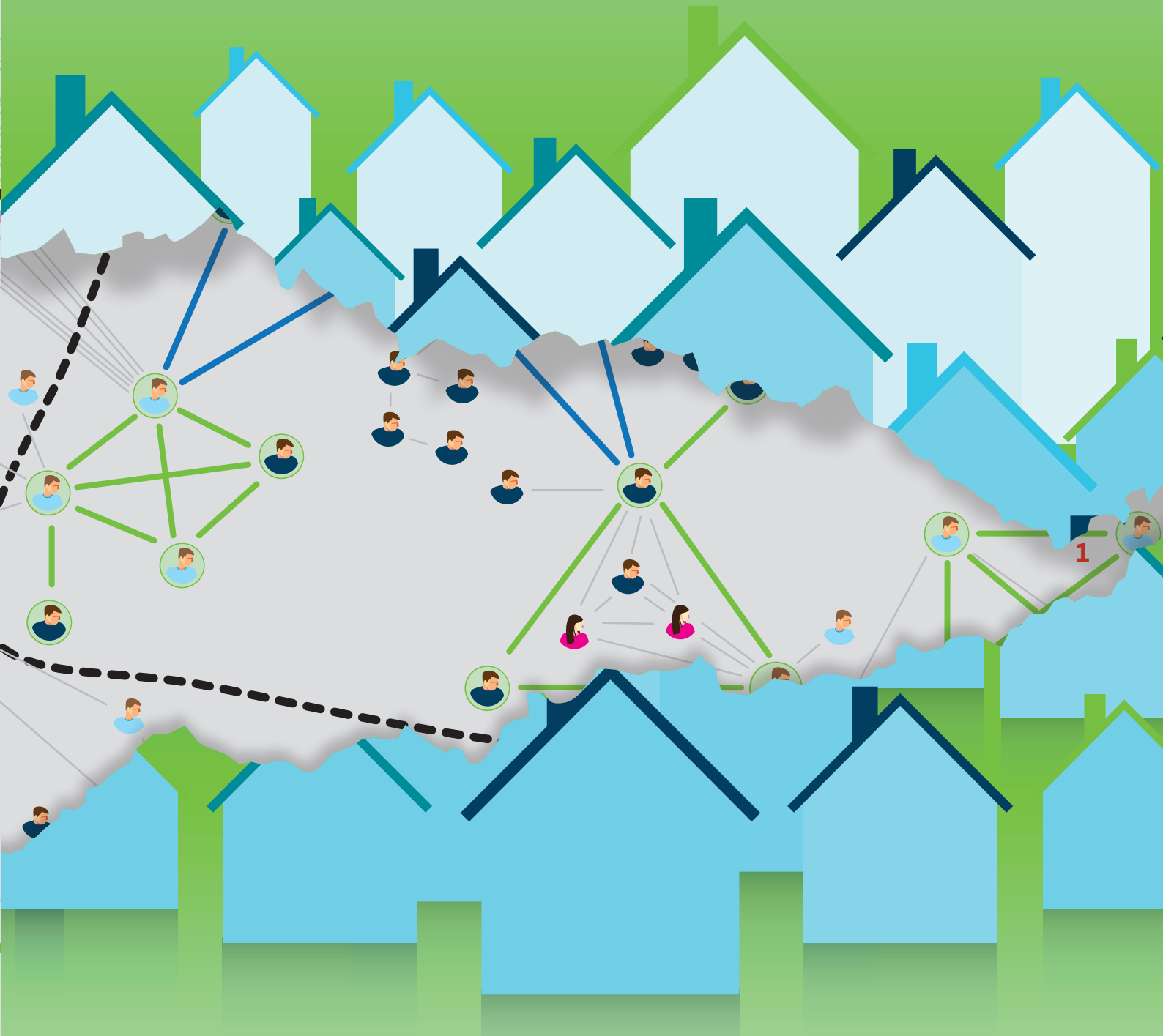
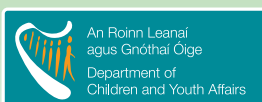



# National Prevalence Study



Do the findings from the Greentown study of children's involvement in criminal networks (2015) extend beyond Greentown?

Interim Report





Greentown an initiative of the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project was approved by the Criminal Justice Strategic Committee and funded by the Department of Justice and Equality.

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## A note on the original Greentown study (2015)

The original study 'Lifting the Lid on Greentown' was undertaken by Dr Sean Redmond, Adjunct Professor of Youth Justice, School of Law, University of Limerick. This study focused on the activities of children involved in burglary, and drugs for sale and supply offences (2010-2011) in 'Greentown', a real but anonymised locality in Ireland.

The study found evidence that a number of children were heavily involved in a network that was dominated by the members of a core family group involved in organised and serious crime. The network in itself was found to have a significant influencing effect on the children identified, to commit abnormally high levels of crime.

The study found significant qualitative differences between children who had a blood relationship with a dominant criminal family, referred to in the report as a 'family member' and those who had not, referred to in the report as an 'associate'.

The type of influence effected by the network depended on the child's relationship to the dominant core family. Children referred to as family members were subtly coached in crime by other members of the core criminal family. There was an inherent expectation that children who were family members would become an integral part of the network, eventually taking on leadership roles, and their criminal activities were largely managed informally via familial 'trust'. Children referred to as associates were recruited by young adult males within the network, mainly living in the same neighbourhood. Associate children's initial engagement was more often driven by attraction, access to alcohol, drugs, and status. However, once drawn in, associates' activities were governed by debt obligation and an environment of fear, intimidation, and coercion. Associates appeared to be more disposable in terms of their value to the network.

The full report can be accessed here: <https://ulir.ul.ie/handle/10344/5793>

## National Prevalence Study

### 1. Purpose and method

This national prevalence survey aimed to identify whether the findings from the original study (2015), based on a single case study design, extends beyond Greentown. A survey method conducted with a national set of expert respondents was selected to test the resonance of the original findings throughout Ireland.

### 2. Survey respondents

The survey was carried out with Garda Juvenile Liaison Officers (JLOs) who support the operation of the Diversion Programme. Importantly for this study, the Diversion Office reviews individual cases of children involved in criminal behaviour in localities across Ireland. Given their local knowledge of youth cases processed by the Diversion Programme, a JLO was considered ideally placed to; gauge the prevalence of children's involvement in persistent and serious crime, to describe the key features of the children involved in persistent and serious crime and to know whether any children are also engaged in network related criminal activity. The survey achieved an almost 90 per cent response rate representing every local Garda Sub-District across the country.

