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Sean Redmond

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The Greentown Crime Network: Introducing its Cast of Principal Actors

Dr Sean Redmond[1]

Summary: This article, based on the author's doctoral study completed in 2015, offers new insight into the operation of criminal networks in Ireland and in particular their influence on children who become engaged in network activities. The research aimed to explore the role of 'network' as an aggravating factor in influencing the trajectories of children involved in criminal behaviour. The research, based on a case study design focuses on 'Greentown', a real (but anonymised) Garda Sub-District located outside Dublin.

The study argues that a relatively small number of principal actors directed and controlled network activity while also actively cultivating the social conditions to sustain the network's incumbent hierarchy. The most powerful of these principal actors belonged to a dominant family and kinship group. This group entered into 'contracts' with a range of often very vulnerable 'associates' involved in the network. The paper argues that understanding the nature of such networks and their relational influence on children's propensity for serious and multiple offences is a first step in seeking solutions for policy makers and practitioners in this often hidden and complex area of youth justice.

Keywords: criminal network, youth crime, serious crime, risk science, wicked problem, geography of crime, crime dynamics, social dynamics of crime, situational dynamics of crime, criminal enterprise, desistance.

Introduction

This article is based on a doctoral study completed in 2015,[2] '*The role of criminal networks in causing children to develop longer and more serious crime trajectories – Greentown a case study'*. The article aims to demonstrate how

[1] Dr. Sean Redmond, Research and Evaluation Unit, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Dublin. Email: Sean_Redmond@dcya.gov.ie

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and why criminal network influence is so strong on its subordinate actors, in particular children. The relevance of this phenomenon for policy is that the controls and influences effected by such networks present very potent challenges to state actors (such as Probation Officers) intent on bringing about 'pro-social' behaviour change for children under their supervision.

The article begins with a review of the extant literature, initially outlining the strengths and limitations of existing mainstream scientific knowledge on youth crime and introducing more tailored commentary on the effects of criminal networks on local communities. I then outline the methodological approach taken by the study, specifying the selection process for Greentown, describing how the Greentown network illustration was constructed and the means by which it was subject to detailed examination using semi-structured interviews with sixteen Garda members based in Greentown. Individual profiles, relationships and activities of its key *principal* actors are then presented providing evidence of both a network effect but also a clear family-based hierarchical structure which governed the behaviour of *associate* network actors. Finally I use this evidence combined with other findings from the study to highlight the policy issues arising from the study.

Youth crime and risk science

It is difficult to discuss what we know about youth crime without reference to the dominant discourse; what has been referred to as 'risk science' or 'risk and protection science'. Here I briefly set out the significant contribution that risk science has made in underpinning our knowledge about youth crime before discussing its limitations in accounting for contexts such as Greentown and turning to more fine-grained literature describing the nature and role of criminal networks in local communities.

Increasingly scientific evidence relating to youth crime, derived from longitudinal and other outcome studies, 'encourages a more optimistic view about the prediction, explanation and prevention of offending' (Farrington, 2008, p. 18). The theoretical framework which has been developed on foot of this scientific endeavour has been referred to (perhaps pointedly), as the risk and protection factor *paradigm* (O 'Mahoney, 2010; Case, 2007) which at its simplest level identifies *risks* relating to children and offers advice on 'protections' to offset these risks including, importantly,

evidence-based programmes designed to effectively prevent and intervene. Public health analogies often accompany descriptions of risk and protection science. For example in the same way that bodyweight, alcohol and tobacco intake have associations with heart disease, stroke and cancer, impulsiveness, ineffective parenting and school drop-out have been shown to have associations with the onset of youth crime. This body of knowledge is largely optimistic, in particular there is a significant consensus that criminal behaviour for youth peaks in the mid to late teens and begins to drop off in the early twenties. Children effectively *grow out of crime*.

However despite the evidence largesse there is significant criticism of risk science. Of interest to 'Greentown' is criticism which focuses on its *universality* claims. Some commentary highlights the importance of place and context, meaning that evidence underpinning scientific knowledge is always 'provisional and conditional' (Pawson, 2002, p. 214). Other criticism relates to the inability of risk science to adequately account for the smaller numbers of children who (unlike the large majority who appear to desist over time), continue in their offending behaviour. A reasonable inference here, if only due to the smaller numbers which inevitably limit the efficacy of actuarial tools, is that *prediction* becomes less sure and more speculative. It has been argued that this minority population of offenders may share more similarities with each other than they do a general youth population. In the case of juvenile *repeat* or *persistent* offenders in Ireland for example, data indicate a higher saturation of certain types of *acquisitive* crime (e.g. burglary and robbery) as opposed to more *hedonistic* crime (e.g. public order, criminal damage) found in the general youth offending population (Redmond, 2011).

In sum I argue that the analysis of youth crime offered by mainstream risk science is too simplistic and insufficiently nuanced to capture the contexts of the small number of children involved in serious crime and who appear not to desist in line with population norms.

