

From criminal justice to social justice: rethinking approaches to young adults subject to criminal justice control

Richard Garside

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About the author

Richard Garside is director of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.

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Produced by:

Centre for Crime and Justice Studies
King's College London
Strand
London
WC2R 2LS

Tel: 020 7848 1688

Fax: 020 7848 1689

info@crimeandjustice.org.uk

www.crimeandjustice.org.uk

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Introduction

Every year many hundreds of thousands of young adults* in England and Wales are processed by one or more agencies of the criminal justice system. We do not know how many there are because the data are not collated in a systematic or consistent manner. Some criminal justice datasets give us details about the 18 to 24 age group; others only provide data on 18 to 20 year olds or provide no age-specific data at all. Not one affords an easy analysis of the 16 to 24 age range as a whole. We are left with tantalising glimpses of the scale of criminal justice interventions, fortified by educated guesswork and informed supposition.

In 2007–2008 the police arrested 223,623 young adults aged 18 to 20 (Povey et al., 2009). In 2007, 172,591 18 to 20 year olds were prosecuted in the courts, with 140,612 found guilty. Of these, 75,536 were fined, 25,314 were given a community sentence and 33,689 a custodial sentence (Ministry of Justice (MoJ), 2008a: table S5.6). Looking more broadly at the 18 to 24 age range, 43,885 young adults commenced some form of community order and 45,179 commenced a custodial sentence in 2007 (MoJ, 2008b: tables 3.4 and 6.6).

Alongside formal court sanctions, in 2007, 51,047 cautions were issued by the police to young adults aged 18 to 20 in England and Wales (MoJ, 2008a: table S3.5e). A further 188,298 Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs) were issued in England and Wales to individuals over the age of 18 (MoJ, 2008a: table 7.2). Official statistics do not indicate how many of these PNDs were issued to young adults. Given the focus of police activity, it is reasonable to conclude that a significant proportion of them were given to people in the young adult age group.

* The preferred definition of a young adult in this paper is an individual between the ages of 16 and 24. Owing to the way in which data are collated, different age ranges – 18 to 24 or 18 to 20, for example – have also been used.

Many hundreds of thousands of young adults each year are also subjected to stop and search procedures by the police. In 2007–2008 there were 1,035,438 official stop and searches by the police in England and Wales under powers granted by the 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act. An additional 53,125 stop and searches were conducted under the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and a further 117,278 were conducted under Terrorism Act 2000 provisions. There were a further 2,353,918 recorded incidents in which individuals were stopped by the police and asked to account for themselves (MoJ, 2009: tables 4.1a, 4.5a, 4.6a, 4.9). We do not know how many of these various stops and searches related to young adults. But it is known that young men in particular are disproportionately targeted by such policing tactics (Waddington, Stenson and Don, 2004).

Since its establishment in 1995, the national DNA database has become an additional means by which individuals find themselves subject to the attentions of criminal justice agencies. As at 9 January 2009, the total number of individuals estimated to be on the database was 4,457,195. Of these, one-quarter – some 1,026,090 – were young adults between the ages of 18 and 24. An additional 287,801 young people aged 10 to 17 and 1,355,140 of those aged 25 to 34 were also estimated to be on the database. This means that, in total, three-fifths of the entire database of records at that time, an estimated 2,669,031 individuals, comprised young adults between the ages of 18 and 24, or those who would become young adults within the next few years, or those who had recently passed through the young adult age threshold (Hansard, 2009).

In sum, the number of young adults who are targeted by one or more agency of the criminal justice system each year is probably in the millions. This activity, justified on the grounds of its putative crime fighting and crime prevention efficacy, causes enormous harm to the lives of one of the most vulnerable groups in society. It tends to entrench rather than resolve the disadvantage, distress and trauma experienced by many young adults, while doing little if anything to make society safer or crime less prevalent. As the 2005 report from the Barrow Cadbury Trust, *Lost in Transition*, puts it:

Criminal justice policies in England and Wales do unnecessary damage to the life chances of young adult offenders and often make them more, not less, likely to re-offend. They make it harder for young adults to lead crime-free lives and exacerbate the widespread problems of social exclusion that other government policies aspire to ameliorate.