### 3. Summary of findings

#### Evidence in support of the original Greentown findings

- While small in number, children's profiles, as described in the original study, were not confined to Greentown.
- These profiles were seen to fit a minority (1 in 8) of the children involved in the diversion system across the country. This was not confined to large urban areas.
- Children involved in serious and persistent crime present with multiple vulnerabilities and complexities.
- Some children involved in serious and persistent crime were likely to be engaged in crime networks.
- Children involved in criminal networks who were described as blood relatives of local dominant crime families (family members) were predominantly groomed in crime by older family members.
- Children involved in criminal networks who were not blood relatives of local dominant crime families (associates) were mostly groomed in crime by younger non-family members of the network or 'recruiters'.

### Evidence insufficiency or not supporting the original Greentown findings

- There was insufficient evidence to identify the hierarchical difference within criminal networks between children who were described as family members and children who were described as associates.
- Although both groups of children were equally likely to present with welfare concerns, children described as family members were more likely to have increased risk factors in terms of committing crime and have parents with more chaotic lifestyles when compared to children who were described as associates.

**Table 1: A summary of the evidencing of key research questions relating to the original Greentown report**

Key research questions	Evidence to support generalisation of findings
Is there evidence of children sharing the same general profile found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?	Yes
Is there evidence of children's involvement in criminal networks found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?	Yes
If so, is there evidence of hierarchical difference in such networks that are determined by membership of dominant families?	No

Overall, the study suggests that the original findings in the Greentown report are substantially reflected in the responses by Juvenile Liaison Officers to the national survey. Further examination of some of the more nuanced findings in the original study, including the existence of potential status disparities between dominant families and associates is strongly encouraged.

However the key policy issue is that children presenting with profiles described in the original Greentown study appear to resonate in many other communities across Ireland.

## 4. Findings in detail

### Overview

This interim report addresses the following specific research questions relating to the original Greentown report (2015):

1. Is there evidence of children sharing the same general profile found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?
2. Is there evidence of children's involvement in criminal networks found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?
3. If so, is there evidence of hierarchical difference in such networks that are determined by membership of dominant families?

For each section the original findings are initially outlined. This is followed by findings from the national prevalence survey.

The methodology is outlined in the Appendix.

### 1. Is there evidence of children sharing the same general profile found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?

The original study found that children who were involved in serious and persistent crime were embedded in a local criminal network. The family backgrounds of children featured in the Greentown study were generally characterised by chaotic lifestyles, drugs, petty crime, and mental health issues. The children were unsupervised late at night and had problematic school engagement. Children were initially attracted to the network by access to money, drugs, and alcohol, but also by the perceived increase in status within their community that network involvement brought and a sense of power and belonging they probably felt was obtained by being part of the criminal network.

#### Survey findings

- 86% of JLOs indicated that there were children involved in serious and persistent crime in their area.
- Of those JLOs in both rural and urban locations believed that children who fit the general profile of the children described in the Greentown study constituted 1 in 8 of the children (11%) involved in criminality within their area.
- When asked to focus on one child who ‘best represents’ children involved in serious and persistent crime, JLOs predominantly focused on male children (94%) aged 16/17 years (71%).

#### Risk factors

The JLOs identified the presence of a number of risk factors identified in the original Greentown study that were present in relation to children becoming involved in serious and persistent crime.

Children involved in serious and persistent crime were described as extremely likely to be out unsupervised late at night (97%), be involved in alcohol (97%) and drug (88%) consumption, and have problematic school engagement (94%).<sup>1</sup> Children were also extremely likely to hang around with antisocial peers (96%), be confrontational with authorities (93%), and look up to (92%) and associate (90%) with local adults engaged in criminal activity. They also are extremely likely to have a knowledge beyond their years about the way the justice system works (88%) and have the ability to manipulate the diversion system for their own benefit (87%). 41% of children were likely to have spent time in state care and 77% of children were likely to have been the subject of child welfare investigations (see Figure 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Averaged across three items (school, drop-out, disruption and attendance).



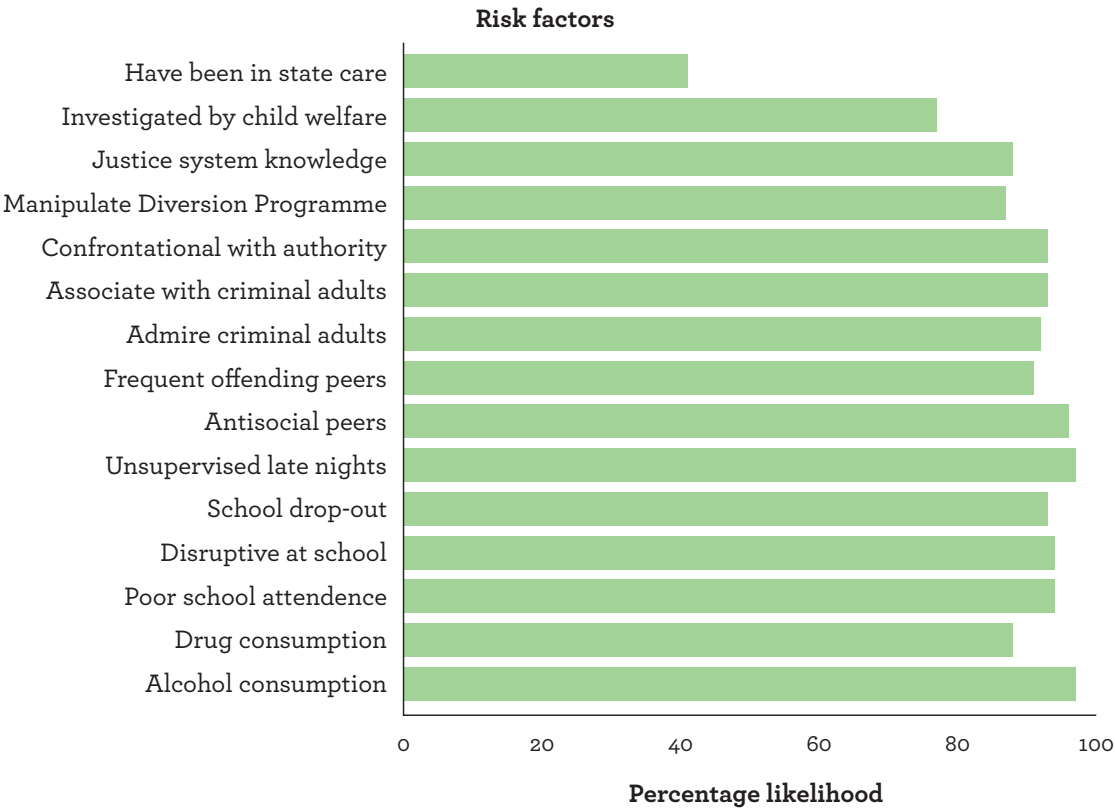


Figure 1: The percentage likelihood that children have specific vulnerabilities and established risk factors in terms of committing crime.

