



# Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime



Causes and Impact of Offending and  
Criminal Justice Pathways: Follow-up of  
the Cohort at Age 35



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# The Edinburgh Study

Longitudinal research programme on offending pathways amongst a cohort of around 4,300 young people

Aims to study offending within 3 main contexts:



Multiple data sources (self reports, interviews, official records, teachers, GIS)

Funded by: Nuffield Foundation, ESRC, Scottish Government

# Follow up at age 35

Aim: Examine the causes & impacts of criminal justice pathways on longer-term life chances

3 key questions:

1. How do people's patterns of criminal conviction vary over time?
2. Does contact with criminal justice help people stop offending over the longer term?
3. What impact does offending and justice system contact have on education, employability, health and inter-personal relationships over the life course into early middle age?

Methods:

- Criminal conviction data n=4257
- Survey n=793
- Interviews n=73

COVID-19 Impact!

# Structure

## Part 1: conviction pathways and prison experience

- Typical conviction trajectories and relationship with self-reported offending
- Profile of the prison experienced

## Part 2: pathways to desistance

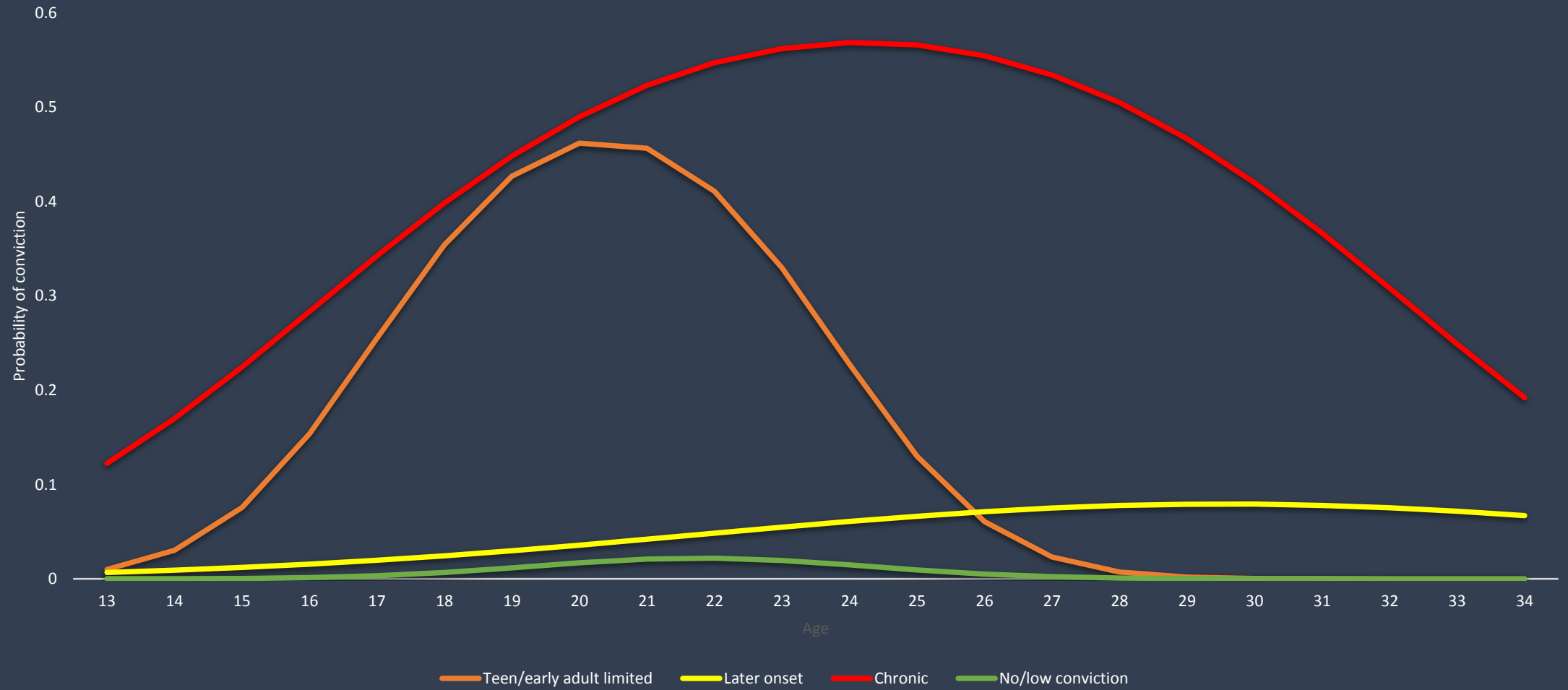
- Factors linked to stopping and continuing offending
- Perceptions of care, education and criminal justice
- Doreen's story