(Barrow Cadbury Trust, 2005: 9)

Two reports subsequently published by the Transition to Adulthood Alliance (T2A), which was established by the Barrow Cadbury Trust, have developed some of the social policy themes touched on in *Lost in Transition*. *Universities of Crime* states: 'Both through the operation of the Criminal Justice System and through wider social policy there is now an urgent need to bridge the gap in support that faces young people as they grow into adulthood' (T2A, 2009a: 8). It goes on to argue:

Young Adults ... should be recognised as distinct from the adult population on account of their developmental stage and because of the economic, social and structural factors that specifically impact upon them. We should not be surprised that the current approach yields such poor results in diverting young adults away from crime; we should be appalled by it.

(ibid.: 27)

This theme is developed in a later report from T2A, *A New Start*. It notes that some young adults 'are being trapped in a cycle of reoffending. They have been let down by a lack of essential mainstream support and ended up in a poorly devised and failing criminal justice system where their support needs cannot be addressed' (T2A, 2009b: 50).

The report makes a number of recommendations in the areas of work, education and training interventions, health, housing and social care, and drug and alcohol support. *A New Start* calls for 'a wholesale shift in the way the Government works with young adults in, and at risk of becoming involved with, the criminal justice system. This must be far more than tinkering around the edges of the system' (ibid.: 11).

This briefing is the last in a series of three that form part of a contribution by the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies to the work of the Transition to Adulthood Alliance. It offers proposals for what might be involved in a wholesale shift in governmental approaches to young adults subject to criminal justice control. It does so by exploring abstract conceptual propositions through the lens of concrete data relating to young adults. By bringing conceptual reflection and material reality together in a dynamic relationship, greater critical purchase on the practical policy questions relating to young adulthood will be possible than would be afforded either by a narrow focus on the 'facts' or by abstract theorising alone.

At the outset it is worth emphasising three points that form the conceptual backdrop for what follows. The first point is assumed and asserted in this paper, rather than argued and evidenced: that is, I take it as axiomatic that young adults subject to criminal justice control occupy, for the most part, a distinct social position characterised by entrenched need and profound vulnerability. By this I mean that they have typically experienced a range of personal, social and economic problems, ranging from blighted childhoods, mental distress, trauma and violence through to substance misuse, poverty and exclusion and other social challenges. This is particularly the case with young adults who end up in the prison system or under probation supervision. There is no space here to review the evidence for this assertion. It can be found in research findings published by a range of institutions and organisations – government departments, criminal justice inspectorates, voluntary organisations and the T2A – as well as those by independent researchers and academics. The starting point of the criminal justice system tends to be the *deeds* of young adults – what they have done to get into trouble – rather than their *needs* as individuals and members of society. This is an inherent limitation of criminal justice that should be taken much more seriously than it often is.

The second point is something that I merely assert at this stage. The distinct social position of young adults subject to criminal justice control is key to understanding why they are so subject. There is a tendency, when thinking through the problem of any person subject to criminal justice control, to start with the immediate behaviour considered to be the catalyst for their being arrested, prosecuted, convicted. From this perspective, subjection to criminal justice control is the natural result of a person

having committed a crime, or suspected of having done so. The distinct social position of the 'offender' or 'suspect' is of interest in explaining their 'offending behaviour' and in informing interventions aimed at tackling it. Far less frequently is the question asked why certain individuals occupying certain social positions are those predominantly subject to criminal justice control. This question is explored during the course of this paper.

The third point concerns the relationship between the mass of young adults in British society at any given time – more than 7 million at present – and the particular subset subject to criminal justice control. Demarcating this subset is less straightforward than often thought. According to a low estimate, it would comprise about 90,000 young adults who receive a community or prison sentence in any given year. A median estimate would include the several million young adults who come into direct contact with one or more criminal justice agency, mostly unwillingly so, during the course of their young adulthood. An upper end estimate would also need to include all those young adults who feel the weight of criminal justice without necessarily having any direct experience of it. In other words, virtually all young adults are, in some sense or other, subject to criminal justice control. In this paper I therefore start with the mass of young adults in British society, exploring the ways in which social position determines their variable needs and vulnerabilities. The insights gained through this process will be used to shed light on some of the more specific questions relating to criminal justice.

