage them to provide suggestions on where to disseminate the findings, who they think will be interested, how to reach them and in what format. I will also be including them in creating a lay summary of the data to be circulated to statutory and charitable organisations, in the form of a visual report.

5.7 Implications

The implications stated in Chapter 2 are supported by the study, in particular the idea that traditional psychiatric criteria for trauma-related diagnoses in the DSM-V are inadequate and don't fully capture the lived experiences and trauma responses of YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. As a result, the conceptualisation of trauma and PTSD needs to be adapted to encompass the lived and living experiences of this population. There needs to be a focus on current, recurring trauma. Language also needs to be considered, regarding how YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence articulate their distress and traumatic stress responses. I urge readers to familiarise themselves with the implications in Chapter 2 as they remain relevant to the findings of this study.

The development of services for the assessment and intervention of traumatised individuals due to gang affiliated violence should be given serious and urgent consideration. However, this should be in line with YBM's needs, expectations and approach to healing which was articulated as missing entities within the therapeutic experiences of participants. There is a need for health systems and the CJS to utilise approaches attending to a wider range of traumatic symptoms and responses. Since those who are gang affiliated come in to contact with health services through various entry points, there needs to be an effective way to ensure their mental health needs are being met (Coid et al., 2013). The results of this study can be used to inform strategic service planning with the caveat that YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence need to be in the room when these discussions take place. After all, who knows what they best need than they themselves.

Despite the accumulation of traumas, and exposures to gang affiliated community violence, YBM's experiences largely went undisclosed, with many first sharing these experiences within the research interview. Trauma remaining undisclosed is a problem and emphasises the critical importance of systems of care for this population. The rich findings generated from participants show the importance of having people in systems YBM trust and not relying on them to go to services but for clinical psychologists to go where they are.

This research has uncovered the value in privileging individual narratives of trauma. Statutory services should be utilising sense-making processes amongst YBM wanting to access mental health services to co-create care that avoids the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes and discourses. Within mental health services, this highlights the importance of co-produced formulations about meanings associated with trauma, PTSD, gang affiliation and violence. There would also need to be a consideration of frameworks that go beyond the individual and account for systemic and community-based trauma. The impact of trauma extends beyond individuals and the sole focus of interventions for individuals should only be part of a comprehensive solution. The Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience Framework (Pinderhughes et al., 2015) advances the understanding that violence in the community contributes to trauma at the individual and community levels. This framework describes how trauma manifests and can be addressed at three levels of the community environment (socio-cultural; physical/built; economic). An example of this framework in action is Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth (UNITY) sites across the US who have embraced a community trauma lens by recognising historical and current day transgressions and injustices towards Black people and the harm this has caused to the community. Strategies have included looking at implicit biases across multiple government agencies including the police, and training service providers to understand what community trauma is, why it's important to address and how to address it. Interventions also include immediate support for individuals and families impacted by violence as well as outreach to the broader community to connect with residents who live in the neighbourhood impacted by the event.

By providing services to individuals closely impacted by the violent event as well as attending to the community, the cumulative effects of violence and trauma are mitigated against.

The YBM hesitant of NHS practices spoke about their rationale for working with third-sector organisations and charities in the healing process. Developing closer relationships between the NHS and third sector organisations would benefit the lives of YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. This relationship should be bi-directional where there are opportunities for growth, shared learning, and support (Goodwin et al., 2012).

With this knowledge now in mind, clinical psychology should seek to influence and combat these issues. We should be advocating for this marginalised group if we are serious about addressing the mental health needs of those deemed 'hard to reach'. Given there is evidence of police brutality, poverty and racism which cause and perpetuate trauma responses, clinical psychology should be operating within the macrosystem to create public policy and shine a light on systemic racism and discrimination impacting YBM in general, as well as those exposed to gang affiliated violence. This top-down approach can then infiltrate statutory services like the police and mental health systems whom participants mentioned are guilty of perpetuating posttraumatic stress amongst this population.

5.8 Suggestions for Future Research

Participants spoke frequently about utilising hypervigilant behaviours as a form of survival and self-preservation. Mays et al. (2007) found hypervigilance as a stress response can create poor health, disease, and mortality. Future research could examine the relationship between physical and mental health implications of the trauma responses portrayed by YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. The chronic nature of this violence exposure is likely to lead to serious physical health issues.

Future research will play an important role in providing understanding around gang affiliated violence and the resulting trauma. Different forms of research, stemming from

different methodologies and epistemologies should be utilised to gather a more holistic perspective of this phenomenon (Joslin & Müller, 2016). Other methods could include the use of PAR, giving participants power and ownership to decide how they want to story their truths and what research they believe needs to be conducted (Noorani, 2013).

An area of further interest could be an exploration of mental health professional's subjective experiences in supporting YBM generally, as well as those exposed to gang affiliated violence. Participants highlighted challenges when working with therapists and engaging within therapy. It would be of interest to hear the experiences of therapists to complement and better understand what support is missing.

5.9 Dissemination

I believe the current study has to some extent, fulfilled its aim to raise awareness and inspire action. The next step now is to contribute to change at multiple levels and disseminate the findings. With the whole being greater than the sum of its parts, this research complemented by existing and future research will play an important role in documenting the experiences of trauma from gang affiliated violence.

This research is due to be presented at the Community Trauma Conference UK, which, this year, is focusing on Black men, Trauma and Mental Health. I plan to explore opportunities to present to relevant services to support them in implementing changes. These being statutory services that work with YBM. My hope is that I can use my research within a multi-agency capacity, bringing together children's services, youth justice and probation services, and the NHS to provide a trauma-informed response to gang affiliated violence. The London Vanguard projects are an example of NHS services that work with YBM, helping to support violence reduction to improve wellbeing in communities. Dissemination of my research to these services is likely to occur by delivering presentations. Other avenues for dissemination include planned publications (A Journal on Black Men; Journal of Black Psychology; Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and

Policy). I will also be producing accessible research summaries to share with participants and third-sector organisations.

At an individual level as a clinical psychologist, disseminating this work at various systemic levels is a form of active resistance for me to challenge current negative discourses and stereotypes surrounding YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. Using my research to highlight the emotional pain experienced by YBM offers a counternarrative to dehumanising scripts.

5.10 Reflections

I have always been drawn to working in ways where I can bring my whole, authentic self. I would like to think I was able to do this during the research process. Growing up, I witnessed the prevalence and negative consequences of gang affiliated violence on my community. I have seen the impact of it on myself, family members and friends. Having an insider-perspective provided many benefits to this project. I came with my own understanding and knowledge of this phenomenon and community. This has been a project I have thought about doing long before I started the doctorate in clinical psychology. As a Black man from 'endz', my racialised experiences, closeness to this research and my interpretations felt inseparable. I witnessed how this put participants at ease and they appeared more relaxed as the interviews unfolded. I perceived our shared slang, cultural idioms and understanding of concepts as the reasons to why participants responded openly and honestly to sensitive questions.

Because of my invested interest in this project, there were times where I felt completely disempowered in doing justice to the stories I heard. I have always felt the weight of responsibility to shift narratives around Black men as stated in Chapter 1. However, writing this thesis felt different. It felt like a 'make or break' moment in which I didn't want to rush anything, and I don't think I ever felt confident about completing the project within the

timeframe afforded to me. I also was not fully prepared for the emotional labour I would be taking on.