The JLOs described the children who were engaged in serious and persistent crime as extremely likely to be attracted to this lifestyle in order to gain access to drugs/ alcohol (91%) and money (95%). They were attracted to crime as a means of gaining respect (89%) and power (87%) within their community, and also to gain other psycho-social needs such as a sense of belonging (85%) (see Figure 2).

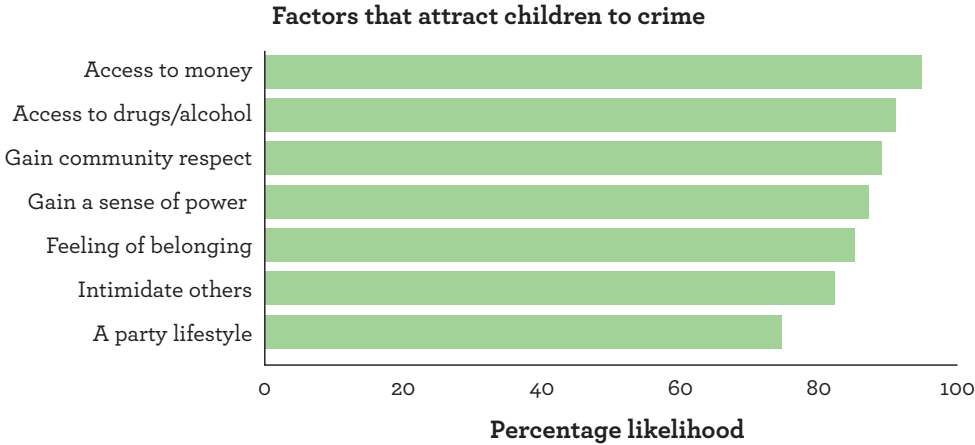


Figure 2: The percentage likelihood of factors that attract children to commit serious and persistent crime.

## 2. Is there evidence of children’s involvement in criminal networks found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?

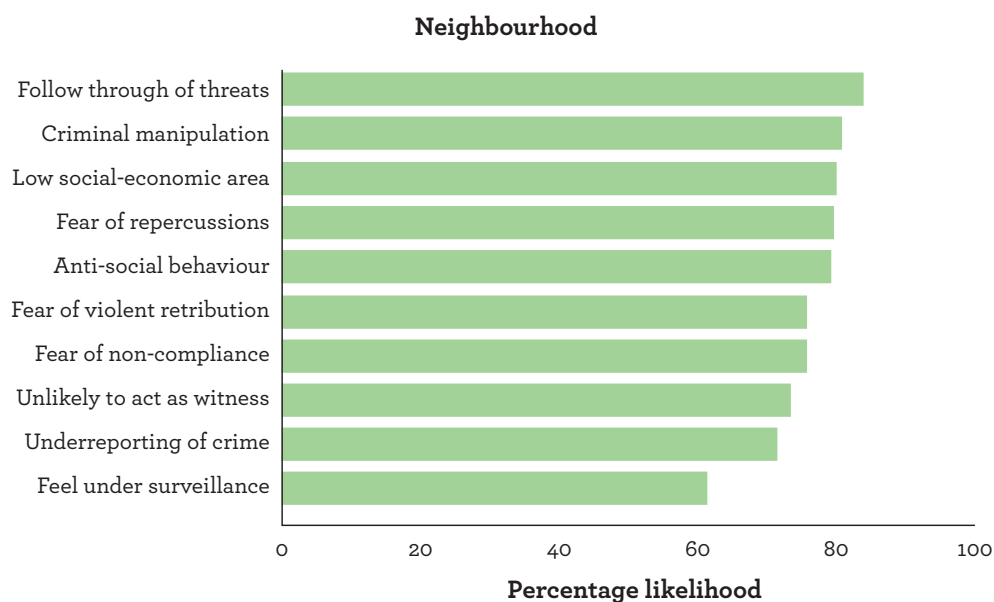
The original Greentown study identified the presence of a local criminal network. Adults within the network were found to groom certain vulnerable local children to commit crime. An environment of fear, intimidation, and coercion, cultivated by the network, made it extremely difficult for children to disengage from crime. The network had a significant influencing effect on this minority group of local children to commit abnormally high levels of crime.

In this section we examined the evidence for three key identifiers that the original Greentown study indicated as suggestive of the presence of a criminal network:

- a) A climate of fear, intimidation, and coercion, within the children’s neighbourhood.
- b) Evidence of adults actors grooming children for crime.
- c) Children’s reduced capacity to disengage from crime due to the effects of adult-child interactions.

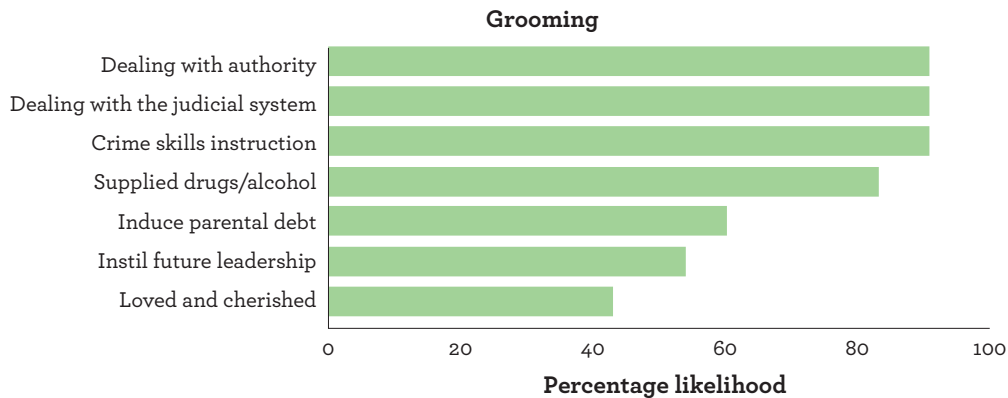
### Survey findings

1. Children, referred to by JLO respondents, were very likely to live in a lower socio-economic area (80%) with a high level of antisocial behaviour (79%). The JLO’s indicated that the children’s neighbourhood was governed by a culture of fear, intimidation, and coercion. For example, that the residents had a deep sense of fear of negative repercussions (80%) and believed that those involved in more serious criminal activity had the ability to fulfil threats of violence (84%) and manipulate the criminal justice system (81%). Residents were also unlikely to either report crime (72%) or act as a witness (73%) (see Figure 3).