## Conclusion: policy implications

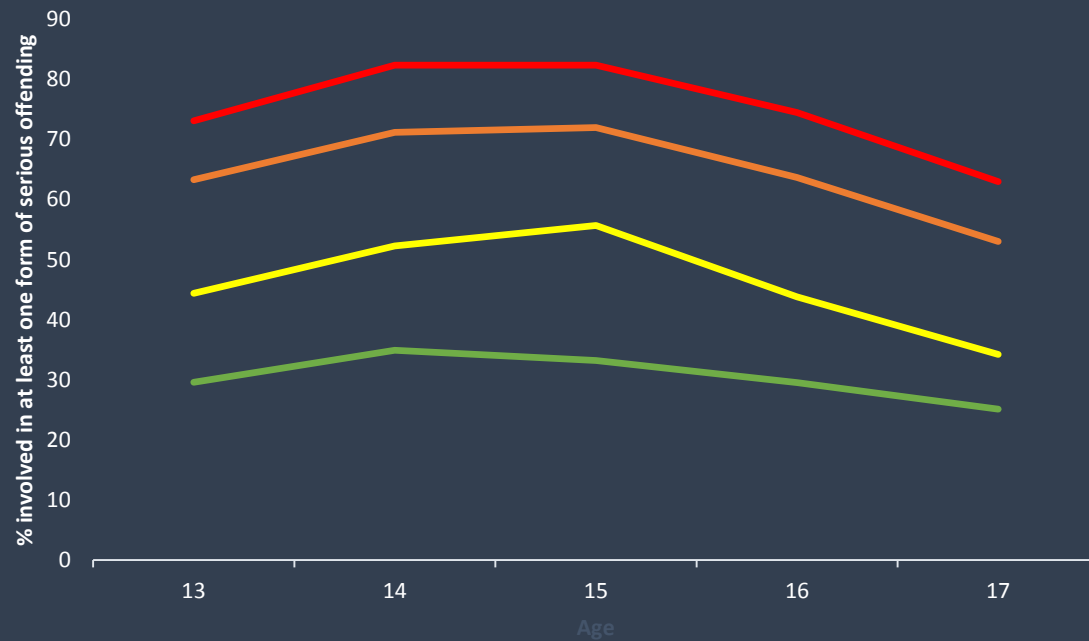
# Part 1

Conviction pathways and prison experience

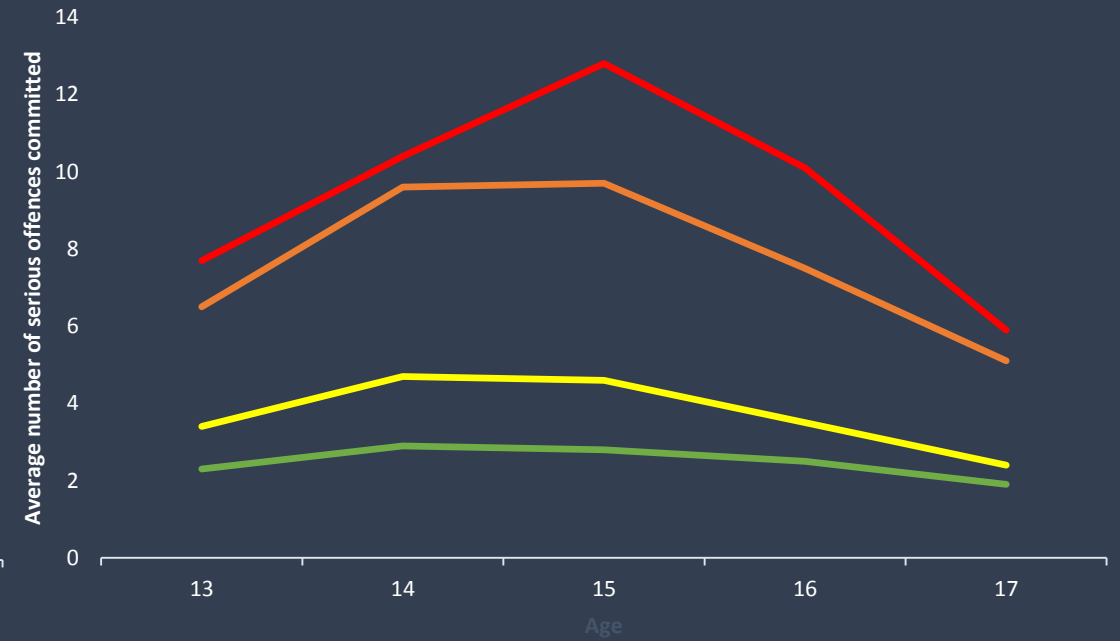
# Criminal conviction pathways



# Relationship between self-reported serious offending\* in adolescence and conviction pathway



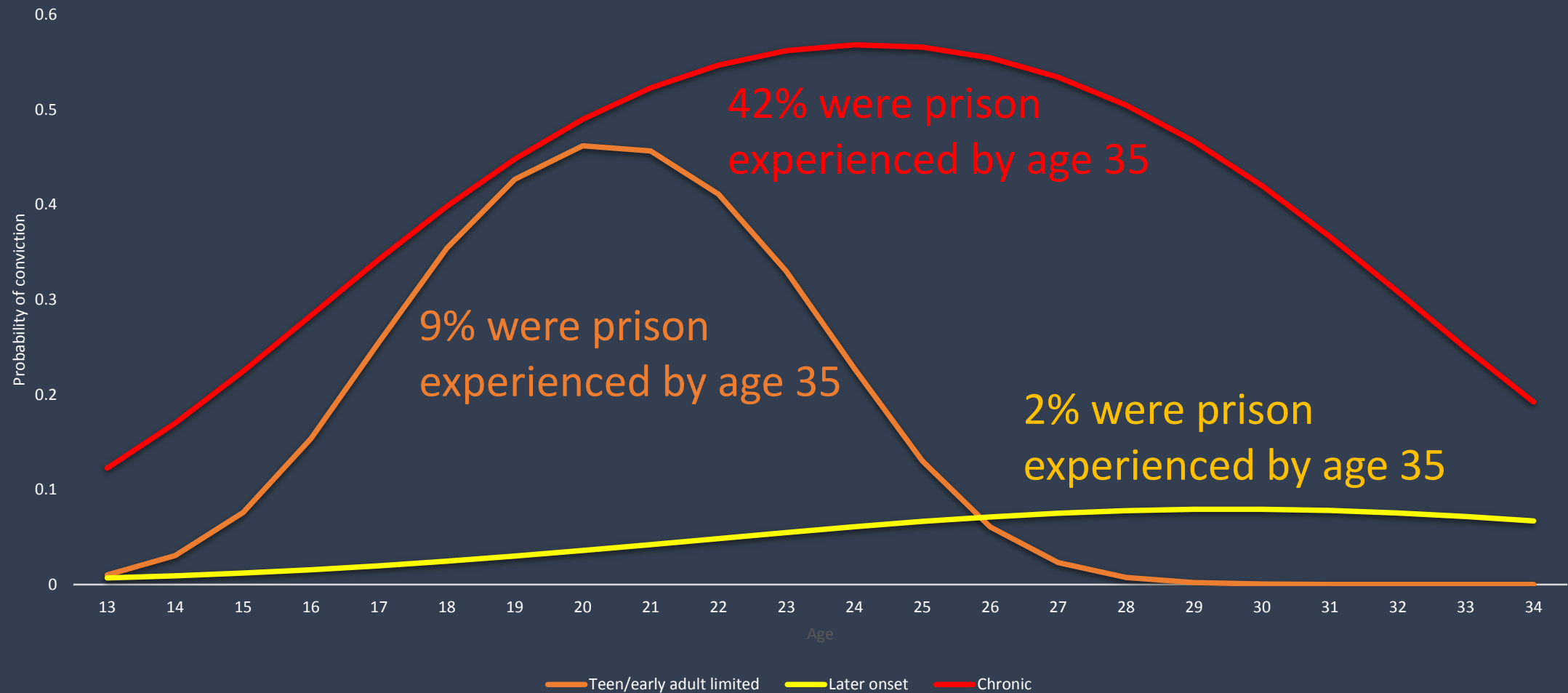
% Involved in serious offending



Average number of serious offences

\*Measure of serious offending includes: assault; robbery; weapon carrying; fire-raising; housebreaking; breaking into a motor vehicle to steal some from it; riding in a stolen motor vehicle.

# Likelihood of prison experience varied by duration and onset of conviction pathway





Prison experienced individuals were significantly more likely to have grown up in a low income household with a non/manual working head of household and living in one of the most deprived areas of the city.