I have learnt so much and appreciated the opportunity to hear other YBM speak about their personal experiences. I was struck by the similarities to my own experiences, whilst other experiences felt so surreal. It has been an honour to hear participants speak so openly, especially knowing Black men don't talk! I was given a massive responsibility with the stories and trust afforded to me by the participants in this study. I needed to do everything in my power and spirit to create something memorable for them, which is why I hope I have kept them central within this research. Throughout the process I have endeavoured to be transparent and reflexive, considering my biases and influence. I am proud to have written such a thesis and proud of what I have been able to achieve with the research team around me. I have been committed to stepping down from a position of power to allow for the expertise of others to shine, whilst also acknowledging I can't stand idly when I know I have power which can and needs to be used. The field of clinical psychology is not and cannot be apolitical in the face of inequity (Dera, 2021).

As a Black man from London, I felt I had experienced many scenarios in my lifetime which desensitised me to the normality of systemic injustice and discrimination. And yet I found myself feeling overwhelmed at various points, hearing about additional layers of racism and systemic and structural violence. These experiences resonate with my lived reality and so it was difficult at times to hear. From this I have taken away the importance of talking about my own experiences to other YBM, and the empowerment felt from these experiences being validated and acknowledged. It has encouraged me to think about providing safe spaces for these discussions to occur.

I can't stress enough the importance of building relationships with gatekeepers and participants. Based on centuries of racism, discrimination, and violence, it is understandable Black communities are suspicious of researchers and mental health professionals (Boyd-Franklin, 2013). This mistrust is justified! If it is your aim to work with this population, you

need to demonstrate yourself as trustworthy. You need to go where YBM are. You need to connect with them on a human level and build genuine relationships. This may take time, but this is the price to pay for asking them to disclose sensitive and serious life experiences in a research interview. If all this is achieved, rich, powerful data can be produced.

5.11 Conclusion

This research analysed the individual, subjective experiences of eight YBM exposed to gang affiliated violence. IPA was used to highlight the sense-making processes and the profound impact of their experiences. Using the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, this study did a deep probe into understanding trauma, PTSD, and gang affiliated violence. Listening to their narratives provided further clarity of traumatic stress symptoms portrayed by YBM. Doing this helps us to challenge the utility of current diagnostic descriptions of trauma which feel irrelevant for this population.

Most importantly, this research amplifies the voices, stories, and experiences of YBM's experiences of trauma from gang affiliated violence. These voices tend to be ignored and invalidated. This research has provided key findings which should motivate future research to continue expanding our understanding of trauma, violence and the contexts shaping these experiences. The qualitative methods used, and the findings presented provide a detailed understanding of YBM's lived experiences of trauma. These experiences challenge the assumptions and stereotypes held by researchers, clinicians and policy makers concerning this population. Hopefully this research has confronted societal discourses about who these YBM are and how they live their lives.

> "*Trauma is personal. It does not disappear if it is not validated. When it is ignored or invalidated, the silent screams continue internally heard only by the one held captive. When someone enters the pain and hears the screams healing can begin*." *(Bernock, 2014).*

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Extract from Reflective Diary

As I prepared for the interview with [participant] about his experiences of trauma related to gang-affiliated violence, I couldn't help but feel a mix of anticipation and apprehension. Even though it wasn't my first time engaging with gang-affiliated individuals I felt nervous. I knew I had to approach the interview with sensitivity and an open mind. Even with my insider perspective, I was aware that nothing could have fully prepared me for the emotional depth that these discussions might uncover. I reminded myself to maintain a non-judgmental attitude and focus on building rapport with him so that he felt comfortable sharing his story.

As [participant] entered, I greeted him warmly and discussed the interview schedule, aims of the research and my context. As the interview progressed, I noticed a tension in the room. It was very apparent that he was guarded. Despite my attempts to create a welcoming environment, his responses were brief and lacked depth in comparison to other participants. He seemed reluctant to share personal experiences or engage in the interview which is why it ended up being the shortest interview of them all. Throughout the short-lived interview, my emotional response shifted from anticipation and curiosity to mild frustration and disappointment. It was challenging to connect with him on a deeper level, as he seemed distant and uninterested in opening up. There were definitely some moments of connection, where I sensed a shift in his demeanour. He began to slightly open up, recounting personal experiences of violence at a superficial level which was better than where the conversation had originally started.

Physically, I noticed myself leaning back slightly and adopting a more neutral posture as I realised the limited engagement from him. I attempted to maintain an empathetic and attentive demeanour, hoping that my presence would encourage him to share more, but my efforts didn't yield the desired outcome.

After the interview I felt a sense of incompleteness and a curiosity about his unexplored experiences. I wondered what had caused his guardedness and reluctance to delve into the topic of trauma and gang-affiliated violence. While disappointment tugged at me, I also recognised that not every interview would yield the in-depth insights I had hoped for.

This encounter served as a reminder of the inherent complexities of interviewing individuals who have experienced trauma. It highlighted the importance of acknowledging and respecting boundaries and understanding that their willingness to share may vary significantly. I recognised the need to adjust my approach and adapt to different interview dynamics to ensure a more productive conversation.

APPENDIX B: Research Flyer

LOOKING FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Trauma - Gang Affiliation

Are you a **Black*** male who is gang affiliated, aged 18-35, living in London?

Have you experienced violent activity: hurting others, others hurting you or you seeing someone close to you get hurt?

I am hoping to understand the experiences of trauma amongst Black men who have experienced physical violence due to gang affiliation. THIS IS A CHANCE TO HAVE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

*Black = anyone who self-identifies as Black or from African or Caribbean Heritage

Unfortunately you can not participate if you have an open/current criminal investigation

WHO AM I?

My name is Ron Dodzro and I am a trainee clinical psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire. I am a Black male, aged 18-35, living in London, with lived experience of gang affiliation

CONTACT ME TO FIND OUT MORE

rd20aaz@herts.ac.uk

University of Hertfordshire UH

Ethics Protocol: LMS/PGR/UH/05089

APPENDIX C: Email template with link of video

Hi, my name is Ron and I'm a trainee clinical psychologist. I am contacting you/this organisation because I am looking for some people to help me with my research on gang affiliation. I'm doing this because I've had family and friends who are gang affiliated and I've seen them show trauma and PTSD because of being in violent situations. It's a topic that hits close to home and something I'm passionate about. This is also a great opportunity for people who are gang-affiliated to have their voices heard, with the hope that this research can then impact how people, services, society treat this group of people.

I want to interview people about trauma and PTSD. This will be extremely confidential. I don't need to know who people are. I am aiming for 8 participants so I can have an in-depth conversation about these topics. Confidentiality and transparency are the biggest principles of this research. Interviews will be audio recorded. There will be no cameras. Food and drink will be provided, travel expenses can be covered, and participants will receive a voucher for their time. The interviews can take place in a safe location for the participants, and they can choose this location. For example, my recent interviews have been in charity buildings where those who are gang-affiliated visit regularly.

Please contact me via email address (rd20aaz@herts.ac.uk) or on twitter (@gangtrauma) if you know anyone who could benefit from this. There is no obligation to commit to the research. I have included a video (https://vimeo.com/762332872) that can be shared widely. The format of the research is that I would interview people for about an hour talking about gang affiliation, violence, and trauma/PTSD. I will not expect anyone to talk about specific details they've experienced. It's more about the impact these experiences have had on them. As transparency is an important principle, I am happy to send people questions in advance so there are no surprises.

My inclusion criteria are:

Males aged 18-35

Anyone that self-identifies as Black or from African or Caribbean heritage

Must be affiliated to a gang in London

Has experienced violent activity because of gang-affiliation

Best Wishes,

Ronald Dodzro

Trainee Clinical Psychologist

University of Hertfordshire

APPENDIX D- Ethical Approval

University of Hertfordshire UH

HEALTH, SCIENCE, ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY ECDA

ETHICS APPROVAL NOTIFICATION

TO	Ronald Dodzro
CC	Rachel McKail
FROM	Dr Rosemary Godbold, Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA Vice Chair
DATE	13/09/2022

Protocol number:	**LMS/PGT/UH/05089**
Title of study:	The Life of a Top Boy: A qualitative exploration of young, Black men and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of gang affiliation and trauma

Your application for ethics approval has been accepted and approved with the following conditions by the ECDA for your School and includes work undertaken for this study by the named additional workers below:

Professor Jane Wood

General conditions of approval:

Ethics approval has been granted subject to the standard conditions below:

Permissions: Any necessary permissions for the use of premises/location and accessing participants for your study must be obtained in writing prior to any data collection commencing. Failure to obtain adequate permissions may be considered a breach of this protocol.