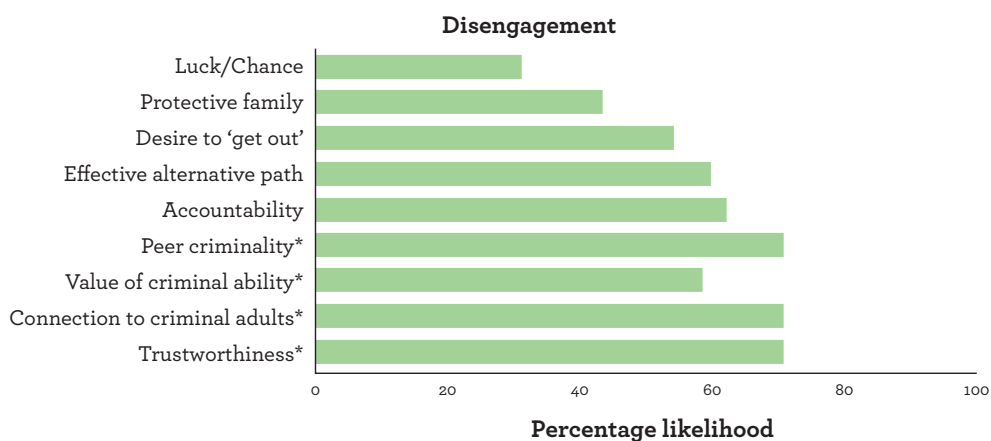
**Figure 3:** The percentage likelihood of consistency between the neighbourhoods described in Greentown and the neighbourhoods of the children in the current study.

2. The JLOs indicated that the adults who had the most influence, in terms of crime, over the children were **extremely likely** to teach the child practical skills on how to, commit crime (86%), deal manipulatively with the judicial system (91%) and those in authority (86%), and to supply the child with drugs/alcohol (83%). Conversely, the adults were **unlikely** to love or cherish the child (43% likely) (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4: The percentage likelihood of how an adult influences children in relation to committing serious and persistent crime.**

3. The JLOs' responses highlighted the difficulties surrounding the children's ability to disengage from crime. This was compounded by the child's relative usefulness to the adults who groomed them in crime. For example, how much the children were trusted by the adults (71%) and the strength of the children's bonds with the adults (71%). The children's social circumstances also mitigated against disengagement, for example, having friends who are mostly involved in crime was considered a significant barrier (72%). The JLOs felt that holding the children to account for their criminal activity (65%), providing an effective path away from crime (60%), and the children's own desire to disengage (54%) were the factors most likely to discourage them from offending (see Figure 5).



**Figure 5: The percentage likelihood of factors that can influence children's decision to stop offending.<sup>2</sup>**

Findings indicate the presence of the three key identifiers. This suggests that some children were engaged in crime networks.

<sup>2</sup> \* To facilitate interpretation these negative items were reversed scored, that is, the factors are **likely** to act as a barrier to disengagement from crime.

### 3. Is there evidence of hierarchical difference in such networks that are determined by membership of dominant families?

The Greentown study identified that the criminal network centred on a core dominant criminal family. Children who were blood relatives of this family (family members) enjoyed higher status within the network than associates that is, a hierarchy existed between the two groups of children. The children described as family members also appeared at least overtly to be relatively sheltered and not presenting obvious child welfare concerns. Children described as associates (not blood relatives) generally came from chaotic backgrounds.

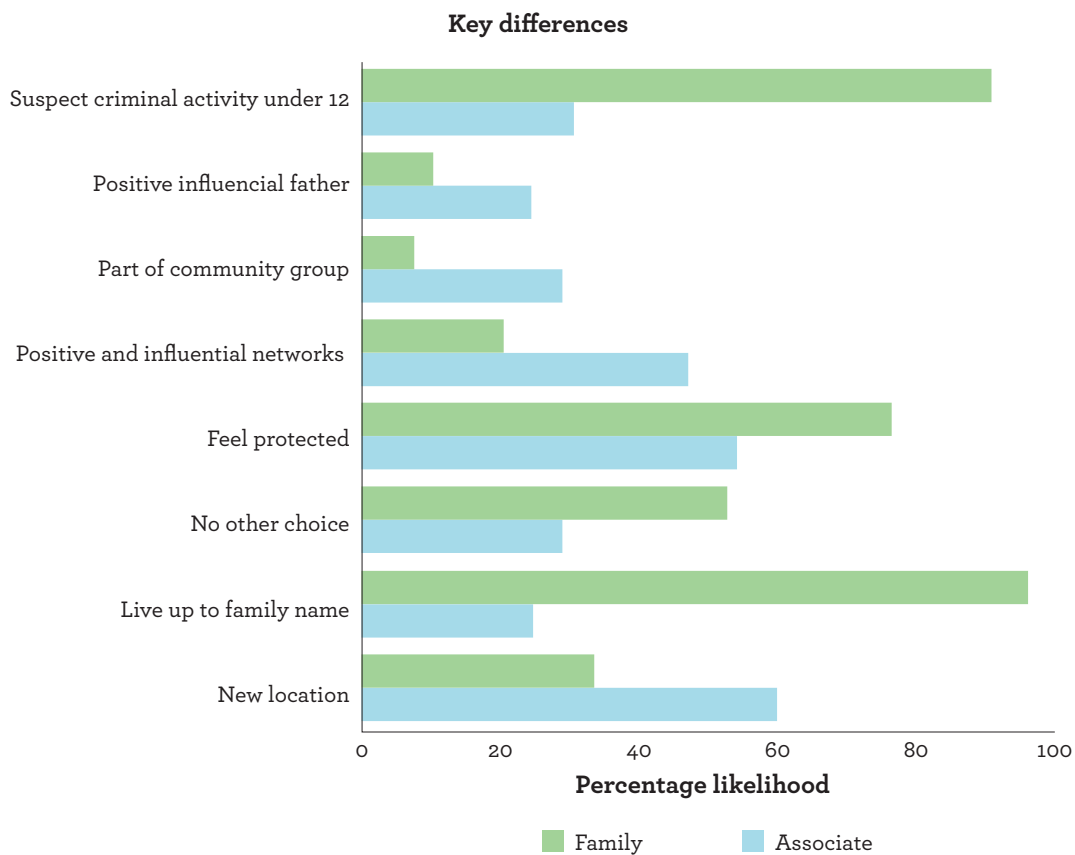
The findings suggest that the children involved in serious and persistent crime may be embedded within criminal networks. In this section we examine whether there is evidence of a difference in status between children who are family members and those who are associates.