Proposition one: Young adulthood is a dynamic process, not a static category

According to estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the population of the UK in 2010 will be just over 62.2 million, of which 30.6 million will be males and 31.6 females (ONS, 2009a). The young adult cohort – comprising 16 to 24 year olds – is estimated to consist of 3.8 million males and 3.6 million females. In total then, more than 10 per cent of the population at the time of the general election – about 7.5 million people – are likely to be young adults.

What will happen to these young adults during the course of the next government's period in office, if we assume it will govern for a four-year term? We will set to one

side for now that small group of young adults who will tragically leave this age group through early death and concentrate on the dynamic process of growing into and growing out of young adulthood. By 2014 around 1.5 million males aged 12 to 15 can be expected to have grown into young adulthood, offsetting a slightly greater number of 21 to 24 year olds – some 1.7 million – who will have grown out of young adulthood. The picture with females is roughly comparable, with an estimated 1.7 million growing out of and 1.4 million growing into young adulthood.

The annual change in the young adult population in the UK in the likely period of the next government will therefore be in the order of 1.5 million people, made up of around 750,000 'joiners' and 750,000 'leavers' each year. What about the situation at the end of a subsequent four-year period of government? By 2018, almost the entire young adult population of 2010 will have grown into adulthood, replaced by the children and adolescents of today. During the period of two governmental terms, some 12 to 13 million people will become, be or stop being a young adult.

This massive movement of people through the young adult age group, with the millions of personal stories in all their complexity and diversity this involves, presents enormous policy challenges. The nature of these policy challenges will be explored later. For now, it will suffice to point out that young adulthood is a process of becoming and 'unbecoming', not a rigid demographic category that starts on an individual's sixteenth birthday and ends when she or he reaches the age of 25. We do not live out and experience our lives according to the conveniences of bureaucratic categorisation.

This is not an argument about the relative maturity of different individuals, though it is true that some 16 year olds are old beyond their years while some 30 year olds lack the capacity to live independent and autonomous adult lives. It is rather an argument in favour of policy that is responsive to the dynamism of human growth and development, as opposed to policy that fetishises particular age ranges or recreates new policy silos in place of or alongside old ones.

The policy challenge is to develop and implement approaches that respond to individual and collective need regardless of age, while being responsive to specific

age-related and other challenges. Constructing an exclusively young adult collection of policy interventions, rather than, for example, a broad-based collection of interventions responsive to age-related needs, at best risks pushing the problem of policy and practice discontinuity up the age bands.

Proposition two: Life chances and life outcomes are determined by social structure

Let us start with an apparently simple question: how does a child become a young person, a young person a young adult, a young adult an adult? The simple answer is through a biological process commonly referred to as 'growing up'. Short of the mass extinction of humanity, babies will grow through their childhood years into adulthood. 'Childhood' and 'adulthood', 'adolescent' and 'young adult' are convenient social labels rather than objective categories. But there is an irreducibly biological component that underlies them.

Yet we do not have to think very hard to realise that this biological process is mediated through distinct social structures. Moreover, these social structures exist and operate independently of the will of any one person or group of people. In the UK in 2007, for instance, the under five mortality rate was six per 1,000 live births. In 1990, it was 10 per 1,000 live births (World Health Organization (WHO), 2009: 43). The specific reasons for this improvement in mortality rates need not concern us here. It is enough to observe that it must be due to changes in social and institutional arrangements rather than any biological changes in children resident in the UK during this period. At the other end of the spectrum, consider the case of Afghanistan. At 257 deaths per 1,000 live births, it had one of the highest under five mortality rates in the world in 2007 (ibid., 2009: 37). British parents' comfortable knowledge that their children will almost certainly grow up into adulthood must seem very alien to most Afghan parents. Biological differences between British children and Afghan children cannot explain this wide divergence. Neither can a surfeit of nurture in Britain, nor a deficit of it in Afghanistan. However, Britain is one of the richest countries in the world. Afghanistan is one of the poorest: internally riven by conflict and deeply engrained misogyny, and the object of external aggression over many years. These social, economic and historical differences must go a long way to

explaining the remarkable and deeply disturbing contrasts in life outcomes for children born into these two societies.