External communications: Ensure you quote the UH protocol number and the name of the approving Committee on all paperwork, including recruitment advertisements/online requests, for this study.

Invasive procedures: If your research involves invasive procedures you are required to complete and submit an EC7 Protocol Monitoring Form, and copies of your completed consent paperwork to this ECDA once your study is complete.

Submission: Students must include this Approval Notification with their submission.

Validity:

This approval is valid:

From: 13/09/2022

To: 30/04/2023

APPENDIX E- Participant Information Sheet

Title:

*The Life of a Top Boy: A qualitative exploration of **young, Black men** and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of "**gang**" **affiliation** and **trauma***

You are being invited to take part in some research done by myself, Ron Dodzro, a Trainee Clinical Psychologist at the University of Hertfordshire. This thesis is supervised by Dr Rachel McKail (Clinical Psychologist & Senior Lecturer, University of Hertfordshire) and Professor Jane Wood (Forensic Psychologist & Director of Research and Innovation, University of Kent).

Who am I? Why am I doing this?

I'm Ron, someone who identifies as being a Black man, with lived experience of gang affiliation. Being around friends and family who share this experience means I have seen them show trauma from being in violent situations. As a Trainee Clinical Psychologist at University of Hertfordshire, I am passionate about working with Black men explore their mental health and provide a platform for their voices and feelings to be heard. I'm also very passionate about changing the way the world sees us. My plan after is to share my findings with the world so positive change can be made

Before you decide if you would like to take part, it is important that you understand what the research is about and what you would be asked to do if you choose to take part. Please take some time to read the following information carefully. Please contact me via email to discuss anything at all that is not clear or for any more information you would like to help you make your decision. Responses will be between 9am-5pm. Please take your time to decide whether or not you wish to be involved.

What is this research about?

This research is interested in finding out what it is like for young Black men who have experienced violent activity because of their affiliation to a gang. Experiencing violent activity covers you hurting others, others hurting you and you seeing someone close to you get hurt. Young Black men affiliated to gangs don't get their voices heard in society. They are often just seen as "hoodlums", "troublemakers", "gangsters". This doesn't acknowledge who these young men are as individuals and the issues they face.

What would happen if I agreed to take part?

If you are willing to take part in the research, you would be sent a consent form to sign. We would then set up a meeting for about an hour. It would be set up like a podcast, with podcast microphones and stands. A lot of people I work with have found this to be a comfortable way to talk about what is on their minds. Food and drink will be provided. Travel expenses will also be covered. Agreeing to join the research does not mean that you must complete it. You are free to withdraw at any stage up until the data analysis in February 2023, without giving a reason.

Risks of taking part?

I would be asking you questions about violent physical activity, gang affiliation and trauma. As the research is about trauma, some of the questions might be upsetting and you might notice yourself getting upset or feeling something in your body. If this happens you can take a break. You can also ask to withdraw from the study at any point. You do not have to talk about any of the difficult experiences you have been through, and you do not have to share anything that you do not feel comfortable sharing. You will be supported at various points of the interview if any distress is observed. I am happy to share the questions beforehand so that there are no surprises with questioning. At the end of the interview, I will provide you with details of local services you can get in touch with if you feel you need some psychological support.

I am not asking or expecting anyone to disclose illegal activity. However if you do accidentally disclose illegal activity this will have to be reported to the police. I will also have to call the police if I believe that you are in any danger.

Who can take part in this study?

To take part in this study, you must:
Identify as being male
Be aged 18-35
Identify as Black or from African or Caribbean Heritage which includes dual/multiple heritage
Identify as a member of, or affiliated to a gang in London
Have experienced violent activity: hurting others, others hurting you and you seeing someone close to you get hurt.

You cannot take part if:
You are currently part of a criminal investigation

What will happen to the data collected within this study and how will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

All your personal details, consent forms and audio recordings from the interview will be stored electronically on an encrypted, two factor authentication drive which only the principal researcher will have access to. Your interview transcript will also be stored securely on this drive. You will be given a pseudonym to keep your identity anonymous and confidential. Our conversation will be audio-recorded, and the recording will be typed up word-for-word afterwards. Your audio data from the interview may be provided to a professional transcription service, who will be bound by a non-disclosure agreement in order to ensure your confidentiality and data protection. Anonymised transcripts may be shared with the research team involved in the study, as part of data analysis. All your data will be deleted when the research project is submitted in June 2023.

What will happen to the results of the study?

When the research is complete, I will write up the results in a thesis. I will also write articles for publication and present my findings at conferences and workshops. You will be given the option to be contacted to review the results of the study and to give your feedback; you can choose whether you would like to do this, and even if you say yes at the end of your interview, you can change your mind at any time.

Who can I contact if I have any questions?

If you would like further information or would like to discuss any details personally, please get in touch with me or my main research supervisor, in writing by email:

Me:
Ron Dodzro
Trainee Clinical Psychologist
Email: rd20aaz@herts.ac.uk

Supervisor:
Rachel McKail
Senior lecturer
Email: r.mckail@herts.ac.uk

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED, PLEASE GET IN CONTACT WITH ME FOR US TO DISCUSS MORE ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Although we hope it is not the case, if you have any complaints or concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please write to the University's Secretary and Registrar at the following address:

Secretary and Registrar, University of Hertfordshire
College Lane
Hatfield
Herts
AL10 9AB

Thank you very much for reading this information and giving consideration to taking part in this study. This information sheet is for you to keep

APPENDIX F- CONSENT FORM

Consent Form

Please complete this form once you have read the information sheet and/or listened to an explanation about this research

Title:

*The Life of a Top Boy: A qualitative exploration of **young, Black men** and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of "**gang**" **affiliation** and **trauma***

Thank you for wanting to take part in this research. If you have any questions about taking part in this research or from the information sheet, please contact me via phone or email. Responses will be between 9am-5pm. Do this before signing this form. You will also be given a copy of this consent form to keep. By signing this form I agree to take part in this research (UH Health, Science, Engineering & Technology ECDA protocol number: LMS/PGR/UH/05089)

I, [please provide a random country, in BLOCK CAPITALS e.g. GHANA, TURKEY etc]

…… agree to take part in this research.

Please tick the box if you agree with each sentence:

□ I have read and understood the information sheet given to me

□ I confirm I have been given a copy of the information sheet to keep

□ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about this study and discuss details of the study with Ron

□ I understand that all the information given in this study will remain confidential and only Ron and his research team will have access to identifying data.

□ I understand that if I mention any illegal activity, Ron has a duty of care to report this to the police.

□ I understand that if Ron believes I am in danger because of participating in this research, he has a duty of care to call the police.

□ I understand that I can choose to decline answering any of the questions during the session

□ I understand that I may withdraw from the study without having to give a reason.

□ I have been given information about the risks of participating within this research. I have been told about the aftercare and support that will be offered to me if I become distressed.

□ I understand that when it gets to the point of Ron analysing the interviews (February 2023), I will no longer be able to remove myself from the research.