Those with prison experience by age 35 were significantly more likely to have been involved in serious offending and report problematic substance use (including drinking and drug use) by age 12.

Those with prison experience by age 35 were significantly more likely to be impulsive and have pro-violence attitudes in childhood, but also have lower self-esteem.

Those with a criminal conviction by age 35 were more likely to have ACEs by age 12, while those with prison experience were most likely to have experienced adult harassment and sexual contact.

Those with prison experience by age 35 were significantly more likely to have had both justice and welfare system contact in childhood ('crossover' children)

Those with prison experience by age 35 were significantly more likely to have special educational needs, identified personal difficulties and half had changed schools at least once during secondary education.

By age 15 (approaching legal school leaving age),  
prison experienced individuals were significantly  
less engaged with school (as were their parents)  
and were far more likely to be behaving badly and  
receiving school punishments.

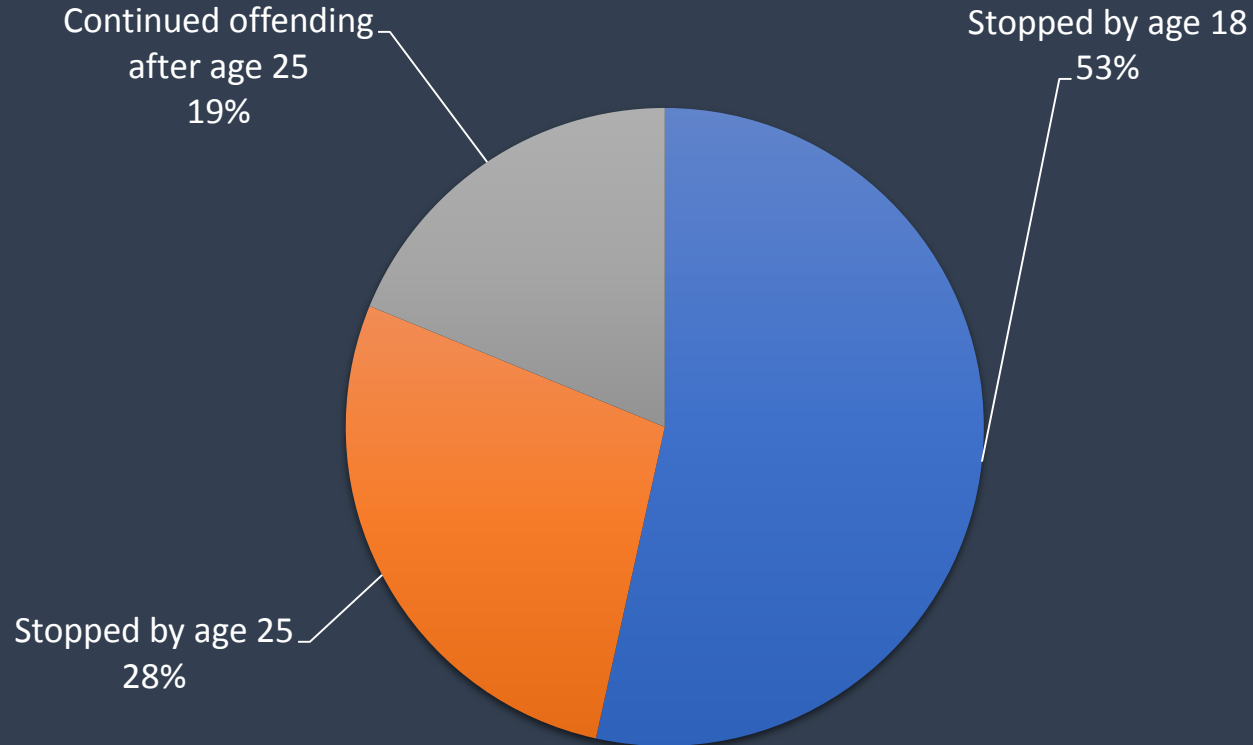
Half of those with prison experience by age 35 were excluded from school by age 12, and the vast majority of them had left school at the earliest opportunity.