Moving up the age range, significant patterns emerge as a child grows into an adult. Across the world, adolescents who become young adults enter a period of their life when they are much more likely to die. In 2004, the worldwide mortality rate for 10 to 14 year olds was 95 per 100,000. For 15 to 19 year olds it was 139 per 100,000. It was 224 per 100,000 for 20 to 24 year olds (Patton et al., 2009: table 3: 884), more than double the rate for 10 to 14 year olds.

The distribution of this increased risk of death was not spread evenly across the entire population of young adults. Worldwide, females and males experienced similar rates of mortality in the 10 to 14 age range in 2004: 94 per 100,000 and 95 per 100,000 respectively. For young adult age groups a distinct gender difference is notable. The mortality rate for 15 to 19 year old females was 131 per 100,000, compared with 147 for males. For 20 to 24 year olds, it was 191 for females and 255 for males (Patton et al., 2009: table 3: 884).

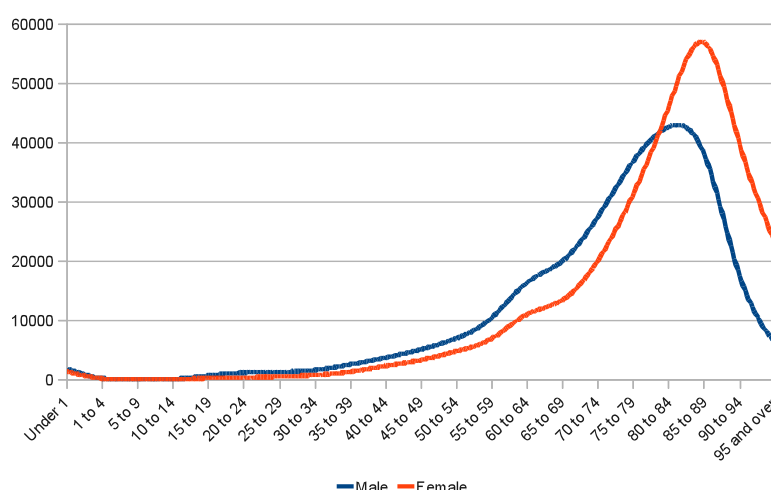
But this is not all. If gender was one axis along which the increased risk of death was distributed in 2004, the social structure of wealth and poverty was the other. The mortality rate for children and young people and young adults in high-income countries was 16, 49 and 69 per 100,000 for the 10 to 14, 15 to 19 and 20 to 24 age groups respectively. In low- and middle-income countries, the rates were much elevated, at 103, 150 and 244 per 100,000 respectively (Patton et al., 2009: table 3: 884).

In summary, life chances and life outcomes are strongly mediated by social structures. Young adulthood is a watershed in terms of mortality; a distinct increase in mortality rates is found internationally at this age across rich and poor countries. Gender differences in mortality also start to open up during young adulthood. The social structures of wealth and poverty are key.

Let us now draw the analysis closer to home and explore mortality rates in England and Wales. Figure 1 graphs male and female deaths due to all causes for all age groups in England and Wales in 2008.