□ I understand that my interview will be audio-recorded and written up word-for-word. This may involve a third-party organisation which will transcribe some of the recordings

□ I agree that the results will be written up for thesis/dissertation, book chapters, journal articles, magazines, conferences, workshops but that my personal information will be removed from it (e.g. names, places, and ages)

□ Contact details have been given to me if I wish to ask any more questions about the research

Signature of participant ……
Date……

Signature of investigator …….
Date……

Name of principal investigator: RON DODZRO

APPENDIX G- Interview Schedule

Introduction

Thank you for meeting with me today. Just a reminder, my name is Ron, and I am a trainee clinical psychologist. As you know, I am doing some research on Black men's experiences of trauma linked to violence and gang affiliation. This is not intended to be an interrogation. It is less about the specific details of incidents but more about how you felt or can imagine how people might have felt after experiencing violent activity. Its more about your journey and reflections. I will be showing flashcards of words when I ask some of the questions.

I want to own my context. I am a Black man from London with experiences of gang affiliation growing up. This was a long time ago. I do not know what it is like now being a Black man who is gang affiliated in London. I will be exploring your experiences from a curious position. Some of the questions might be uncomfortable or take you to a place you have been avoiding. You do not have to answer all my questions. If I say something that sounds a bit confusing or does not make sense let me know. I might have worded the questions in a confusing way so sorry if that happens. I might ask you to expand on things, so I fully understand what has been said. Please remember you can request to stop the interview or take a break. As I mentioned in the information sheet, the interviews will be audio recorded. Is this still, okay? It will only be listened by the research team and will be destroyed afterward. All your details will be kept confidential and anonymous. I will call you by the country name you have agreed to which is...

- How old are you?
- How long have you been gang affiliated?
- Based on your experiences of violent activity, do you feel that you might have trauma or PTSD? **What I mean by PTSD are feelings, behaviours, and physical symptoms that someone might have after experiencing trauma**.

How does the environment of YBM in gangs affect their trauma?

- Can you tell me about your area/ends? What is it like living there? (CARD)
- Do you feel safe in your area? Could you walk around during the day or night by yourself? Could anyone walk around safely?
- Do you feel that living in your area and being gang affiliated impacts your mental health in any way? If so, how?

How do young, Black men in gangs make sense of their experiences of violent situations?

Attacked

- Have you ever been attacked in your area or another area? (CARD) (***PROMPTS e.g., been shot at, gun or knife pulled out on you, drive-by, stabbed, chased, beat-up, robbed, house run up on, fist fight, someone trying to run you over ,in the car***). Was that due to gang affiliation? What was that like? How did that make you feel? If not, what kind of attacks do people who are gang affiliated experience?
- Have you experienced violence from the police. What was that like? How did that make you feel?

- Has anyone ever threatened to kill you? What was that like? How did that make you feel?

Witnessed

- Have you ever witnessed violence in your area or another area? (CARD) (***PROMPTS e.g. shooting, gun or knife pulled out, drive-by, someone being chased, stabbing, beatings, robbery, fist fights, people seeing someone get killed, dead bodies, someone trying to run someone over in the car***). What was that like? How did that make you feel?
- Have you seen a friend or family member attacked by the police? What was that like? How did that make you feel?

Perpetrated

- Without going into detail, have you ever committed violence against another person? (CARD) What was that like without going in to detail about what happened?
- If you haven't, what impact do you think committing violence has on a person?

How do young Black men in gangs make sense of trauma/PTSD?

- How do you define trauma or PTSD? (CARD)
- Do you think being gang affiliated causes you to experience trauma or PTSD?
- If someone who is gang affiliated were to be suffering with trauma or PTSD, what would we see in that person? (***PROMPTS physically, mentally, behaviourally***).
- After experiencing violence, have you noticed anything out of the ordinary in yourself? (CARD) (***PROMPTS trouble falling or staying asleep, bad dreams/nightmares, disturbing memories, suddenly acting, or feeling as if the experience were happening again, feeling very upset when something reminded you of the stressful experience, heart pounding, trouble breathing, or sweating, avoiding thinking about, or talking about the experience, avoiding activities or situations that remind you of the experience, being "super alert" and on guard, feeling jumpy and on edge***)
- Do you think that someone with trauma or PTSD can get better? What might need to happen for it to get better?

How do young, Black men in gangs manage trauma from exposure to violent situations?

- Is there anything you've done to help manage trauma or PTSD from violence you have experienced? Did it help? (CARD)
- What kind of things do you think other people do to help manage trauma or PTSD from violence they have experienced? (***PROMPTS drugs, alcohol, more violence, making music, avoidance, safety behaviours***).
- After exposure to violence did you ever speak to friends or other people who are gang affiliated about what happened? If so, what was that like? If not, why not? (CARD)
- Would you ever speak to a mental health professional about trauma or PTSD you may be experiencing? If not, why not? If so, why? What would you want that to look like?

Is there anything else you would like to say that we have not already discussed? (CARD)

APPENDIX H- Debrief Sheet

Dear (participant),

Thank you for taking part in this research. The hope is that with your interview, we will be able to provide new knowledge about the experiences of trauma amongst Black men who are gang affiliated. This will potentially have an impact on how statutory services (Youth offending services, integrated gang units, mental health services) work with you and assess for trauma. When services are better informed about the experiences of people who access services, staff members and professionals can work with yourselves to adapt services to better suit your needs. Unfortunately, there is very little known about the psychological wellbeing of those who are gang affiliated. This then means people go unsupported until they reach a crisis point.

Your interview will be valuable in providing a new perspective into the experiences of Black men who experience trauma but don't access talking therapy. It is also hoped that by spreading the results of this research, it can encourage other Black men who are gang affiliated to be aware of some of the issues they may also be facing.

Some of the discussions we have had may cause you to have some upsetting feelings and thoughts. If you are feeling stressed or uncomfortable and require further support, please let me know before you leave. An information pack will be provided which contains some local services available to you for psychological support.

What will happen next?

All the interviews I conduct will be analysed to explore the experiences of the participants who have taken part. Once the results have been written up and submitted, there will be an opportunity to attend a feedback session to hear about the findings. If you cannot attend, a summary sheet will be sent to you. It is hoped that the results will be published and presented at conferences and services. Thank you for taking part. I really appreciate your time. If you have any questions or queries, please contact me at rd20aaz@herts.ac.uk

APPENDIX I: Support Services

APPENDIX J- Risk Assessment

UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE

ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR STUDIES INVOLVING THE USE OF HUMAN PARTICIPANTS ('ETHICS COMMITTEE')

FORM EC5 – HARMS, HAZARDS, AND RISKS:

ASSESSMENT AND MITIGATION

Name of applicant: Ronald Dodzro Date of assessment: 18.7.22

Title of Study/Activity: *The Life of a Top Boy: A qualitative exploration of young, Black men and their stories of experiencing violent activity in the context of "gang" affiliation and trauma*

If you are required to complete and submit a School-specific risk assessment (in accordance with the requirements of the originating School), it is acceptable to make a cross-reference from that document to form EC5 in order not to have to repeat the information twice. The purpose of Form EC5 is to consider how a participant might react to the activities in the study and to indicate how you will manage such reactions; the Form also addresses the safety of the investigator and how any risks to the investigator will be managed.