Criminal networks and their effects on communities

The effect of adult criminal networks on children in local communities and neighbourhoods has not attracted widespread attention. Studies which have been undertaken in this area consider the geometric composition and properties of criminal networks (McGloin, 2011; McGloin, 2010), how networks underpin specific organised crime phenomena (Malm, 2011), motivations and modes of entry, retention and exit from

gangs (Pyrooz, 2013; Pyrooz, 2011; O'Brien, 2013), ethnographic accounts of communities and neighbourhoods where organised criminal activity takes place (Pitts, 2008; Hourigan, 2011; Stephenson, 2011), or points of network vulnerability (Malm, 2011) susceptible to sabotage and co-ordinated suppression (Braga, 2012) by law enforcement agencies. With specific reference to children (or youth) a limited body of literature identifies particular effects associated with criminal networks. One such effect is *criminal network as local enterprise*, offering opportunities for local youth to secure employment, a sense of meaning, identity and self-worth. As Pitts (2008, p. 70) observes,

> … the drugs business is a business, requiring a relatively elaborate division of labour within a large workforce, which must maintain and protect the supply chain: markets, package and distribute the product, protect the key players, silence the would-be whistle-blowers, collect debts and ensure contract compliance …

The notion of criminal network as *enterprise* may appear crass; however what the literature in this area has usefully highlighted is that criminal networks have *needs* (to sustain and to succeed) and corresponding vulnerabilities (or 'situational contingencies') (Van Koppen, 2010, p. 157), which can be targeted using reverse engineering tactics, to suppress criminal activity.

Network vulnerabilities can also relate to less obvious, deeper-set *cognitive* factors. The Boston 'Operation Ceasefire' project focussed on a key presumption made by members of criminal gangs, *that they would not be apprehended*. Braga reports how 'Operation Ceasefire' sought to generate dissonance around this sense of complacency by relevant authorities *pulling every lever* to suppress certain specified behaviours and communicating this intent directly to gang members, 'making explicit cause-and-effect connections between the behaviour of the target population and the behaviour of the authorities' (Braga, 2012, p. 5).

This treatment, certainly at face value presents dichotomous caricatures for criminal networks as de facto governing authorities preying upon 'poorer functioning' neighbourhoods (Loeber, 2012, p. 109), bereft of capable guardianship and with 'poor collective efficacy' (Braga, 2012, p. 351). Additionally, the *enterprise* conception of criminal network infers, certainly for children considering a career in the business, that engagement, participation and succession are essentially rational acts offending

much desired kudos, 'inclusion, success and protection otherwise denied to them' (Pitts, 2008, p. 84).

Nevertheless concepts such as 'network redundancy' which describe contexts of significant social insularity 'constraining an individual's exposure to information and opportunities' (McGloin, 2010, p. 66), promote 'distinctive beliefs and attitudes' (Pitts, 2008, p. 37) and increase the chances of anti-social 'group think' (McGloin, 2010, p. 70). This analytical approach suggests that any such rational acts are at least bounded by significant information deficits for those living in marginalised estates isolated and far from the influence of levers of legitimate authorities. The *reluctant* in Pitts 'Reluctant Gangsters' (Pitts, 2008) indicates a further ratcheting up of the role of *compulsion* over *attraction* in influencing the behaviour of youth engaged in local criminal networks. Here 'the individual immersion within an enduring deviant network' (Pyrooz, 2013, p. 241) and seclusion from external influence are seen as significant in predicting on-going retention. Reference is made to the costs associated of not 'engaging in collective local deviance' (McGloin, 2011, p. 10), appearing indifferent or neutral and the significant but paradoxical risks of being singled out for engaging in *pro-social* behaviour.

This body of work also identifies more complex relationships between marginalised neighbourhoods and criminal networks, requiring more detailed teasing out: 'complicated knots to be studied and untied' (Sparrow, 2008, pp. 66–67). This literature suggests greater cross-flow between neighbourhoods, residents and criminal networks; a '*fair is foul and foul is fair*'[3] opacity. Such suggestions of institutionalized client-patron relationships or compromised 'docile bodies' also exist in the Irish literature (Hourigan, 2011, p. 84).

Whatever the consequences of a child choosing the good guys from the bad guys in such contexts, Hourigan's suggestion that criminal families occupy a position of 'curious ambiguity' (master and benefactor) adds further confusion. Many extended families themselves 'may be deeply enmeshed in feuds and drug related activity' (Hourigan, 2011, p. 144) suggesting a *fuzzing* effect to what at face value to the average citizen, may seem clear oil-and-water separations.

This it is argued may be a child's complex 'cognitive map' (Kaplan, 1984, p. 30) of their immediate neighbourhood; their options significantly bounded by a redundant network of friends and associates, copper-fastened by a climate of fear and in some cases bewildered by an

[3] William Shakespeare. *Macbeth*, Act 1 Scene 1.

ambiguous (albeit reluctant) affiliation between community and criminal.

Methodology

In this section I outline the methodological strategy for the study. First I describe the systematic selection process which identified Greentown as an appropriate location. Second I introduce the Greentown network, an illustrative map commissioned specifically for the study and produced by the Analysis Service of An Garda Síochána. This map shows key linkages between individuals in Greentown involved in burglary and drugs for sale and supply offences 2010–2011. I then briefly describe how the network was examined in semi-structured interviews with local Garda members before finally outlining the key methodological limitations.