Figure 1: Male and female deaths in 2008, all causes, all age groups

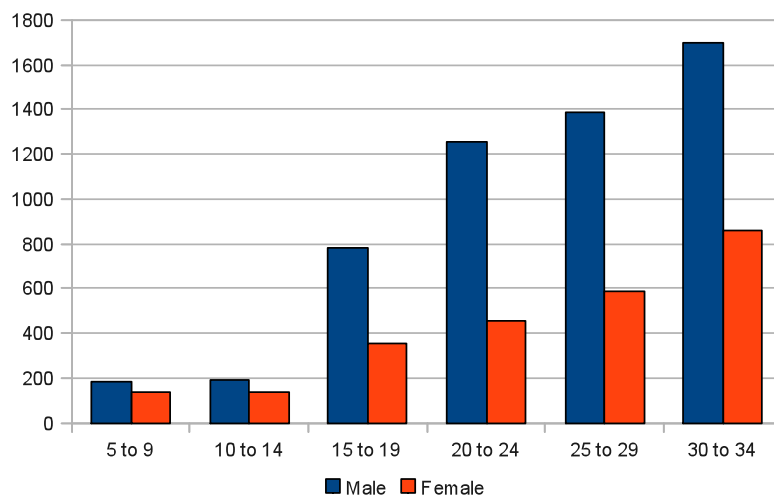
(Source: ONS, 2009b: table 5)



Deaths below the age of 50 were comparatively uncommon in 2008, but they increased at an accelerating rate after that. There is also a distinct gender difference in mortality rates that starts in the 15 to 19 age range, with men having an elevated mortality rate compared with women. This is a consistent pattern until people reach their early eighties. The scale of the gender divergence is clearer in figure 2, which gives mortality rates for 5 to 34 year olds. It shows a clear jump in mortality rates from 15 onwards. It also shows a marked divergence by gender. While injuries such as traffic incidents, violence and self-harm were the main cause of death for both young adult females and males, a distinct gender pattern was observable. There were 809 young adult females deaths as a result of injuries in 2008. For young adult males, the figure was 2,034.

Figure 2: Male and female deaths in 2008, all causes, ages 5 to 34

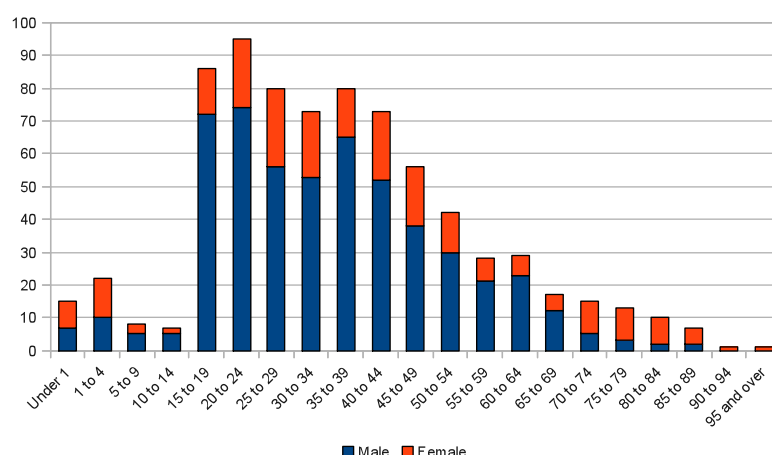
(Source: ONS, 2009b: table 5)



What of the social structures of wealth and poverty and their relationship to levels of mortality? Research published in the *British Medical Journal* in 2002 studied the mortality rates of 2,132 women and 2,322 men between the ages of 26 and 54 born in March 1946 (Kuh et al., 2002). It found a strong correlation between social position and rates of mortality. In both childhood and adulthood, males and females from manual classes were nearly three times as likely to die between the ages of 26 and 54 than those from non-manual classes. A more recent study in the *British Medical Journal* examined census and mortality data across England and Wales. It compared the relationship between mortality rates and deprivation in 1900 with those in 2001. It found that the link between mortality and deprivation was as strong in 2001 as it had been in 1900: 'Patterns of mortality and deprivation are deeply entrenched such that in both cases the patterns of a century ago are strong predictors of today's patterns' (Gregory, 2009: 6).

For some causes of death, the correlations between age, gender and social position are particularly strong. Figure 3 shows a breakdown by age and gender of homicide victims and suspected homicide victims in 2008.