#### Survey findings

Respondents indicated differences regarding the circumstances of children who were described as family members and those described as associates. However, there were inherent contradictions in the findings in relation to an elevated status by a virtue of a child relationship to a dominant crime family. In contrast to the original Greentown study findings, JLOs, in general, reported *increased risk and decreased protective factors* for the children who were family members when compared to children who were described as associates<sup>3</sup>. For example:

- JLOs indicated that children who are family members were much more likely to have been involved in crime before the age of 12 years (92%) when compared to associates (42%) (see Figure 6).
- Children involved in serious and persistent crime were portrayed as extremely likely to be vulnerable and to have highly complex needs. However, compounding this, children (in particular those described as family members) also were **unlikely** to be characterised as having factors which may be protective. For example, having a positively influential father (family member: 13%, associate: 28%), to be embedded within a positive network (family member: 20%, associate: 47%), or actively participate in a community group (for example, sports or arts) (family member: 8%, associate: 30%) (see Figure 6).
- However, findings also supported the original Greentown findings. For example, children who were described as family members were more likely than associates to engage in crime due to their desire to live up to the family's (criminal) reputation (family member: 97%, associate: 26%), to feel protected (family member: 77%, associate: 54%), or because they felt that they had no other choice (family member: 54%, associate: 30%). Moving to a new location was approximately twice as likely to be an incentive to reduce offending for associates when compared to children described as a family member (family member: 34%, associate: 60%) (see Figure 6).

<sup>3</sup> All percentages in this section relate specifically to the family member or associate group averages.



**Figure 6: Key differences between children who are family members and children who are associates.**

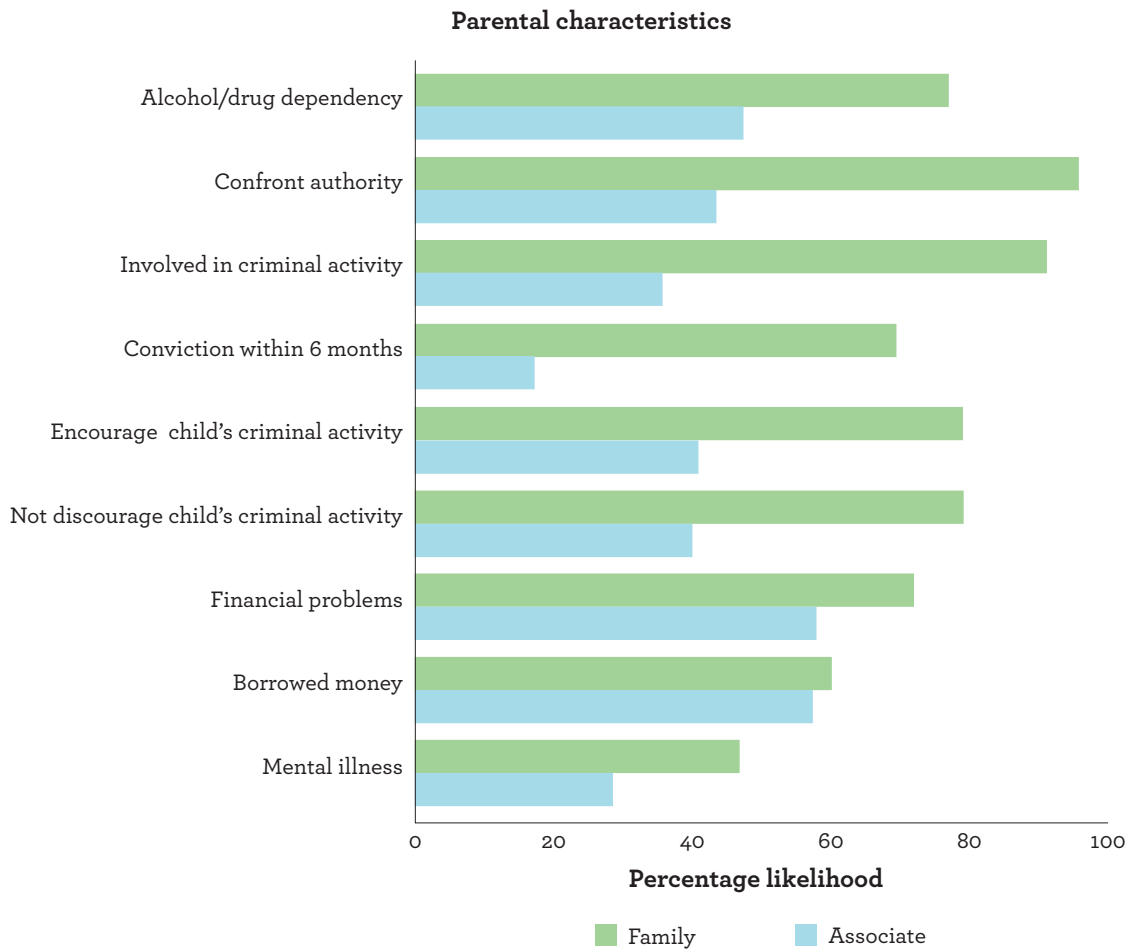
There were some similarities between the original study and survey findings in relation to the children's *home life*<sup>4</sup>. For example:

- Consistent with the studies definition of a child described as a family member, the parents of family members were extremely likely to have been involved in criminal activity (family member: 92%, associate: 37%) and to have received a criminal conviction within the preceding six months (family member: 69%, associate: 17%). They were also more likely to actively encourage their children to engage in criminal activity (family member: 80%, associate: 42%).

Nevertheless, there were some notable differences to the Greentown findings, for example:

- The current findings suggest that it was the parents of the children who were described as family members that were more likely to have alcohol and drug dependency (family member: 77%, associate: 46%) and be confrontational with authority (family member: 95%, associate: 44%) (see Figure 7).