The Greentown research uses a case study design influenced significantly by the work of Robert Yin (2008). The Greentown location[4] was selected following a rigorous sampling procedure. Burglary and drugs for sale and supply (considered reasonable proxies for both *persistent offending* and *adult/child co-offending* collaboration (Redmond, 2011)), provided a signpost function in terms of identifying a geographical location likely to disclose criminal network activity. Garda analysts supplied a list of all 320+ Garda Sub-Districts across Ireland ranking the frequency of burglary, drugs for sale and supply and robbery being committed by children.

Greentown featured twelfth on this list. Importantly it was the highest ranking Garda Sub-District outside Dublin. Greentown was judged to be a potentially productive location (in terms of yielding rich data) due to its location and obviously its ranking. The choice of a provincial location increased the probability of offending occurring within the home Sub-District meaning that Garda respondents in the study had better knowledge of both the individuals involved in offending and the actual offending events. Recognition was further improved by local Garda management in Greentown carefully selecting respondents across Garda units who had had significant dealings over the years with individuals positioned in the Greentown network.

In the study, the Greentown network is depicted by a two dimensional illustration (Figure 1). The Greentown network was constructed off-site

[4] The study provides only general descriptors for Greentown, observing assurances regarding anonymity at individual and locality level. As with all confidential and sensitive data relating to the study, such material was passed on to the Analysis Service of An Garda Síochána. Access to any of this data for future study will require prior authorisation by An Garda Síochána.

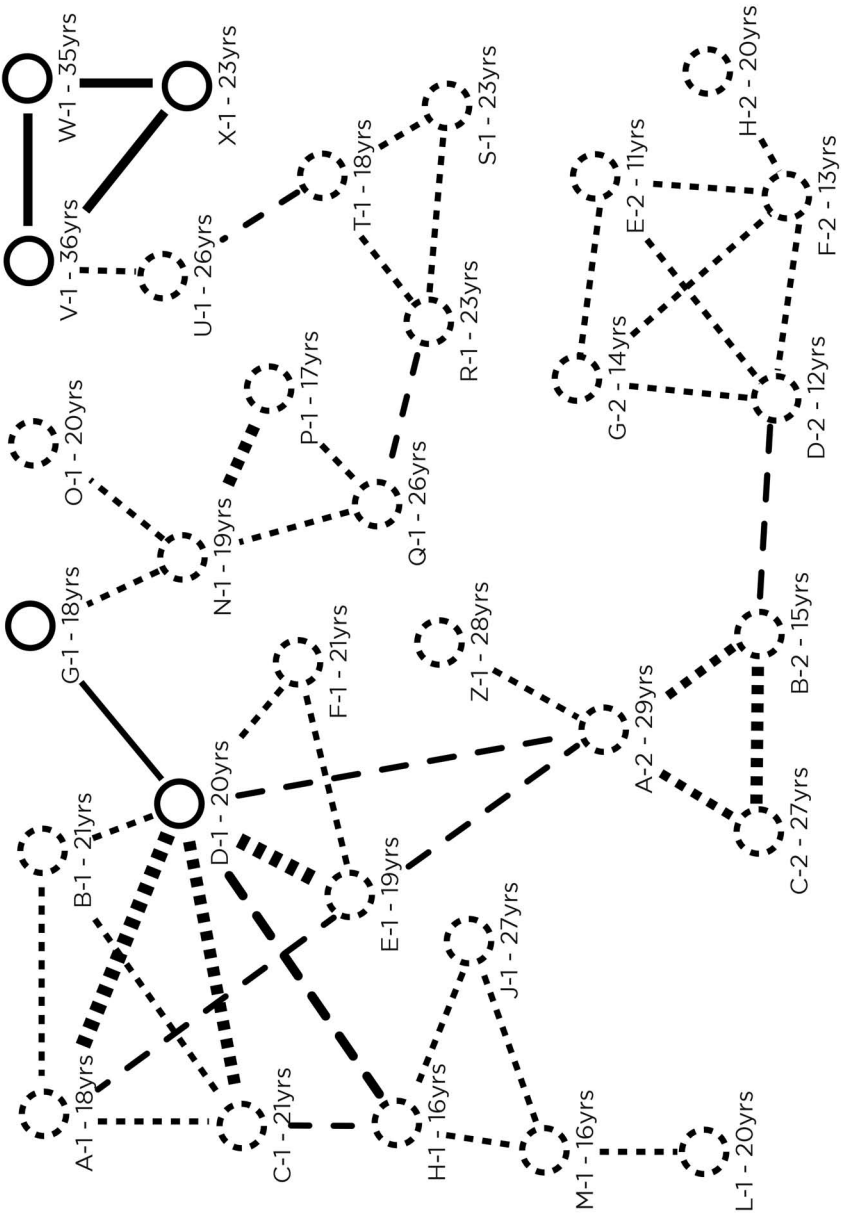


Figure 1 – the Greentown Network

at Garda Headquarters in Dublin based solely on PULSE[5] data without researcher input or the input of local Garda members based in Greentown. The network map was provided in PDF format for use in subsequent interviews with Greentown Garda members. The exclusion of the researcher from the construction of the network and restricting any means for the researcher to modify or manipulate the network artefact was intended as an important element in protecting confidentiality, maintaining evidence integrity and reducing opportunities for researcher bias.

The network was based on offending relationships involving co-offenders in Greentown. PULSE was used to identify *all* offenders suspected of involvement in burglary and/or drugs for sale or supply in the Greentown Sub-District for the period 2010–2011. The network was constructed by linking individuals through common incidents (involving both children and adults). ***All individuals had an address in the Greentown Sub-District*** during 2010–2011 and ***all offences occurred within the Greentown Sub-District***.