Figure three: Male and female death by homicide and probable homicide, all ages^{*}, 2008 (Source: ONS, 2009b: table 5.19)



A quarter of all homicide and probable homicide victims in 2008 were young adults, mostly young men. More women died as a result of homicide in their late twenties and early thirties, and again in their late thirties and early forties, than died in young adulthood. Homicide victimisation is primarily a male cause of death and a disproportionately young male one at that. Figure 3 does not show the social position of those who died. However, research by the social geographer Daniel Dorling reveals a strong correlation between social position and homicide. During the 1980s and 1990s young men living in the poorest areas were far more likely to be homicide victims than any other social group. Their risk of homicide also grew dramatically during those decades (Dorling, 2008).

To summarise the main points so far, moving from childhood and adolescence into young adulthood marks an important threshold in anyone's life. In England and Wales, it also marks an increased incidence of death. This increased incidence is not distributed equally. It affects males much more than females. It affects the poor far more than the rich. These increased risks and their distribution are determined by social structures. This pattern holds internationally. In the case of England and

* Two sets of data have been used for compiling the figures in this graph: deaths coded X85–Y09 (assaults) and those coded U509 (death from injury or poisoning, awaiting determination of intent). Most of these latter cases will end up being coded as deaths due to assault. See ONS, 2009b: section 2.11, p. xix.

Wales at least, it is also a pattern that has been remarkably persistent for at least a century.

Yet, while the problems of young adulthood are in some senses distinctive, they are not a problem of young adulthood in general. Young adulthood might be a high watermark with respect to homicide for males, but homicide is a cause of death that disproportionately affects men from their late teens through to their mid-forties. This says much about the particular vulnerability of males in particular age groups. But it is males in a particular social position – in poverty – who are disproportionately affected, not all males in this age group. The picture for women is different. Their mortality rates are consistently below those of men until their early eighties. It is important not to confuse the particular problems of mortality affecting particular age groups, particular genders, particular social groups with the problem of young adulthood as such. Moreover, young adulthood might mark a quantitative jump in levels of mortality, but mortality rates grow rather than subside in older age groups too. Who dies and when in middle and old age is not merely the result of ‘getting old’ or the luck of the draw. Social position plays a fundamental and ongoing role.

At this point some readers might be wondering why this section has focused on mortality rates at all as a means of thinking about social justice questions. A more usual approach might involve reviewing a range of data related to various personal, interpersonal, social and economic problems, building up a composite picture of the challenges facing young adults. Consider the following, for instance, from the Social Exclusion Unit report on young adults with complex needs:

Young people aged between 16 and 25 suffer disproportionately from many different types of disadvantage, including homelessness, worklessness, lack of training or education, poor health (in particular, mental and sexual health), and are at high risk of becoming involved in anti-social behaviour, drug use, and crime.

(Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM), 2005: 20).

Two more recent reports take a similar approach. Young People in Focus has produced a useful analysis for the T2A Alliance, collating various data relating to

need and vulnerability among young adults (Devitt et al., 2009). A team from the University of York has produced a detailed analysis of youth and young adult social exclusion for the Social Exclusion Task Force (Cusworth et al., 2009).

There is little to be gained from redoing this exercise here or merely replicating the data already available. This is a pragmatic reason for not going down the composite picture route. But there is another, more fundamental, reason for focusing on mortality. If the right to life is the most fundamental of all rights, then unequal life outcomes, related as they are to the particular ways in which society is structured and ordered, are a profound issue of social justice. To quote the social epidemiologist Richard Wilkinson:

Within each of the developed countries ... average life expectancy is five, ten, or even fifteen years shorter for people living in the poorest areas compared to those in the richest. This huge loss of life, reflecting the very different social and economic circumstances in which people live, stands as a stark abuse of human rights.

(Wilkinson, 2005: 1)

The unequal distribution of death therefore brings questions of social justice into focus in a particularly acute manner.

Proposition three: Social justice requires multi-dimensional changes outwith the criminal justice system

In one week in July 1995, during the course of a heatwave, some 740 people in Chicago died. The following week, the US government's Center for Disease Control (CDC) sent in a team of 80 people to work out why only certain people were affected. The resulting study looked at the characteristics of those who had died to establish whether there were common patterns. It found that they shared a range of characteristics. These included: not leaving home daily; having an underlying medical condition; living alone; having no social contacts nearby; lacking air-conditioning; and being without access to transport.