Activity Description					
1. IDENTIFY RISKS/HAZARDS	2. WHO COULD BE HARMED & HOW?		3. EVALUATE THE RISKS		4. ACTION NEEDED
Activities/tasks and associated hazards Describe the activities involved in the study and any associated risks/ hazards, both physical and emotional, resulting from the study. Consider the risks to participants/the research team/members of the public. In respect of any equipment to be used read manufacturer's instructions and note any hazards that arise, particularly from incorrect use.)	Who is at risk? e.g. participants, investigators, other people at the location, the owner / manager / workers at the location etc.	How could they be harmed? What sort of accident could occur, e.g. trips, slips, falls, lifting equipment etc, handling chemical substances, use of invasive procedures and correct disposal of equipment etc. What type of injury is likely? Could the study cause discomfort or distress of a mental or emotional character to participants and/or investigators? What is the nature of any discomfort or distress of a mental or emotional character that you might anticipate?	Are there any precautions currently in place to prevent the hazard or minimise adverse effects? Are there standard operating procedures or rules for the premises? Have there been agreed levels of supervision of the study? Will trained medical staff be present? Etc/	Are there any risks that are not controlled or not adequately controlled?	List the action that needs to be taken to reduce/manage the risks arising from your study for example, provision of medical support/aftercare, precautions to be put in place to avoid or minimise risk or adverse effects NOTE: medical or other aftercare and/or support **must** be made available for participants and/or investigator(s) who require it.

The questions in the interview, particularly the ones linked to trauma, could potentially cause some stress/discomfort.	Participant, investigator	Stress/discomfort resulting from answering questions and listening to response. This may elicit a behavioural and physiological response. Psychological distress could also occur. There could be intent to harm self.	The nature of the environment has been designed to minimise this. it being setup in a podcast style to make it a more relaxed environment as opposed to a formal one. Participants being aware of the questions beforehand so there are no surprises with questioning. I will also utilise my therapeutic skills to employ strategies for stress/discomfort. This is based on my experience as a CBT therapist and clinical psychologist. Based on the questioning and how the questions are framed, the participants will not be expected to relive their experiences. Participants will not be required to detail the incidents which occurred as this is one of the factors involved in reliving the experience.	How the participant will respond	I will be carefully looking out for discomfort, distress, trauma responses and the different forms this may take- silence, anger, sweating, shaking, hot flushes, crying. Participants will be offered the option of not choosing to answer questions. Pauses between questions will be important to not rush on to the next question. Breaks will be offered. If a participant does become upset or distressed: I will offer to pause the interview, or to terminate and/or rearrange it if participant feels this is the best course of action. Participant will be given a follow-up call. Aftercare support will be provided in the format of giving local services to that participant regarding formal psychological support if needed. I will discuss my reflections of the interviews with my supervisors and the emotional response the interviews may have evoked in me. I will be mindful of how many

					interviews I book in a week, with the intention of spacing them out to minimise emotional exhaustion.
Working with a population that engages in violent activity	Participant, investigator	Investigator could be physically harmed if something is said that the participant does not like. This could be a behavioural reaction to discomfort/stress. Participants could then be harmed in an act of self-defence from myself that is proportionate.	The nature of the environment has been designed to minimise this. it being setup in a podcast style to make it a more relaxed environment as opposed to a formal one. The questioning style will be one that is not too intrusive. Active listening and respect will also be portrayed. Participants feeling that they can trust me. I am working with consultants who participants will already have a good relationship with. Letting them know I don't care what they've done. No judgement.	How the participant will respond. Participants may be used to behavioural responses when dealing with affect.	Meeting with consultants to discuss how they work with this target group and what this looks like to gather tips on my questioning style and manner. Meeting with consultants and participants to build trust and transparency about the research project. A risk assessment of the location of interview To work in line with the Social Research Association (SRA)'s Code of Practice for the Safety of Social Researchers - of particular relevance is being aware of local tensions, planning the route in advance to interview location, dressing inconspicuously and unprovocative, making sure I am seen entering the interview location (ensuring there is CCTV present so people are being seen), providing

					location to supervisor and a check-in/check-out process organised, carrying an alarm to attract attention in an emergency, letting the interviewee know that I have a schedule and that others know where I am, leaving my mobile phone switched on, assessing the layout of building and the quickest way out always carrying identification. In the result of a physical incident occurring, the police will be notified, and supervisors contacted.
Equipment malfunctioning	Participant, investigator	Both investigator and participants could be harmed if equipment malfunctions. As it is a podcast-style interview, there will be microphones, stands to support the microphones, use of laptop and software.	I have been practicing how to set up the podcast equipment safely.	Spontaneous malfunctioning of equipment	Recommendations in equipment manuals will be adhered to for malfunctioning of equipment.
Personal injury	Investigator	Lifting of equipment could be a risk. I could injure myself by carrying equipment (e.g., microphones, stands, laptop).	The stands and microphones are a bit heavy. To ensure safety I will not carry it all in one load	The investigator moving too quickly whilst carrying equipment or falling over.	Health and safety protocols around carrying equipment will be adhered to (e.g. positioning my feet, accordingly, getting a secure grip around the equipment, keeping the load close to my body, maintaining good posture, using leg muscles).

Food poisoning from hot food and food allergies	Participant, investigator	Symptoms of food poisoning could occur and issues with allergies as participants will be provided with food and drinks to feed into it being a relaxed environment.	Cold food and snacks to also be offered.	How the food is prepared	Participants will be asked about food allergies in advance. Food will be sourced from vendors with certification from the Food Standards Agency and those that have good food hygiene ratings.
The location of the interviews	Participant, investigator	If the interviews are in a location that the participant has a negative perception/relationship, this could cause anxiety and stress. They could also be harmed if the space is not confidential.	I am liaising with my consultants to find neutral, confidential, safe spaces for participants. This may be outside of their formal workspaces. Participants will have travel expenses covered for them to take an uber to the location of interview.		Adhere to standard operating procedures/rules for the interview location such as awareness of fire protocol. Getting familiar with the location will also be important. To ask participants areas of concern for them where interviews should not take place. The interview locations will be private and confidential. Somewhere the conversation cannot be overheard. It will be accessible and easy to get to. The location will have easy and safe exit if needed. Waiting rooms will be avoided. If the location requires sign in/sign out, participants will use their pseudonyms. Locations will have easy access to toilets also. Venues that won't be used are spaces that

					are completely isolated with nobody around, outdoor spaces, homes. If there happens to be a situation with one of the locations whereby it is not confidential or safe on that given day, interviews will be rescheduled. They will also have the option of getting a cab to locations.
Disclosure of illegal activity	Participant, investigator	Both could be harmed by the disclosure of illegal activity which needs to then be reported. This could ruin trust for the participant. For the investigator, there may be some distress/comfort occurring from having to contact the police knowing they have an insidious relationship with this population.	Not asking about explicit details relating to illegal activities. Stating to participants about breaches in confidentiality at the start and during the interview. Having a discussion about anonymity- being up front and informing them that I am not interested in names, I can anonymise the activity, they can say its someone else that did those things. I am not looking for anyone to confess.	Participants still disclosing illegal activity	Ensuring my questions do not require the disclosure of explicit details relating to illegal activity and are more about the participants emotional and psychological state and wellbeing. If participants disclose any offence in whatever context that may have been in, this will be reported to the police. The interview will be stopped, and the police notified after participant has left. Ultimately, letting participants know about the line and what happens when it is crossed- my duty to disclose.
Participants under the influence of drugs or alcohol	Participant, investigator	Due to the nature of the topic and the lifestyle of some people who are gang affiliated, they might be under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This could result in over	Participants will be informed in advance that the interviews will not take place if they are under the influence of	Participants not telling me if they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.	Investigator using smell to assess the recent use of cannabis. Investigator explicitly asking if participants are under the

		disclosure, threats made to the investigator, lack of informed consent.	drugs or alcohol.		influence of drugs or alcohol. This being assessed throughout the interview. If I believe participants are under the influence of drugs or alcohol, interviews will be stopped and rescheduled.
Participants speaking to me about their experiences and people finding out	Participant	Participant may disclose to peers that they are speaking to me about their experiences.	Participants will be told in advance the dangers of disclosure to peers. This will be done when arranging to book the interviews with prospective participants.	Participants being followed.	Investigator explicitly informing participants about the dangers of disclosing the conversations we will have prior to and post the interviews. Pseudonyms are provided to safeguard the individual and pertinent details removed from transcription. If this occurs where I suspect that the participant is in danger as a result of participating in this research, I will call the police.