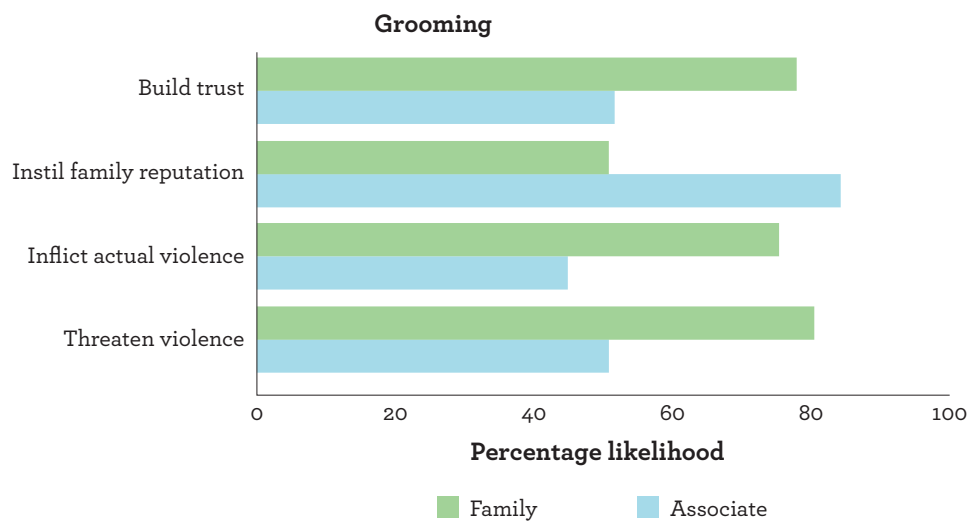
<sup>4</sup> The survey design also included questions relating to older siblings. However, the findings were similar to the findings for parents so to facilitate brevity they were not included in this interim report.



**Figure 7: The percentage likelihood of parental characteristics for family members and associates.**

JLO’s perceived contingencies for adult influence in the children’s life regarding criminality. For example:

- For children who were family members, influential adults were described as mainly male (87.5%), a family member (76%), and over 36 years old (55%). A majority (89%) described this adult as having a lot or more influence over children described as family members. This influential adult (predominantly their father) was more likely to instil within the child a sense of pride in the family’s reputation (family member: 86%, associate: 51%), to threaten violence (family member: 81%, associate: 51%), and use physical violence as a form of punishment on the child (family member: 75%, associate: 45%).
- Adults who groomed associates were more likely to attempt to build a trusting relationship with associates (family member: 53%, associate: 79%) (see Figure 8).



**Figure 8: Qualitative difference in the percentage likelihood of the type of influence adults have on children in terms of criminality between children who are family members and children who are associates.**

- Younger adults who were not blood relatives of the child (specifically young men who lived in the same locality) were depicted as having the most influence over the children described as associates. Further advanced analysis of the data suggests that it was these adults who were engaging in behaviours consistent with the concept of grooming the associate child for the purpose of crime. Such behaviour includes supplying the child with drugs/alcohol, inducing debt obligations, and teaching the child practical skills on how to commit crime.<sup>5</sup>

## 5. Interpreting the findings

### Is there evidence of children sharing the same general profile found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?

The findings indicate that from the JLOs' perspective, on average, children who are engaged in serious and persistent crime make up 1 in 8 of the children involved in offending, and that these children are predominantly boys aged 16/17 years. Importantly, this finding is not confined to large urban areas but resonates in localities across the country.

JLOs portrayed the children involved in serious and persistent crimes as presenting with multiple vulnerabilities and complexities. Children were attracted to crime due to lifestyle choices (access to drugs/alcohol and money), however, involvement in serious and persistent crime also fulfilled some of the children's basic psychosocial needs (for example, a sense of belonging, friendships, and safety). The survey findings therefore indicate that JLO's profile of children involved in serious and persistent crimes is consistent with the same general profile found in the original Greentown study.

<sup>5</sup> This advanced analysis forms the basis of a paper under preparation. Due to its relevance to this interim report an overview is provided as a full discussion is beyond the scope of this interim report. Please contact the research team for further information.

### Is there evidence of children's involvement in criminal networks found in the original Greentown study in localities across Ireland?

The survey findings suggest that a minority group of children may be groomed for crime by local adults. Importantly, these children were described as growing up in local environments comparable to the familial and neighbourhood profile of Greentown. This was consistent in rural as well as urban areas. Furthermore, the relationships forged with key adult actors makes it extremely difficult for the identified children to disengage from their offending behaviour. Indeed, only half of the JLO's indicated that a child engaged in serious and persistent crime was capable of reducing offending behaviour by their own choice. Taken together, these three indicators of engagement in criminal networks suggest that a significant proportion of the children involved in serious and persistent crime are involved with criminal networks. However, while evidence was sought to indicate whether or not children were involved in behaviours suggesting network activity, the size and nature of any such networks was beyond the scope of the national prevalence survey.

### Is there evidence of hierarchical differences in such networks that are determined by membership of dominant families?

Consistent with the original Greentown findings, the adults most likely to groom children within the family were older family members (typically fathers) while the adults most likely to groom associates were younger male adults from the same location. However evidence for the existence of hierarchies within the networks between children who are family members and associates is contradictory. There were some significant differences between both groups of children. Generally, children described as family members tended to fare worse in terms of vulnerabilities and complexities due to their parents' lifestyle, as well as other factors that inhibited their ability to disengage from crime. However survey findings do not permit a more nuanced examination of potential power differences between children who were family members and associates.

## 6. Policy considerations

The findings from the current survey suggest that the original findings **extend beyond Greentown**. Network involvement may resonate nationally for the minority of children involved in serious and persistent crime. Even though children involved in serious and persistent crime represent a small minority of children living in Ireland, their significantly disproportionate offending levels pose a considerable challenge.

However, combined findings from both the original Greentown report and the national prevalence survey plausibly suggest malign, intrusive and coercive adult influence in the lives of children caught up in the environments described. Therefore, intervention efforts aimed at individual children should be welfare-oriented and protective and not solely justice related.

As criminal networks are likely to have a regular throughput of vulnerable children, shortening the criminal activity of individual children is unlikely to disrupt the network's essential balance. Such situations can only be addressed by intervening in networks as a whole entity.



## 7. Study limitations

The survey rests on the expert knowledge of Juvenile Liaison Officers who are specifically skilled in engaging with and diverting children away from crime. Their engagement with these children provides JLOs with rare professional insights into the children's worlds. However, because the study is based solely on JLOs' perception of a specific child's situation and predicament it will inevitably be vulnerable to respondent subjective bias.