The Chicago story is recounted by the political philosopher Brian Barry in *Why Social Justice Matters*. He points out that the most striking fact about the Chicago deaths – that they were concentrated in the poor South Side of Chicago – was glossed over in the CDC study. This broader context, within which the particular factors identified by the CDC study played themselves out in the lives of the individuals affected, was ignored:

Thus, of two people too poor to run an air-conditioner ... it is hardly surprising that the one who was bedridden was more likely to die of heatstroke. But another way of looking at the issue is to say that the primary cause of vulnerability was poverty, and then to add that among equally poor people some were more fortunately placed than others to cope.

(Barry, 2005: 162)

Barry is proposing that explanatory primacy be given to a particular factor, poverty, rather than assuming that poverty sits alongside a number of other social disadvantages – health problems, lack of air-conditioner and so on – with all having equal explanatory weight. It was poverty that was the ‘primary cause’ of the individuals’ deaths. Other factors were secondary causes; they help to explain why certain poor people died and some did not. But it was poverty that mediated these secondary causes.

Applying Barry’s logic to the matters explored in this paper, the argument would be that the primary cause of the unequal distribution of a natural phenomenon – death – was poverty. The additional characteristics of those who died – that they were male or female for instance, or that they were young adults – were secondary causes. They might help to explain why some people living in poverty died early while others did not. They do not have the same explanatory weight as poverty.

But this does not sound quite right. It is clear from looking at the data that gender and age appear to influence mortality in ways that are not entirely reducible either to each other or to the social structures of wealth and poverty. To put it differently, a radical redistribution of national wealth, such that everyone in the UK had comparable annual income and assets, might well have a profound impact on

mortality rates attributable to poverty and inequality. But might it also equalise rates of premature death along gender and age grounds? This seems rather less plausible.

Rather than seeking to rank causes of mortality, it might make more sense to talk of poverty, gender, age and mortality levels being *interrelated*. Rather than seeking a primary cause of unequal mortality rates, when thinking about the problem of social justice it might be more useful to explore the different dimensions through which unequal mortality rates are mediated. If unequal mortality rates are a profound matter of social justice, the dimensions for thinking through policy challenges must include poverty, gender and age.

Let us explore some of the practical policy implications that flow from this rather abstract argument. The first of these relates to criminal justice: its role and function; its contribution to the cause of social justice. There is no credible evidence that the actions of the criminal justice agencies, either individually or combined, make a significant or sustained contribution to tackling the unequal distribution of mortality rates. Criminal justice therefore has nothing to contribute to the most fundamental social justice challenge facing British society today.

Ironically, the criminal justice system is very good at affecting the lives of those most likely to experience early death. Its target group is predominantly made up of young adult males who come from a background of poverty and exclusion. As *Lost in Transition* points out, criminal justice tends towards exacerbating these problems, rather than ameliorating them. Whatever its other functions as a means of maintaining order, it has little or nothing to offer the cause of social justice.

This leaves those who support the cause of social justice but who work in or around the criminal justice system with something of a dilemma. From this dilemma spring many decent and principled attempts to reform the criminal justice process and ameliorate its worst aspects. It would be churlish to dismiss these many worthwhile initiatives. But it is important to be clear about the limitations of criminal justice reformism. This was made very clear by the Justice Secretary, Jack Straw, in a speech at the Royal Society of Arts in October 2008. 'Punishment and reform' were

the 'very basis of the criminal justice system,' he argued. As for social justice: 'The criminal justice system does not exist to do what a parent, a teacher, a social worker could not' (Straw, 2008).

There is therefore a need to conceptualise the challenge of social justice within a much broader framework than the narrow one represented by the criminal justice system. The first dimension relates to the question of wealth, poverty and its unequal distribution. As Brian Barry points out, 'If we accept that the distribution of income and wealth is unjust, and that it would be more just if it were more equal, we cannot get around the answer that money has to be redistributed from the rich to the poor' (Barry, 2005: 171).