Signed by applicant: 08.09.22 Signed by supervisor: RACHEL MCKAIL 08/09/2022	Dated: 18.7.22

APPENDIX K- EXAMPLE OF IPA PROCESS

1. Extract from 'Brazil's Analysed Transcript. Analysing code in text box: Red= descriptive, exploratory notes. Blue = Experiential statements

P: … you don't even have to be involved or nothing, like we're still getting shot and stabbed whatever

P: … it's like the way we grew up, yeah, like our generation, you just got to know like … firm it … yeah firm it – that's life, innit.

Probably like the older lots, yeah, they would call it that innit because they … they know that's not normal innit … our generation, they just … it's normalised …

It's also because of what the older lots have started… really and truly they've just started this off over some rubbish … most people fall into it, most people don't … that's just how it goes

1. His comment, "... you don't even have to be involved or nothing, like we're still getting shot and stabbed whatever" appears to convey a sense of pervasive threat and indiscriminate violence within his environment. This notion that anyone can become a victim, regardless of their involvement or non-involvement, illustrates his perception of a ubiquitous risk of harm. The casual tone used to describe such serious consequences could also suggest a degree of normalization or desensitization to these violent occurrences. A persistent sense of danger and unpredictability within his environment

2 His comments, "... it's like the way we grew up, yeah, like our generation, you just got to know like … firm it … yeah firm it – that's life, innit", appear to convey a deep-rooted acceptance of adversity as a characteristic aspect of his generational experience and upbringing. The repeated phrase "firm it" suggests an internalized societal expectation to endure hardship without complaint. The phrase "that's life, innit" underscores this acceptance. An internalised societal norm to stoically endure adversity

3 He suggests a generational difference in the perception of what is considered 'normal'. He seems to indicate that older individuals ("the older lots") recognise certain experiences or conditions as abnormal, while his own generation has come to consider them as 'normalised'. The repetition of "it's normalised" underscores this acceptance and internalisation of conditions that may be considered undesirable or harmful by others. A disparity in the interpretation of 'normalcy. across generations

4 He appears to attribute the genesis of certain detrimental situations or behaviours to the actions of the previous generation ("what the older lots have started"). He seems to express a sense of inevitability and resignation about individuals falling into the same patterns, reflecting a perception of a cycle that's hard to break. The use of the term "rubbish" might suggest a perception of these inherited situations as unnecessary or trivial, yet still with serious consequences. The phrase "that's just how it goes" may indicate a level of acceptance or fatalism about these conditions. Fatalistic inevitability with conflict seen as a legacy inherited from the preceding generation

I've lived in the area …so, it's a thing where I have to go shop … do you get it? I have to go and do this whatever … it's got to the point now where I've got used to it …Obviously, I'm still like, I'll be paranoid and that's … "Who's that in the car?"… but you get used to it like … it's just one of those things… Every … every other estate goes through this … it's just who's got it worse …

5/6/7 The repetitive necessity of tasks ("I have to go shop … I have to go and do this whatever") seems to imply that normal everyday activities are tainted with an undercurrent of fear and suspicion. The use of phrases like "I've got used to it" and "it's just one of those things" suggests a normalization of paranoia, indicating a persistent state of high-alert and vigilance ("Who's that in the car?"). His concluding remark, that every estate goes through this and some have it worse, reflects a shared experience and an implicit ranking of hardship and danger within his community. Mundane tasks tainted with fear and vigilance/ A normalised state of paranoia/ A common communal experience of adversity and danger

You know what it is… I can't lie I'll say this now… when I'm by myself, yeah, I feel safe. When I'm with other people, yeah… I don't feel safe. Because now that's … that's like you are a target then… because when you're around other people, yeah, deep it yeh … say paigons pull up now yeah, and we're … we're together, yeah …I've got to worry about the people I'm with now fam – you get it? There's no running, there's no nothing … na, do you get it…when I'm by myself, I can get away, I know I can … I can cut out; I can do whatever…

8 There's an expressed paradox where the presence of others, often seen as a source of security, instead brings a heightened sense of vulnerability and danger. He equates being with others to being a "target", suggesting the perception of increased risk due to group dynamics and the potential for collective altercations ("say paigons pull up now"). The need to look out for companions ("I've got to worry about the people I'm with now") implies a code of loyalty or responsibility that further intensifies the perceived threat. Conversely, solitude is associated with greater control over personal safety and a freedom to react ("I can cut out, I can do whatever"). Companionship inducing vulnerability and danger by transforming individuals into targets

(Slight pause) … I would say yeah, because none of us … everyone that's passed all of this year, none of us were supposed to go through this, do you get it? None of us was supposed to hear, "Oh yeah, your bredrin's just been stabbed, and now he's dead." you get it… this wasn't supposed to happen. Our parents have come down to this country from Jamaica … whatever, whatever, yeah, to come and live a better life, you get it… Next thing you know their child's all gone – yeah – no one wanted this bro. No one wanted this… yeah … that's trauma in general

9 This excerpt conveys a poignant reflection on loss and unmet expectations, with a strong sense of what 'wasn't supposed to happen.' He acknowledges the weight of the tragedies faced by his peers ("none of us were supposed to go through this"). The shocking revelation of a friend's violent death underscores the brutal reality they contend with. The reference to his parents' migration from Jamaica highlights an unfulfilled aspiration for a better life, now marred by the loss of their children. The repetition of "no one wanted this" speaks volumes about the universality of their grief, and the utterance "that's trauma in general" may suggest an understanding of their collective experiences as traumatic. The slight pause at the beginning might imply a depth of personal reflection or emotional burden. The shared trauma and grief borne from tragedies.

It's who's in that car? Because say it is a gang member now yeah… You got some of them hot-headed yutes … hot-headed ones, yeah, that just don't care what you say, like you could tell them anything, like show them proof and everything … they don't care!... It's got to that point where it's… know what car … yeah, that car there dodgy.

10/11 his excerpt highlights his heightened state of vigilance and perceived threat from his surrounding environment. The concern about identifying occupants of cars demonstrates a constant alertness, potentially stemming from fear of rival gangs or "hot-headed" individuals. He depicts these individuals as obstinate and unpredictable ("they just don't care what you say"), escalating the sense of potential danger. The mention of a "dodgy" car points to a coded language or internal system of signs that helps identify potential threats, suggesting that survival in his context involves constant risk-assessment and calculation. An unpredictable and dangerous environment marked by obstinate individuals and rival gangs/ A lived experience that requires unrelenting risk-assessment and strategic calculation

P: … they violated, they violate though… we were walking from a shop … and they see us, innit?... They're saying "we're stopping you because of robberies… there's robberies happening and na-na-na, and murders, you know, we literally had just come from the shop … they pull up, they see two black kids … black yutes together … pulled us. It's bullshit … started searching my shit… seeing if our phones were stolen … it's mad … just because we're black. You know, if that was two white kids, they would have just LEFT them …

12 This excerpt offers a candid account of his experience of racial profiling and perceived injustice by authorities, specifically the police. He feels targeted due to his race and age ("they see two black kids ... black yutes together"), associating his identity with suspicion and criminality. His narrative suggests a frustration and disillusionment with the police's discriminatory practices ("it's bullshit... just because we're black"). The comparison to hypothetical "two white kids" further emphasizes his belief in racially biased treatment. His expression "violated" indicates a sense of personal intrusion, disrespect, and unfairness associated with these incidents. Feeling frustrated and disillusioned due to racially biased treatment from police

P: Yeah, fucked up on the block… I've had police pull up innit, we've had whatever like weed whatever … and then … it's one of those blocks where there's no block door innit. So, I ran into the upper stairs and like … and then the feds, you know, when, yeah, you've run now innit, so now they're going to be rough now innit …so my man's moving all rough and that… I've had my phone in my hand, but he's tried to snatch my phone out of my hand innit, but I've like gripped it and that … and then he's there saying, "Stop resisting," and all of that … next thing you know he's just trying to fight me and that … (sucks his teeth) … some big guy bruv

13 This excerpt depicts his personal encounter with the police, showcasing an experience of aggressive and confrontational policing. His decision to run away after being found with "weed" and the subsequent rough handling by the police ("my man's moving all rough and that") suggest his fear and distrust of the police. His expression of frustration and disdain ("sucks his teeth") further accentuates his negative sentiment towards law enforcement, revealing a confrontational relationship between him and authorities. A deeply ingrained negative sentiment towards the police

It gets like that… But that's what they want innit. They want you to be scared of them… They want you to … But because they know, yeah, we're not going to be scared of you, we're going to take the piss out of you, like, you get me?