In Figure 1 a ····· link indicates that one or more Burglary offences link the respective individuals. A ——— link indicates one or more Drugs Sale/Supply offences link the respective individuals. A - - - - link indicates other crime types which link individuals. Garda analysts used judgment with - - - - links where they believed that an offending link other than burglary or drugs for sale and supply would add to the understanding the illustration. The thickness of the line linking respective nodes reflects the numbers of incidents connecting individuals (i.e. the thicker the line the greater the number of suspected incidents).

A technique which I designed, *Battleships*, permitted me in semi-structured interviews with sixteen individual Garda, to discuss the detailed contexts relating to individuals presented in the network map without disclosing their personal identities. The technique, similar to the game *Battleships* involved researcher and respondent examining separate network maps at far enough physical distance for the researcher not to see the detail on the Garda respondent's network map. This distance was critical because while illustrations used by researcher and respondent were identical with an anonymous but unique identifier providing a co-

[5] PULSE is an acronym for Police Using Leading Systems Effectively. Pulse is an I.T. enabled Service Delivery Project. PULSE comprises of seventeen operational and integrated system areas e.g. Crime Recording, Processing of Prisoners and Traffic Management (Garda Website downloaded 16:30 29/05/15) http://www.garda.ie/Controller.aspx?Page=136&Lang=1

ordinate to locate each individual in the network (for example D1) the version examined by the Garda respondent also included confidential case related information to ensure that they were certain about the identity of each actor. By referring only to the unique identifier this protocol permitted authentic narrative while observing ethical requirements to protect the identities of individuals discussed.

The network illustration possessed inherent strengths. In particular (and different to many studies of youth involvement in gangs which asks individual gang members about their relationship(s) with other gang members), PULSE served as an evidence-based honest broker, forcing the Greentown network to surface *finite* group actors and prescribing relationships based on *detections*. This meant that interviews with Garda members were in the main bounded by those connections only disclosed by PULSE.

Consequently this meant that inclusion was delimited only by offence type (burglary and drugs for sale and supply) and time period (2010–2011) meaning other data was excluded. As pointed out by Garda members the PULSE generated network missed vital links, particularly those relating to friendship, client, patron, family and kinship relationships. These relationships were critical to understanding Greentown and were only disclosed by closer examination of the network with Garda members in interview that had intimate knowledge of the principal actors.

Focus on the individual as the basic unit of enquiry was a key feature of how the study was configured. This approach discouraged broad sweep thematic opinions by respondents, '*youth crime is caused by x or y'* unless they could be evidenced by example to a specific individual or a specific incident or groups of individuals or incidents. This inclusion rule (i.e. tying themes and issues to real incidents and people) demonstrates the study's preference for grounding issues and themes that arose in interviews with Garda members in the real life narratives of network actors.

Obviously caution is required in using solely police incident data (PULSE) and police interview testimony as primary data points. While accurate qualitative input from on-the-ground officers who have detailed historical knowledge of members of a criminal network in a given locality has significant merit it could be criticised for effectively using only one (organisational) perspective. Nevertheless (accepting the inevitable concerns regarding bias), it has been argued that police officers are in a privileged capacity to help fill in the holes 'identifying robust network

descriptions ... despite the likelihood of missing data' (Malm, 2011, p. 291). I was also sufficiently satisfied, given that any opinions about 'how and why' were evidenced in the narratives of network actors, that this reduced the potential for *party-line* responses.

The data yielded approximately 400 pages of transcription. A nine stage protocol based on the *constant comparative* method, significantly informed by the work of Maykut and Morehouse (Maykut, 1994) and adapted for use with the computer assisted analytical tool 'NVivo' was used to process, code and analyse the data. These analytical tools ensured transparency in the reduction process from raw statistical data to representative and supportable findings, which is critical in the presentation of qualitative data (Bazeley, 2009).

Greentown's cast of principal actors

(Reference numbers relate to the unique identifiers in the Greentown network in Figure 1.)

In the following section I present the key actors in the network.

I start by introducing Greentown network's principal actors A2, B2, D2, Z1, D1, E1, A1, F2 and 'The Little Fella' (see p. 220 below). These specific actors were selected following a simple counting exercise to track which individuals featured most often across all Garda interviews.[6] This additional *within-network* sampling exercise was (again) intended to reduce interviewer discretion and opportunities for bias. Individual case vignettes were composed based on accounts of network actors provided by Garda in interview. The case profiles are used to support the contention that a network existed in Greentown in 2010–2011 and that it was marshalled by a small number of key individuals.

A2, B2, and D2, are presented as *family members*, belonging to the same dominant family and kinship group in Greentown. Z1, D1, E1, A1, are presented as *adult associates* who are not members of the dominant family and kinship group, F2 and 'The Little Fella' are presented as *child associates*. 'Associates' occupy subordinate roles to family members and have varying status within the network. (N.B. *family members* and *associates* are very important distinctions in the study).

[6] Interviews were largely respondent-led, particularly in terms of which actors respondents chose to talk about.