Barry's conceptual point is reinforced by data on the impact of inequality and the possible impact of redistribution. Work over a number of years by Richard Wilkinson and colleagues has systematically explored the links between inequality and a range of harms and vulnerabilities (Wilkinson, 2005; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). Research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation published in 2000 examined mortality rates across Britain. The authors estimated that 7,500 people under the age of 65 would not die prematurely *each year* if income inequality levels were returned to the levels they were at in the early 1980s (Mitchell et al., 2000). Given the crucial threshold of increased mortality represented by the entry into young adulthood, the effects of such policies would be potentially dramatic for this age group. It is also worth bearing in mind that Britain in the early 1980s was already a very unequal society. The implications of a more fundamental redistribution of wealth would presumably be even more dramatic.

Were a new government to embark on a course of radical income distribution – and there is no evidence that any of the main political parties would commit itself to such a policy – the benefits would take many years to feed through. Major shifts are often achieved in many small steps. One potential small step relates to labour market programmes. A recent study in *The Lancet* explored the effect of active labour market intervention programmes in ameliorating the effects of recession-induced unemployment. Suicide is one of the most tragic effects of unemployment. *The Lancet* study concluded that spending an equivalent of \$190 per head on active

labour market interventions would mitigate the effects of unemployment on suicide rates (Stuckler et al., 2009). Young adults are one of the groups most affected by recession-related unemployment. Suicide is also one of the major causes of early death among young adults, particularly males.

Gender, and the construction of masculinity in particular, is the second main dimension to consider. For boys, the process of growing up is a process of learning socially mediated gender roles. These typically include the celebration of physical strength, sexual prowess, emotional distance, risk-taking, and face and 'respect', to name but a few. These learned practices are deeply embedded in society, with historical roots that go back many centuries. The gender roles that young men learn and internalise partly explain why far more young men than young women die in traffic incidents (too often the result of risk-taking behaviour) and through homicide and self-harm (different routes out of a crisis of masculine identity). A commitment to social justice therefore requires serious policies aimed at challenging prevailing masculine norms and developing new, far less lethal, masculine identities in their place.

Where to start? In *The Men and the Boys*, the masculinity theorist R.W. Connell sets out the following 'arenas for action to reduce masculine violence'. The list is equally applicable to the wider challenge of rethinking masculinity:

- *Development: schooling, child rearing and adult–child relationships ...*
- *Personal life: marital relations ... family relationships, friendships ...*
- *Community life: peer groups, neighbourhood life, leisure ...*
- *Cultural institutions: higher education ... mass media, the arts ...*
- *Workplaces: occupational cultures, industrial relations ... the state and its enforcement apparatuses (armies, police etc.) ...*
- *Markets: the labour markets ... management practices and ideologies.*

(Connell, 2000: 224–225).

It is clear that any successful set of policies designed to reconfigure masculinity will require an enormous effort, involving a range of state and non-state actors over

several decades. But again, small steps are possible.

For a paper about social justice, young adults and criminal justice, the above has had little to say about criminal justice, apart from to emphasise its limitations in relation to the cause of social justice. It has also highlighted the fluid and dynamic interplay between young adulthood as a mobile population group and the enduring social facts of income inequality and poverty, gender roles and masculinity. Young adults might have distinctive needs. These needs are not, however, unique to them.

In some ways this is alien terrain for many of those who come to the subject from a criminal justice perspective and with reformist priorities. Their knowledge and focus, their passion and drive, are related to the criminal justice process and to its reform. In other ways, though, this is very familiar territory. As the quotations from the T2A Alliance reports towards the beginning of this paper indicate, the notion that many of the answers to the challenges of young adulthood lie outside the criminal justice system is well understood. The problem is that the difficult work of developing the implications of this acknowledgement is generally not attempted. What I have tried to do in this paper is to start the process of thinking through the nature of these wider issues and to map out the framework for taking them forward.

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