14 his transcript shows his perspective on the power dynamics between the youth and the police. he seems to perceive that the police desire to instil fear ("they want you to be scared of them"), which he defiantly resists, asserting his decision not to be intimidated ("we're not going to be scared of you"). The reference to taking "the piss out of you" reflects a rebellious attitude towards authority, underlining his resistance to being controlled or subdued. Resisting power dynamics and control exerted by the police

P: Yeah. Like… they're threats innit, everyone's going to say it. It's just gonna … it all comes down to who's serious… when you know the guy, you know he's about it, that's when you're going to be like over-thinking, "rah, is he actually going to do it?"

15 he discusses the psychological impact of living under the constant threat of violence. It appears that threats are commonplace ("everyone's going to say it"), and he has learned to differentiate between empty threats and credible ones based on his knowledge of the individuals involved ("when you know the guy, you know he's about it"). The expression of "over-thinking" suggests a persistent state of heightened alertness or vigilance that can contribute to chronic stress and anxiety. Discerning credible threats from bluster in an environment rife with violence

P: … you adapt to the life-style literally … if you're involved or not, you adapt to it.

16/17 his brief statement underscores a sense of inevitability and adaptability. Whether directly involved in violent situations or not, he emphasizes that adaptation to the lifestyle becomes essential for survival. An acceptance of violence as an inescapable reality of his environment/ The necessity of adaptation as an integral part of survival

P: No, like I've just seen like bare… like the older lots from my area and that ... seen bare of them just walking down the road and like the next thing you know, like … I promise you not … about 50 guys come through an alleyway, like I can see baseball bats … knives all of that, all out you know… they're just walking around. (clicks his tongue) … they've then … the people from my area tried to run now and everything … they chased them. I see one of the guys afterwards, yeah, he's got like a cut from his coat and that … like so close to being stabbed and that …from that day… I was young now … I just watched how everything happens … when I saw the guy's coat and that, I was thinking "rah he could have lost his life"… and he was the fat guy innit, so (laughs) … he was … he was like the last one

18 This transcript recounts a potentially traumatizing event he witnessed, providing a glimpse into the everyday occurrences in his community. The mention of weapons such as baseball bats and knives underscores the high level of violence that characterizes these confrontations. A sense of close-call danger and vulnerability is conveyed through his reflection on the narrowly escaped stabbing. Potential trauma from witnessing and being close to such violence

it's one of those things where like, you see me, yeah … it got to the point where the area was just too much innit, so … mum's just telling you, yeah, "Stay inside", you get it, so it just got to the point where I was just staying inside innit… and then you're just hearing bare shit… it gets like that …

19/20/21 This excerpt reflects his experience of confinement and the influence of an unsafe environment on personal choices. The parental advice to "Stay inside" suggests a protective strategy due to the high levels of threat and violence in the area. His compliance ("I was just staying inside") could denote his acceptance of this advice, indicating a sense of helplessness or resignation towards the situation. His phrase "you're just hearing bare shit" might imply that the violence and challenges of his surroundings permeate his life, even when physically withdrawn from them, reinforcing the inescapable nature of these events. The repetition of "it gets like that" may indicate normalization of these circumstances as an unavoidable part of life in his community. A life constrained by an unsafe environment,/ parental advice and personal choices being driven by threats and violence/The acceptance of confinement as a protective strategy

P: It's the same thing as like … the way like it's the other … the opposite side like, the opps will pull up or whatever, yeah? So, it's the same exact thing. This time, yeah, it's not a thing where like you can run and do all of these things or jump in and that… They're just another opp … they just got the … they just got the authority to actually do something to you… they can literally spot a guy and just be like, "Yeah (clicks his tongue) … don't like him, he's hitting a cell tonight"… he didn't even have to have anything on him like …

22 In this excerpt, he appears to equate the presence and role of authority figures (possibly referring to the police or similar entities) with opposing gangs ("opps"), suggesting that he views them as an additional threat rather than a source of protection. He implies that authorities abuse their power ("they just got the authority to actually do something to you") and act arbitrarily ("don't like him, he's hitting a cell tonight"), leading to a perception of unjust targeting and discrimination. The police as an additional threat rather than a source of protection

This is what I'm saying … you see when the younger generation… they're listening to music videos, all these things where they're chatting (does a bit of rapping –man got down my opp and that) … Now they're thinking, "Yeah, man's gonna go try that" … but see … that's what I'm saying, when they go try that, they're trying that at school. Do you get it? So, that's how all this little beef ting all starts and that. Literally …

23 he provides a critical perspective on the role media, particularly music videos, play in shaping the behaviours of the younger generation. The depiction of violence in these media (symbolized by his mimicry of lyrics "man got down my opp") is seen to influence attitudes and actions of the young people who are drawn into trying out the behaviours they observe ("Yeah, man's gonna go try that"). He concludes with an emphasis on the role this plays in perpetuating and escalating conflict in his community ("that's how all this little beef ting all starts"). The glamorisation of conflict and aggression in the media

everyone forgets about it … I know certain people that's just mashed up people. I know people that stabbed people, yeah …and they're friends, literally, they're still friends … he's at his mum's house… his mum's all feeding him food and that … didn't know, "I just stabbed your son"… its peak

24 He discloses an eerie facet of social life within his community. The insensitivity or 'forgetfulness' towards violent actions is brought up starkly. Instances of violent perpetrators being friends with their victims, even being unknowingly welcomed into the victim's home, suggest a chilling acceptance and normalization of violence. This reflects an intrinsic aspect of life in his environment, where violent actions may be forgotten, dismissed, or potentially even reconciled in a strange, paradoxical manner. The phrase "its peak" serves as an expression of the severity and complicated nature of these relationships and the circumstances surrounding them. The acceptance of violence as a prevalent but dismissed part of social life

P: … that's … that's … I would say, yeah, it's a part of life, literally because … everyone goes through … in their own type of ways. Everyone goes through it… It's just who's got it worse, so … Like everyone goes through it, like you know, like nan could have just died, someone they're depressed for the rest of their life, some people can be depressed for a day. Yes. Everyone just takes it in differently … but Everyone goes through a certain type of …

25 He expresses a perspective that trauma is a part of life, regardless of one's background or circumstances, and that these experiences are simply dealt with differently by different individuals. His statement "everyone goes through it" underscores the idea that trauma is a shared human experience, though the severity and type of adversity may vary. There's a tacit acknowledgment of individual resilience and coping mechanisms when he mentions varied responses to similar situations, such as the death of a loved one. Trauma is a ubiquitous human experience variably manifested and dealt with by individuals

it's what PTSD means innit … get me … you're just … over … over-thinking … you're stressed … after a while it's gonna take an effect on you…. but the thing is, PTSD … it can be … can be caused by anything really. It's like it just depends on who you are… And how you take things

26 In this transcript, he is discussing his understanding of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). They relate the condition to overthinking and stress, and also acknowledge its wide range of potential triggers - "it can be caused by anything really". he also emphasizes the importance of individual interpretation and emotional processing in the development of PTSD ("it just depends on who you are... And how you take things"). His understanding of PTSD

P: Nah, what I agree with is that … that heart racing thing … like, it's got to the point now my heart just races naturally. Just … soon as I touch the area or if I know I'm coming to the area, my heart's racing. I've been in the area my whole life really, innit. I've left the area once, yeah. Left the area … the way … how calm I felt like I didn't have to worry about NOTHING … because I knew that I was just good, just in a good place. Touch the area again (clicks his tongue) … boy! Heart was racing. I didn't want to leave the house.