Family members

A2 (male aged twenty-nine years) is considered by all respondents, as the clear leader of the network, the *head man.* He presents as a remote, elusive but controlling individual. The following is quote in interview 009 is typical:

> **Garda:** *Ere, I suppose just because ever since I came down he was the name that was always said to me and one of the first houses that was pointed out to me when I went out in the car. You know keep an eye on him, intelligence reasons, he was always a prominent figure down in Greentown as long as I've been here and that hasn't changed you know. You often hear of a fella being prominent and then falling from grace, you know as in no one's listening to him anymore, but that has never happened with him … I suppose people are so afraid of him. He just has that reputation. … like he's probably just intimidating in that he's a strong character like. No one would mess with him and he gets that message across in different ways and they know if they mess with him there's going to be some kind of consequence. And he's kept that going like he hasn't left anyone go with things maybe so that's how he's keeping his name going and keeping those around him in line as such.* (Interview 009, p. 19)

A2 has presided over a regime that governs the majority of network actors both in terms of their outward compliance and own self-governance. He has sustained this regime over a significant period of time. A2 has achieved a 'Kurtz-like'[7] mythical status; even senior members of the network such as D1 hold him in awe.

A2 has an ambivalent relationship with An Garda Síochána, presenting as polite as opposed to confrontational or aggressive. This *creative* compliance with state actors is a behavioural characteristic expected by A2 of those most closely linked with him, including his family and kinship network and a small number of *trusted* associates as a means to avoid undue and excessive Garda attention. It is a behavioural norm for which even relatively senior network actors can be sanctioned for breach and where A2's influence has also served to shape young peoples' behaviour

[7] Kurtz is the central character in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. The relevance here is that Conrad's Kurtz ruled his outpost in the Belgian Congo by a combination of ruthless action and myth.

> **Garda:** … *If you met him he's like charming and would talk away to you … But you just wouldn't trust him as far as you throw him, do you know that way … I've never had any actual roaring row with him … If I've ever dealt with him it's been 'hello Gard, how are you Gard?' This kind of thing … But then you hear the stories afterwards you know, I suppose, but then the stories add to the myth and the myth makes you stronger … And it probably makes you more … more important around Greentown or more of a character I don't know …* (Interview 013 p. 7)

In the past A2 has been involved in burglary and is suspected of involvement in drugs for sale and supply although far more likely in recent years to organise and supervise or contract this work to others. A2 oversees a money lending enterprise, which is utilised by certain vulnerable residents in Greentown, drug users and associate members of his own network. Importantly these transactions impose obligations on debtor *clients* to a small number of network *patrons*. In terms of debt retrieval A2 uses middle ranking members of the network such as A1, D1 and E1 to enforce repayment. To some children who live on the same estate A2 represents as a clear example that crime pays.

B2 is a brother of A2 and lives close by in the same estate. During the period of examination B2 is listed as fifteen years old. He is seen as a natural heir to control the network. B2 earned a reputation from injuries sustained in past conflicts at a very young age.[8] In his own neighbourhood B2 presents as having little to fear and utilises his family name to confirm his significant social capital. He is both revered and feared by young people in his immediate neighbourhood. Respondent 007 captures this ambiguity well.

> **Garda:** *there's a sort of dividing line between like … certain kids will go 'he's one of that family, he's 15, I'm 15 and I can't really associate and I'll stay away'. Then you have the other side that go, 'he's 15 and I'm 15, he's cool (deleted), he's the man, you know he's 200 quid in his pocket at the weekend and is only 15, I'll align myself to him'.* (Interview 007, p. 11)

In his early adolescence B2 was considered impetuous and impulsive. However he has emerged as a player, mixing more with family members

[8] The specifics of the conflicts are not disclosed in the study because they risk compromising B2's anonymity. Suffice to say that these past events ensured that B2 has an on-going reputation as a hard man, supplemented by the social capital derived from being part of A2's family.

than the *associates* that he used to mix with. He is now more trusted by A2 in terms of self-governance, management of the family brand and the reprimanding of subordinates in terms of showing any 'disrespectful' behaviour to An Garda Síochána.

D2 is the youngest family member included on the network and is listed as 12 years of age. D2 appears to be encouraged by A2 in terms of criminality. However he is equally sheltered. This is partly because his younger age may make him more liable to open chinks in A2's armour by disclosing something that he shouldn't.

> **Garda:** … *as I said to you D2 … Doesn't be involved as much … Whether it's a thing that … for all the world … A2 doesn't want him involved because he is too young and is a kind of, a liability there … He may leak something he shouldn't …* (Interview 015, p. 19)

D2's stock is considered to have risen considerably. He carries authority significantly disproportionate to his age, and is considered to be a serious network actor for the future. He appears to be able to gauge the potency of evidence against him on matters that he is suspected of and offers street advice and counsel to other children on offence-related matters and has developed engagement skills for encounters with An Garda Síochána.

> **Garda:** … *they kind of over exaggerate being nice to you … I meet D2 now all the time as well, … chatting away … 'good-o', he'd nearly be asking me … Getting information out of me like, but, and again a front in front of his gang, but then you don't know, like I hear rumours that he is kind of … recruiting below him then as well like.* (Interview 008, p. 8)

Like B2, D2 benefits from the family brand and many of the local children are afraid of him. Other evidence indicates relationships between D2 and younger children at the periphery of the network (not shown in Figure 1) and he is considered to be developing an acumen for distancing himself from offending incidents by organising the efforts of others.

