

Juvenile firesetters: A family case study approach



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Donna Lovell





Funding and Academic team

- Avon Fire & Rescue Service and Great Western Research
- Donna Lovell (PhD researcher)
- Dr. Rachel Gillibrand (University of the West of England, Bristol)
- Dr. Rachel Manning (University of the West of England, Bristol)
- Dr. Dianne Catherwood (University of Gloucestershire)

[Overview]



- Juvenile firesetting
- Longitudinal case study
 - Background
 - Participants
 - Methods
 - Analysis
 - Preliminary findings
 - Discussion and implications



[Juvenile Firesetting Behaviour]

What is juvenile firesetting behaviour?





[Juvenile firesetting behaviour]

“The term arson is typically used when referring to a deliberate act of setting fire to a property, whereas firesetting is used typically with regard to young people” (Geller, 1992).



[Firesetters case study]

- Longitudinal study (up to 2 years)
- 12 families with one or more youths who have engaged in firesetting behaviour
- All youths were referred to the FRS for an intervention because of their fire involvement.



[Firesetters case study]

- Aims:
 - An in depth study exploring background and firesetting history, motives for firesetting, family factors, school and peer issues, emotional and behavioural issues.
 - Following the youths and their families from the start of a firesetting intervention for up to 2 years, recording any further firesetting during the period.



[Firesetters case study]

- Mixed method approach using:
 - Negative Affect Scale (Whooley et al, 1997)
 - Parenting Practices Inventory (Fast Track Project, 2006).
 - Life Changes Scale (Dodge, 1990).
 - Parent FireRisk Questionnaire (Fineman, 1980; 1995).
 - Satisfaction With Life Scale (Diener et al, 1985).
 - Interviews
 - Secondary data from the FRS.



[Firesetters case study]

- Participants:
 - 12 mothers, 18 youths.
 - 17 male youths and 1 female.
 - Youths ages from 8 – 17 years old.
 - 9 families were living in local authority housing.
 - 8 families were single parent households.



[Firesetters case study]

- Youth characteristics:
 - 5 of the juveniles have been convicted of arson.
 - 14 of the youths have a history of fire activity.
 - 9 youths have a diagnosis of a developmental and/or a behavioural disorder.



[Firesetters case study]

■ Analysis

- The quantitative data were analysed using frequencies, correlations and Chi Square tests.
- Comparisons were made with other groups.
- Qualitative data analysed using thematic analysis.

[Firesetters case study]

■ Education

- 10 youths at mainstream school
- Remaining 8 youths either at a pupil referral unit, home schooling or a special needs school
- 10 youths have been excluded from school on at least one occasion
- Changeable educational status
- All mothers reported problems in school as an issue for their son(s)/daughter



[Firesetters case study]

■ Mothers

- Negative Affect Scale: 8 mothers (66.7%) showed signs of clinical depression.
- PPI: mothers in the firesetting sample are less consistent, less effective and more punitive than a similar study sample.
- Life Changes: the mother/child relationship in the firesetting sample was less positive or less warm than a similar study sample.
- Satisfaction With Life Scale: mothers in the firesetting sample present as slightly dissatisfied with life, even less satisfied than a sample of battered women.



[Firesetters case study]

- Parent FireRisk:
 - Both school and peer issues were deemed as high risk factors.
 - Fire involvement, family issues, developmental and anti-social issues were medium risk factors.
 - Anxiety/depression and severe dysfunction were low risk factors.



[David's story]

- Eleven years old.
- David was referred to the FRS because he had set fire to paper in a classroom after he had got angry.
- Intelligent boy who had problems in school, problems with friendships and often in trouble for fighting.



[David's story]

“Stayed and watched, I didn't try to put it out. I like to watch fire. It did not get out of control as it was in the sink”.



[David's story]

- Mother and father divorced when David was six.
- David has a history of violence towards mother and younger brother.
- Mother describes David as different from her other children:
“Oh, there’s a lot of difference and I have said this since he was a year old. He’s different”.



[David's story]

“What I would like for David would be uum, for him to control his obsessions. The obsessions with swearing, with messing with fire, the obsession with beating up his brother (long pause). I would love him to control those three things. To have it more in perspective”.



[David's story]

“David knows more about autism, he knows others like him”.

“I am learning to deal with who he is, rather than fight against it. I admire David”.



[In summary]

- Vulnerable population
- High rate of depression in mothers.
- Parenting practices less consistent, less effective and more punitive.
- Mother/child relationship less positive.
- School and peer issues high risk.

[Implications]

- Juvenile firesetting serves a purpose
- Understanding the background to the firesetting is crucial
- Relevant training for FRS personnel to recognise key issues
- Signposting to other agencies

[Questions?]



Donna2.Lovell@uwe.ac.uk

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