The design is cross-sectional in nature, a snap-shot in time. Stronger evidence may be gleaned from further study that tracks individual children over a longer time frame. Evidence would be further strengthened with the collation of data from various sources, other professionals involved with the identified children, and, more importantly, the child and their family themselves.

While the survey design identified prevalence and sufficiently demonstrated two of the three initial research questions, it lacked the ability to succinctly capture any hierarchical difference between children who are family members and associates within the network. This may mean that status difference between individuals described as associates and those described as family members are confined to Greentown. However, it should be noted that examination of the survey's qualitative data together with the JLOs' descriptions of the children, who are *family members*, parents and siblings, suggests that the respondents may have interpreted a dominant crime family as a family that is predominately involved in crime as opposed to a powerful family at the core of a criminal network.

## Appendix

### Methodology

In this section we overview the methodology used to ensure the rigour and robustness of the findings. We outline the design, sampling rationale, survey completion, and analysis of the data.

#### Survey design

- The survey design was based on the original Greentown study (2015) findings.
- The findings from the original Greentown study were systematically coded and a flowchart was developed to reflect both groups (family members and associates) of children’s pathways through the Greentown criminal network (see Figure 9).
- Survey questions that were grounded in the original Greentown findings were then arranged in relevant categories as follows:
  - » Risk and protective factors
  - » The children’s attraction to engage in serious and persistent crime
  - » Grooming for criminal activity by adults
  - » The children’s neighbourhoods
  - » Children’s ability to disengage from offending

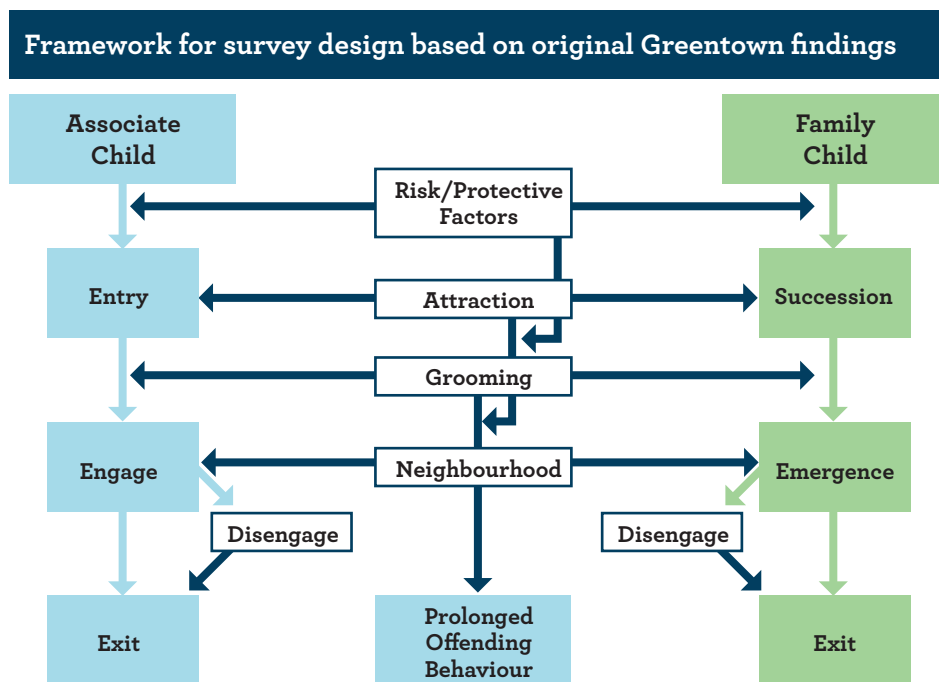


Figure 9: Flowchart of the original Greentown findings as they related to survey design.

### Sampling rationale

- The survey was distributed online via Qualtrics software to 107 JLOs.<sup>6</sup>
- JLOs were considered an appropriate group from which to investigate the generalisability of the Greentown findings. JLOs are stationed throughout Ireland and support the operation of the Diversion office who review the vast majority of youth justice cases. They therefore have in-depth and specialist knowledge of children involved in offending behaviour in their local area.

### Survey completion

- JLOs who indicated that they were aware of children involved in more serious offending<sup>7</sup> within their own local area progressed with the survey and answered separate but identical blocks of questions relating to both children described as family members and associates.
- JLOs responded on a Likert scale of 1: extremely unlikely, to 6: extremely likely to each question, all of which specifically related to the Greentown finding.
- JLOs were asked to focus on a child within their area who best represents a child that fits the description of a family member and associate when responding to the two separate blocks of questions.
- JLOs were also requested to focus on an adult who was most influential to that child regarding the child's criminal activity when responding to questions about grooming.

### Data analysis

- Demographics: 89% of JLOs completed the survey; they represented every region in Ireland (see Figure 10). Respondents were highly experienced Gardaí with 82% having 16 or more years' service with An Garda Síochána. JLOs took considered attention when responding to the survey with an average completion time of 35 minutes.
- The data was analysed using IBM SPSS Statistical software, version 22. Scores were dichotomised; that is, responses 1 to 3 were coded as unlikely, responses 4 to 6 were coded as likely.
- For each question, separate averages of percentage likelihood were calculated for both groups of children (family and associates). Where values for both groups were similar, an average across both groups was calculated and presented (Figures 1 to 5). However, where there were substantial differences, the individual averages for both groups were presented (Figures 6 to 8).

For further information on the methodology please contact the research team.

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<sup>6</sup> Full list of JLOs received from the Garda Analysis Unit (March 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Reflecting the description of the children in the original Greentown study.