Adult associates

Z1 (male aged twenty-eight years) is an intriguing character, originating from outside Greentown. There is some suggestion that A2 and Z1 share some historical connection due to common family links. Z1 is not a family member of A2's but is considered his second-in-command by

most respondents. Z1 is considered to be A2's confidante, always in his company, and joint architect with A2 of serious offending events. It is a close association that has sustained over time and Z1, like A2 selects his closest associations very carefully. Z1 appears to be a network entrepreneur; he has links to individuals outside Greentown in terms of fencing stolen goods and together with another actor (who is not disclosed by the network map) provides a network crossing point for burglary and drugs for sale and supply.

D1 (male aged twenty years) is considered part of Greentown network's middle management under the influence of A2. He is seen as being involved in criminal behaviour from an early age, particularly car crime, prior to his full engagement with the network.

D1's family background was considered chaotic. D1 developed a reputation for not caring about adverse consequences of his behaviour and for being willing to do anything for money including enforcing discipline on behalf of A2. His older brothers were all involved with A2 and have spent significant periods of time in prison. His familial as well as actual geographical proximity is key to his closer connection to A2. D1 has a reputation for driving proficiency but is not considered to have the right temperament, acumen or intelligence to become leader of the network. Consequently he is not party to the core intelligence of A2's network. D1 is part of a smaller friendship group with E1 and A1 capable of operating alone, though lacking the sophistication of crimes organised by A2 and more likely to be detected. D1 is seen as mid-level controller and recruiter of new participants (of for example F2 and other juveniles). D1 has shown dissent to A2, which was punished, indicating that even senior members of the network are subject to summary justice by A2. However, D1 sees A2 as a figure to aspire to.

E1 (male aged nineteen years) is a close, long-time associate and neighbour of D1. He is also neighbour to *family members* A2, D2 and B2. E1 and D1 are often mentioned in the same breath by respondents when discussing their activities and their relationship to A2's family.

> **Garda:** … *E1, he lives with his mam and let's say he is one of the …That family …He's one of their major like what would you say … Drug runners or … You know he does all the crime for them like … And like he's working for that family … and I'd know as well D1. They are heavily linked and they still are … they're always committing crime together D1 and E1 …* (Interview 002, p. 6)

E1 does not appear to have experienced the same sibling pressure as D1, in terms of older brothers who had been routinely involved in crime and with A2 in particular. While E1 has in collaboration with D1 been very closely connected to A2's operations, more recently he has also developed links with other key players outside Greentown.

A1 (male aged eighteen years) is a close associate of D1 and E1. A1 is often seen in the company of D1 and E1 although he does not live in the same part of Greentown. A1 was known to Garda as a juvenile and is remembered for his hostility to authority, an attitude that appears not to have tempered as he has grown older. A1's family background was considered chaotic; his father had chronic alcohol problems and the family had an openly confrontational relationship with An Garda Síochána. A1 has been involved in multiple offending episodes with D1, in particular burglary and intimidation/debt collection activity on behalf of A2. A1 was involved in the recruitment and mentoring of F2, a juvenile, whom he lives close to. It is believed that A1 and D1 have benefited from the proceeds of burglaries committed by F2 and a younger cohort of children. A1's role in recruitment and mentoring included developing a *paternalistic* relationship with 'The Little Fella's mother while 'The Little Fella' was spending time outside Greentown in residential care (see 'The Little Fella' below).

Child associates

F2 (male aged thirteen years) is considered by many to be the member of the network who has progressed (regressed) fastest over the period. F2's family background was considered chaotic. His father is considered to have been absent in F2's upbringing, living elsewhere in Greentown. An uncle of F2's involved him very early on in offending behaviour, including burglary. In addition to being considered a prolific offender in his own right, F2 has himself been instrumental in recruiting members of his own network, including 'The Little Fella'. F2 and his young offending group were responsible for a spate of burglary and robbery offences and appear to represent a chaotic fringe at the edge of the network. F2 has engaged in excessive alcohol and drugs consumption in the company of D1 and A1 and is considered to be significantly under A1 and D1's influence more generally. He lives near to A1 *but not* D1, E1 or A2. However he has family ties in A2's neighbourhood. F2 is seen as an individual with a strong character who will progress into one of the

more significant adult members, assuring the network's succession to the next generation of *associates*. Despite his lower status, his primary relationship being with A1 and D1, he is not beyond the coercive reach of A2.

'The Little Fella'[9] (male aged twelve years) is not represented on the network map. However he is included in the study because of repeated references to him by respondents, for example respondent 008

> **Garda:** *he would have himself come from obviously a family where there was trouble, like his mother would have been a heroin addict, she got located in Greentown. His uncle would have also been down here for a while and would be getting in trouble and would have been taking drugs himself but and again no father figure there and 3 or 4 younger brothers and sisters so never had an interest in being at home so was always out and about on the street anyway … And just from hanging around with the likes of F2 and these other boys they would have been then linked to the likes of A1 and started doing jobs for them …* (Interview 008, p. 013)

'The Little Fella' was considered to be an individual of current concern (2014), for crime but also welfare reasons. His mother appears to have a significant drug problem and (as has been noted earlier) is visited by A1 in an ersatz pastoral/grooming role. 'The Little Fella's' welfare concerns precipitated his removal into residential care where his conduct and behaviour were considered very poor and disruptive. On his return back to Greentown, F2 engaged 'The Little Fella' with D1 and A1 with whom he collaborated in burglary-related activity. 'The Little Fella's' specific asset, notably his small size and slight build means that he is able to crawl into small spaces or through windows of houses to open up premises for accompanying adults committing burglary.