27 he describes a deep-seated fear and stress linked to the location they grew up in. This is reflected in the physical symptoms of a racing heart that they experience as soon as he enters his local area. Interestingly, they contrast this feeling of anxiety with the sense of calm they felt when they moved away from the area, not having to worry about anything and feeling in a good place. The constant anxiety, exemplified by the 'racing heart', when returning to the area could potentially point towards symptoms of PTSD. The impact of the environment on his mental and physical wellbeing

P: No … it don't just happen just like that. The only way you can get better, yeah, is the way like you can just look at life. And just realise that "Rah … do I want to live my life like this and carry on dealing … like going through this, or do I want to actually get better?"… it just depends man … it depends on how bad it actually is like … say if it's … see when you get to that cold-sweat point, sleep – nightmares – all of that, yeah …that's … that's when you're struggling … that's when … the next thing you know you're on them medications to try and forget about it …

28 This transcript appears to indicate his perception of the personal responsibility in recovering from trauma and the potential severity of trauma-related symptoms. They highlight the importance of introspection and decision-making in the process of recovery, suggesting that the desire to improve is essential. The description of reaching a 'cold-sweat point' where one might require medication to cope, points towards a critical juncture in dealing with trauma, potentially characterizing severe PTSD symptoms. The role of personal responsibility and introspection in managing trauma

P: I … I don't know anyone like that … that I can actually go to … most of my things that's happened to me is when I was younger, do you get it? When I … I would try say something and that, like, "This has happened to me." Yeah … (sucks his teeth) … back then, like, "yeah - you're joking"… "He's lying" you get me? … I just got to that point… I just keep it to myself.

29 he appears to reflect a sense of isolation and dismissiveness encountered during past attempts at seeking help or expressing his experiences. His voice demonstrates an experience of not being heard or believed during formative years, which may have influenced his ability to seek support in later life. An experience of isolation and dismissiveness encountered in past attempts to seek help

P: That's what I used to think, that's what I'm saying. When I actually tried to do it, now, and like no one's listening, I'm just thinking like … "What's the point, man?"

30 he demonstrates a sense of resignation and despair, underlining the perception of his past attempts at seeking help as futile. his question, "What's the point, man?" might indicate a sense of hopelessness. Past attempts to seek help as futile

P: No… Never… what can they do? There's no point still … you're telling them – what can they do about it? They ain't gonna do anything.

31 He demonstrates a sense of scepticism and a lack of trust in mental health professionals. There appears to be an embedded belief that seeking help would be futile, as they do not expect any real change or assistance. The repeated phrase "they ain't gonna do anything" emphasizes this perception of lack of action or indifference from those who should be providing help and support. A scepticism and lack of trust in mental health professionals

it was the same thing like my friend passed away and that, my mum's seen me upset … obvious I was upset for a good minute, like … get me? And my mum's upset now because I'm upset, like … so … this is why, like when I hear things, you know, I just go like – I can't show my mum. I can't talk to my mum about that. I'm just letting her know, letting her worry even more … that's how it gets, man.

32/33 He appears to suggest that sharing his experiences and emotions with his mother contributes to her worry, leading to a self-imposed silence. This reluctance to express his feelings indicates a protective attitude towards his mother, aiming to shield her from his struggles. Furthermore, it signals a sense of emotional isolation as he feels he cannot share his burden, reinforcing the idea of carrying emotional trauma alone. The words "I can't show my mum. I can't talk to my mum about that" echo his internal conflict: wanting to express his grief and sorrow, but feeling he cannot due to the potential distress it may cause. A self-imposed silence borne out of a protective attitude towards his mother/ Internal conflict between expressing grief and distressing his mother

APPENDIX L: List of Experiential Statements for Brazil

1. A persistent sense of danger and unpredictability within his environment
2. An internalised societal norm to stoically endure adversity
3. A disparity in the interpretation of 'normalcy. across generations
4. Fatalistic inevitability with conflict seen as a legacy inherited from the preceding generation
5. Mundane tasks tainted with fear and vigilance
6. A normalised state of paranoia
7. A common communal experience of adversity and danger
8. Companionship inducing vulnerability and danger by transforming individuals into targets
9. The shared trauma and grief borne from tragedies
10. An unpredictable and dangerous environment marked by obstinate individuals and rival gangs
11. A lived experience that requires unrelenting risk-assessment and strategic calculation
12. Feeling frustrated and disillusioned due to racially biased treatment from police
13. A deeply ingrained negative sentiment towards the police
14. Resisting power dynamics and control exerted by the police
15. Discerning credible threats from bluster in an environment rife with violence
16. An acceptance of violence as an inescapable reality of his environment
17. The necessity of adaptation as an integral part of survival
18. Potential trauma from witnessing and being close to such violence
19. A life constrained by an unsafe environment
20. Parental advice and personal choices being driven by threats and violence
21. The acceptance of confinement as a protective strategy
22. The police as an additional threat rather than a source of protection
23. The glamorisation of conflict and aggression in the media
24. The acceptance of violence as a prevalent but dismissed part of social life
25. Trauma is a ubiquitous human experience variably manifested and dealt with by individuals
26. His understanding of PTSD
27. The impact of the environment on his mental and physical wellbeing
28. The role of personal responsibility and introspection in managing trauma
29. An experience of isolation and dismissiveness encountered in past attempts to seek help
30. Past attempts to seek help as futile
31. A scepticism and lack of trust in mental health professionals
32. A self-imposed silence borne out of a protective attitude towards his mother
33. Internal conflict between expressing grief and distressing his mother

APPENDIX M: Brazil's Personal Experiential Themes (PETs)

Theme 1: Perceptions and Experiences of a Threatening Environment

This theme encapsulates his experience of living in a persistently dangerous and unpredictable environment and the necessity of constant risk-assessment and strategic calculation (Statements 1, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21).

Theme 2: Authority, Power Dynamics, and Discrimination

This theme reflects his perception of the police as an additional threat, his feelings of frustration and disillusionment, and his strategies for resisting power dynamics (Statements 2, 4, 8, 12, 13, 14, 22).

T**heme 3: Media Influence, Social Norms, and Violence**

This theme highlights the impact of media on shaping behaviours and attitudes towards violence, the acceptance and normalization of violence as a part of daily life, and the perceived disparity in 'normalcy' across generations (Statements 3, 9, 23, 24).

Theme 4: Understanding of Trauma and PTSD

This theme covers his understanding of trauma and PTSD, the ubiquitous human experience of trauma, and the role of personal responsibility and introspection in managing trauma (Statements 25, 26, 27, 28).

Theme 5: Seeking Support, Trust in Professionals, and Emotional Isolation

This theme focuses on his experiences with seeking help, his scepticism and lack of trust in mental health professionals, and his struggles with emotional isolation and self-imposed silence (Statements 29, 30, 31, 32, 33)