# Part 2

Pathways to desistance

# Many stopped offending, but almost half had persisted into adulthood



96% of cohort admitted offending at some point

Persistent offending (beyond age 18) was linked to early serious offending, drug use and ACEs

Problems in adulthood were also strongly associated with persistent offending, including:

- Ongoing drug use
- Adverse experiences
- High levels of impulsivity
- Clinical depression
- Clinical anxiety
- High levels of victimisation (esp. after age 25)

# Lack of attention, compassion and/or love were commonly experienced by those in care

And I only had [social worker] a couple of times, but she give me worksheets and asked what colour my hair was. What colour my eyes were. I didnae kinda understand the point of her. She never spoke to me, **she never had questions about what had happened**, I don't actually remember having an actual conversation with her about anything to do with it. (Interviewee 415, referred to the children's hearing system as victim of abuse and neglect)

Obviously if you're put in foster care [or] sent to a home you **know there's like a massive lump of rejection there**...Like I've always felt like either, or, I'm the problem or, or you know everything is going wrong or like and then having a cycle of negative thoughts. (Interviewee 995)

I hated my social worker.. probably because she was authoritative. **She never understood me, I didn't understand her**. ..She threatened a few times.. and said that if I didn't behave they would put me in a children's home on Christmas day. (Interviewee 840)

# Positive care experiences can have a profound impact on later life outcomes

My foster carers, I still keep in touch with them...they played quite a big part in our lives. **If it wasn't for them, I don't know how I would've turned out** to be honest. (Interviewee 210)

**My social worker at the time, she was lovely...** She was really, really nice, but she ended up giving up being a social worker just because, for her, she's not been able to help people. I remember me really impacting on her 'cos I kept trying, but **the odds were against, and you keep trying and trying.** (Interviewee 101)

# Educational disruption linked to being bullied, bad behaviour and undiagnosed learning needs

I started skiving school, didn't do much school and then I missed most of my high school years... **it was really bullying that stopped me from going to school**, kept me away. I used to keep it a secret, cause my mum used to drop me off at school and pick me at school. I'd just leave and always be back at school for her to pick up. (Interviewee 989)

I got into trouble at school a lot. There's one teacher and she told me that I was attention seeking ...I was like, you know what, I will show you the difference **and I would totally play up. I would totally wind her up to the point ..where she couldn't handle the class.** And it was because in my hearing ... she said I was 'attention seeking'. (Interviewee 415)

I wasn't the happiest of kids to be honest. School wasn't great for me, **like, I was quite dyslexic. So they didn't pick that up at all at school, like sort of they messed that whole up..**I started skiving.(Interviewee 899)

# Agency contact became less intimidating over time – a hazard to be negotiated or endured

## First criminal justice contacts:

That was quite a negative experience because **I was very scared thinking** – I could go to jail. (Interviewee 831, recounting when he was taken to court for assault at age 16).

At the time **it gave me a fright**, because I knew it would jeopardize my future. ..if that had been prosecuted on racial abuse, you know? (Interviewee 554)

## Later contacts:

Courts: Well I haven't really seen that I broke the law and the worst they could really do is give me a fine. So, **I wasn't really bothered to be honest**. (Interviewee 561)

Probation: To be honest I didn't learn anything from it, I was just surrounded by other people that committed crime...I didn't find it as much as a punishment, **it was just something I had to do**. (Interviewee 831)

# Loving relationships, employment and responsibilities are key aspects of desistance

Going home, **dirty hands, clean money** (Cohort member aged 35)

I think **finding a job** that I really enjoy.... Then **finding a partner** who right from day one we got on brilliantly together. To then **feeling comfortable enough to ... have children** and now children that, I just look at them, and there's no way I'd ever want to be run the risk of ever getting sent away from them. (Cohort member aged 35)

I've got to the point where **I don't want to let people down**. And I want to do the things that I wanna do, I've got a really good job. I've got a, you know, I've got a really nice partner. I've got two step kids, I've got...You know, we've got money (Cohort member aged 35)

# Positive change can be more difficult and fragile for some

- A worker from [health and social care service] was brilliant. And to be honest I've even found it hard reaching out now, you know, saying I'm not coping. And **I'm very paranoid**. I know I'm very irrational just now, you know with my paranoia. But I think if I just keep trying to be open it'll no snowball and build up. And **I have found it incredibly hard to ask for help**. It's something I still struggle with. (Cohort member aged 35)



# Implications for policy

- Holistic/joined up approach across policy portfolios
- Community targeted universal services
- Educational inclusion - policies to tackle bullying and exclusion, better diagnosis and support for those with additional learning needs
- Don't lose focus on older children (16-18)
- Life-long learning opportunities – employability, caring and parenting skills, managing relationships, literacy etc.
- Better support for key transitions - out of school, out of care, out of prison
- Recognition of adult adverse experiences (in addition to ACES)