Many respondents shared particular concerns about this young person in terms of predicting his likely deteriorating trajectory. Garda reported that 'The Little Fella' was supplied drugs by D1 and was highly influenced by both D1 and A1. In one incident 'The Little Fella' was discovered by Garda in D1's house, in a state of severe intoxication with other boys of a similar (young) age.

[9] The term 'The Little Fella' is used because this and 'young fella' is how he was described by respondents. I think the term conveys (if nothing else) the respondents' perception of him relative to the physical size of other network actors.

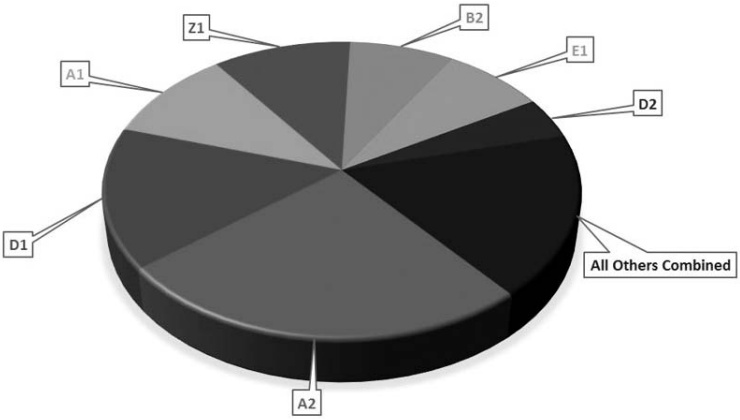
Linking individual narratives to theme development

The *Battleships* method used for the study permitted not only individual tracking of narratives which offered case profile-building properties, but also the ability to position individual actors in the development of patterns and themes. Using NVivo software it was possible therefore to further support suggestions that a small number of individuals controlled network activity.

As Figure 2 clearly shows, references to 'power' which could have related to any of the thirty-one network members, instead identifies the same small number of individuals discussed in this paper. N.B. These individuals were selected for discussion *only* on the basis of the number of 'mentions' attributed to them across all Garda interviews.

Note in particular the dominant share of perceived power attributed to A2 and the proportion of the pie attributed to the group of seven actors, including child family members B2 and D2. Less than a quarter of the references to power related to the twenty-four remaining network actors. This means that in addition to being referenced most in Garda interviews, they were also considered to be the most powerful members of the network. Similar patterning exercises involving references to 'leadership' and 'influence' revealed almost to a person, the same individuals.

Figure 2 References to 'Power' attributed to individuals in Garda interviews



In this section I have attempted to demonstrate

- That the activities of individual actors positioned on the network map off-site by Garda analysts and determined solely by PULSE data bear a relevance to the real-world experience and accounts of events of the selection of Garda members engaged in interview.
- That although the case profiles provide small granularity accounts of individuals they are equally capable of suggesting broader emerging patterns of relationships and behaviour.
- Further analysis of themes and issues indicates that suggestions of key actor dominance derived from individual narratives are substantiated when Garda interviews are systematically analysed by themes such as 'power'.

Findings

The evidence presented in the study permits us to draw a reasonable and plausible inference that a criminal network was operating in Greentown 2010–2011.

Further evidence relating to the clamour for status by *associates* supports other studies of criminal networks and their *pull* potential to permit individuals who are engaged to acquire social capital. The study suggests that the Greentown network was hierarchical in nature suggesting centralised authority, power and influence. Within the network, membership of A2's family and kinship group appears to confer elevated privilege scaffolded by a self- governing model based on trust as opposed to contract, obligation or threat. Pilbeam (2012, p. 368) has identified the role of *trust* as a distinctive governance mechanism for *core* members at the centre in his more general economic treatment of networks as institutions. Conversely worries about opportunism by network 'associates' are mitigated by *push* forces associated with debt or obligation and underpinned by subordinates' perception of A2's ubiquity.

Powerful structures, processes and a compliant culture appear to envelop those who are engaged, certainly in close proximity to A2, serving to sustain the network. The findings clearly identify incidences where the expectations of principal network actors direct and influence behaviour, for example norms of behaviour in relation to exchanges with An Garda Síochána. Other mainstream economics commentary has

identified this ability of networks (more generally) to set expectations, shape behaviour or delineate opportunities for discretion. Applied to *criminal* networks research has identified how such anti-social but 'distinctive beliefs and attitudes' (Pitts, 2008, p. 37) are cultivated in gangs and networks. Corresponding *vulnerabilities* demonstrated by the chaotic case histories of most 'associate' members offer the potential for A2's greater leveraging of network influence. While directed at community level, Horney *et al.'s* analogy of 'preying' (Loeber, 2012, p. 109) and notions of poor efficacy and poor guardianship are relevant here in terms of family vulnerabilities and inadequate protection from ill-intentioned adults experienced by F2 and 'The Little Fella'.