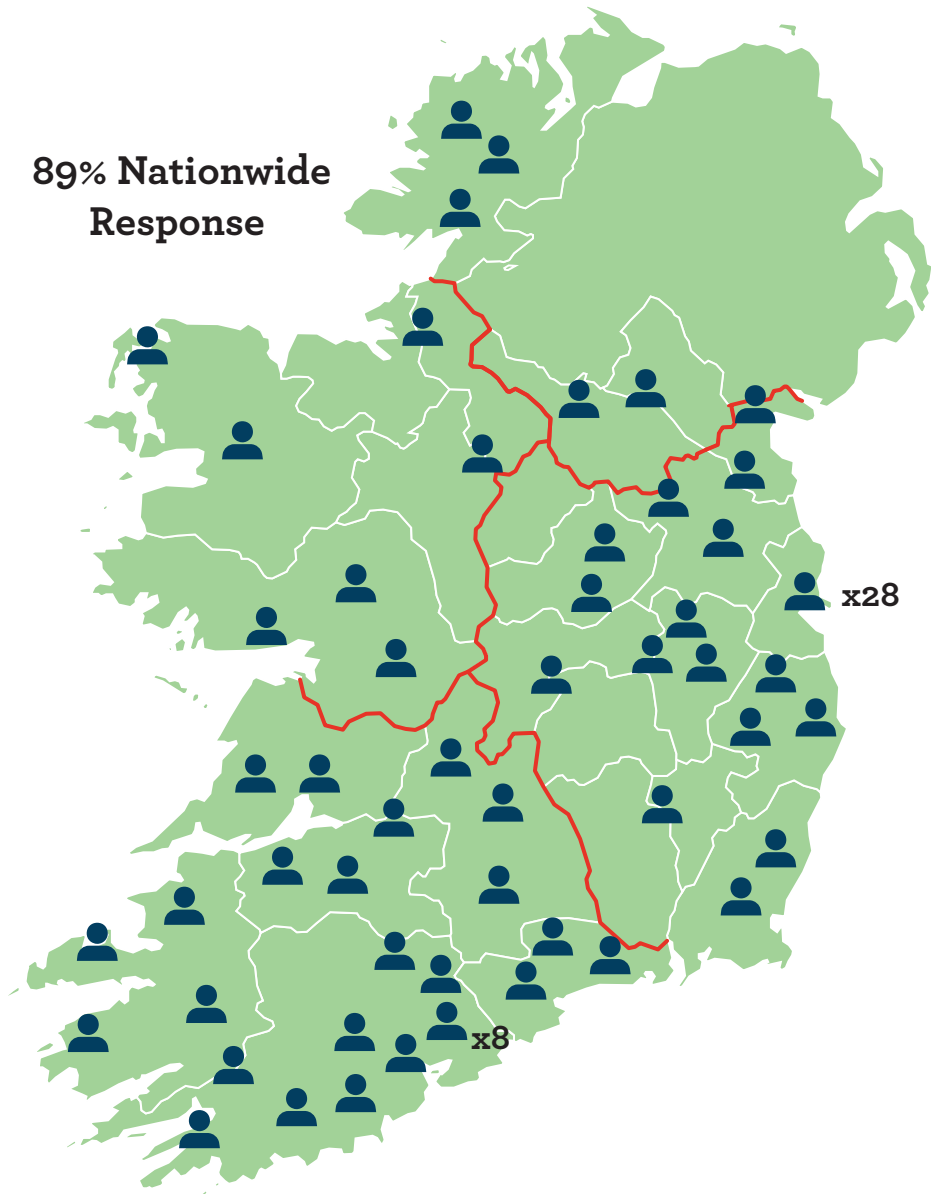
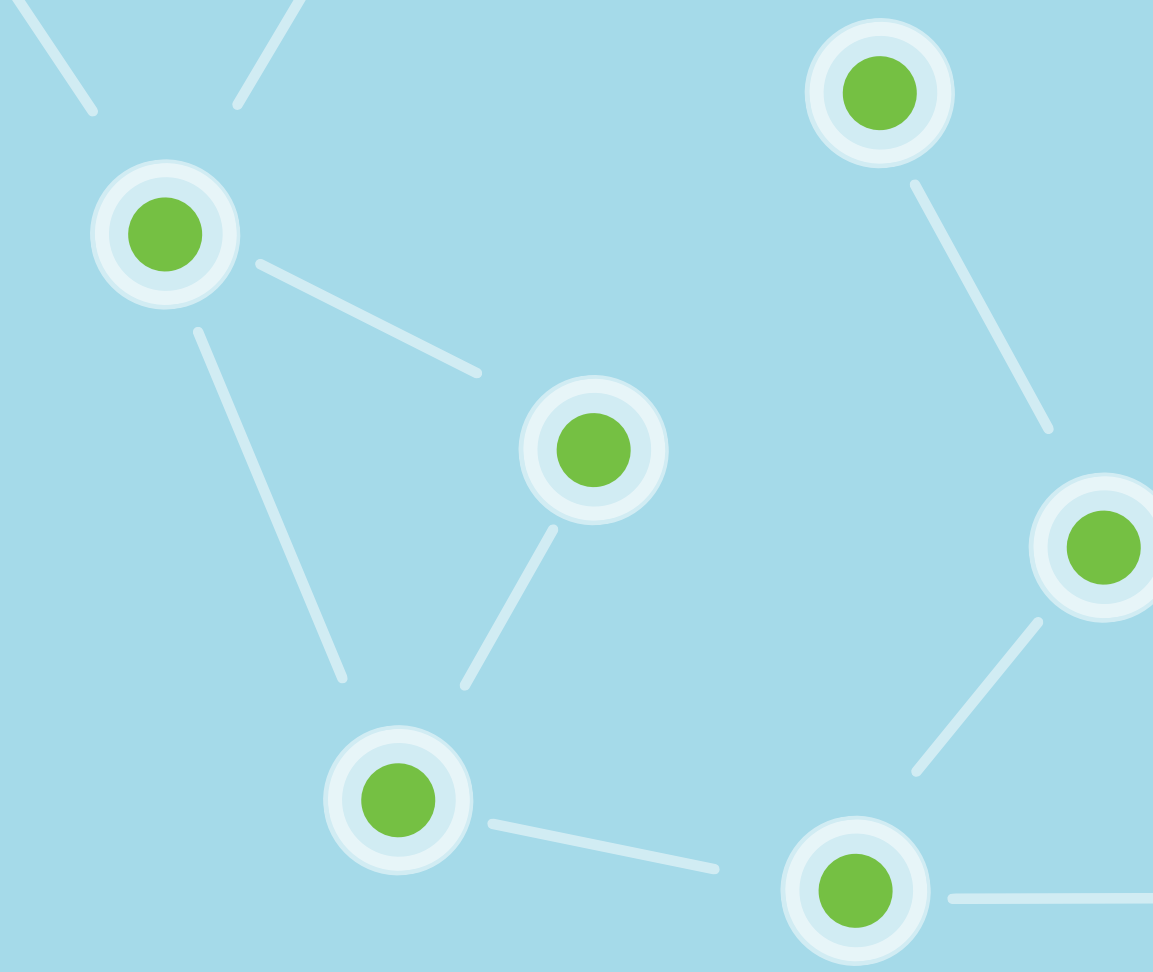
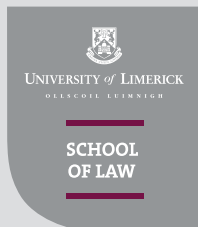


Figure 10: The national distribution of the 93 respondents.









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