The study suggests that the network's influence is strongest in A2's estate involving *clients* and *associates* where individuals such as D1, E1 and A1 are truly 'embedded' and involved in a closed collection of anti-social relationships. Such confinement in marginalised neighbourhoods has been seen to lead to information deficits for children (Hourigan, 2011, p. 129) and a lack of exposure to information and opportunities (McGloin, 2010, p. 66). Some commentary in this area understandably points to a general contaminative effect which cultivates ambiguity with families living close to actors such as A2. However testimonies of Garda respondents in the Greentown study (for example respondent 007's reference to 'the dividing line'), suggest that within what should be the highest risk location, close to A2's home, *stoical* families go about their day-to-day business, albeit with their heads down, and do not become involved. Conversely the study indicates strong network influence for certain individuals (adults and children) who live outside of the close geographical proximity of A2's estate. These individuals are those who for one reason or another have an obligation-bound client relationship relating for example to debts incurred from borrowing money from A2 or co-enterprise in past offending events.

Significantly the study finds a contrast between the network experiences of A2's identified *family members*[10] and those described as *associates*. Less attention has been paid to the role of *family* in criminal networks in Ireland although Hourigan, observing that family is the fundamental unit of criminality in the context of Limerick (Hourigan, 2011, p. 144) is a notable exception. The Greentown study adds to this commentary, suggesting that A2's family in Greentown has sustained a

[10] Accepting that definitions of family and non-family are not so clear-cut.

perverse stability in Greentown and that family members are groomed and cultivated in a process of succession rather different to the essentially contractual engagement with network *associates*. Notwithstanding the disposability of *associates* this stability has endured long-term relationships with some client families; D1 for example is the most recent in a line of brothers associated in a client-patron relationship with A2's family. Sparrow (2008, pp. 231–240) identifies these longstanding damaging phenomena as being 'harms in equilibrium' possessing sufficient dampening capability to disarm or deaden any short-term intervention by authorities designed to imbalance or otherwise subvert what is the lived norm by many engaged in the Greentown network.

Taken together the aggregate outputs generated by the network plausibly converge to produce an overall network effect for certain children. The study finds that there is insufficient evidence to indicate whether the Greentown network caused *longer* crime trajectories for children. However statistical comparisons made between children involved in the Greentown network with national norms indicate strongly that participation in the network is associated with *vastly elevated frequency of serious offending* over the period in question. Importantly the study helps to highlight one of the key shortcomings in the risk science literature which is that in its treatment of youth crime as a rational exercise balancing risk factors with sufficient protection factors it generally fails to consider that *context*, certainly for the children in the Greentown study, is not simply an inert backdrop. The Greentown network is an active variable capable of undermining the efforts of law enforcement, and presenting those such as Probation Officers involved in the practice of behaviour change with significant organic challenges or 'conscious opposition' (Sparrow, 2008, pp. 199–214), outside the clinical risk assessment and intervention environment.

Limitations of study

There are limitations to a case study design which serve to bound wider practical application of the findings due to time and location specificities. This specificity is somewhat mitigated by the rigorous approach to sampling and it is argued that read together with the extant literature some *theoretical* generalisation may be possible in terms informing the policy debate in Ireland.

Other limitations derive from using An Garda Siochana sources (statistical and testimony via Garda interview) as the sole lens of study. A

richer multi-dimensional narrative could obviously have been achieved by the inclusion of information from network actors themselves, in particular children. Ethical and resource considerations precluded expanding the evidence base in this way but future studies would benefit from such multiple perspectives.

Practical applications

The Greentown study, although limited by context, may help to shed new light on how certain criminal networks operate in Ireland. The individual and collective network narratives in Greentown indicate how the efforts and loyalties of children are acquired, groomed and sustained over time suggesting that the network had an organic succession process. Obviously further work, possibly including a prevalence study across Ireland, would assist in helping to demonstrate to what extent the findings in Greentown resonate elsewhere.

The *Battleships* technique used alongside other risk management controls in this study[11] offers a new protocol for academia to talk to law enforcement about sensitive and complex matters. The systematic scrutiny of the network using the *Battleships* technique was essential in separating out the *prolific offenders* (most obviously D1 because of his multiple links on the map, as one respondent reported 'because he gets caught') from the actual power base; A2 and to a lesser extent Z1. Only the additional examination via semi-structured interviews tapping into Garda soft intelligence surfaced this reality. The protocol thus provides a means for undertaking the important knowledge-building function of linking theoretical work in this area with sound empirical study.

Although the network construct is inflexible, having been pre-determined by PULSE data, it provides reasonable evidence-based bounds to *sizing a problem* which Sparrow has identified as a key and fundamental strategic issue in unpicking complex harms (Sparrow, 2008). The network tool could for example be used operationally as a strategic or clinical assessment and intervention tool for state agencies seeking to bring about change in complex crime contexts.

More generally a better sense of network anatomy (assuming concerted and co-ordinated effort by state and partner agencies), provides the opportunity to both reduce network influence and improve the

[11] A forthcoming paper will outline this technique alongside a fuller description of the methodology used for the study.

efficacy, in particular, of vulnerable children and families identified in the Greentown network as '*associates*' to pursue pro-social trajectories. These two intervention elements, *network suppression* and *offering network actors a viable route out* if they so choose it is argued are key to resolving the 'wicked problem' that Greentown represents.

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