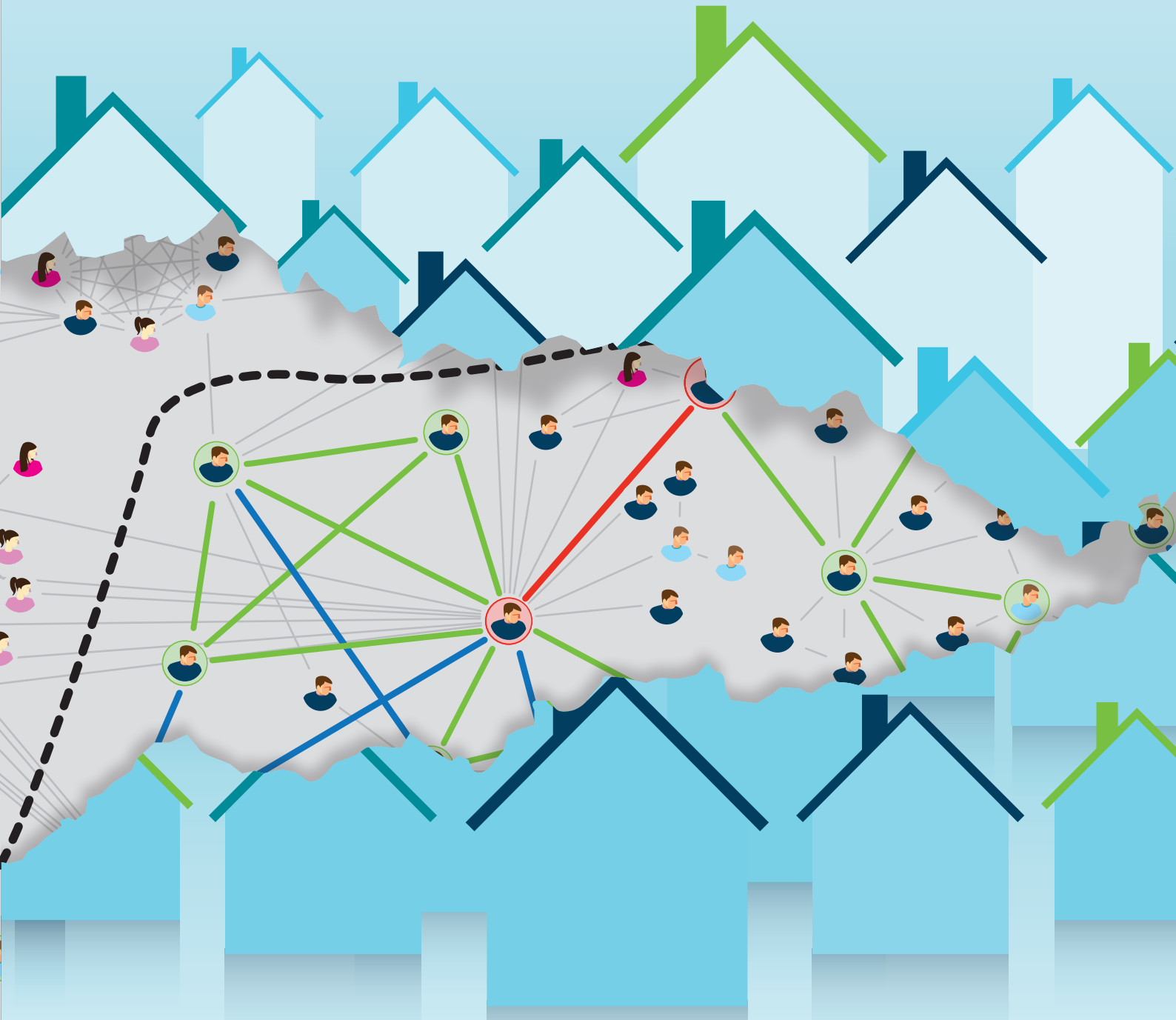
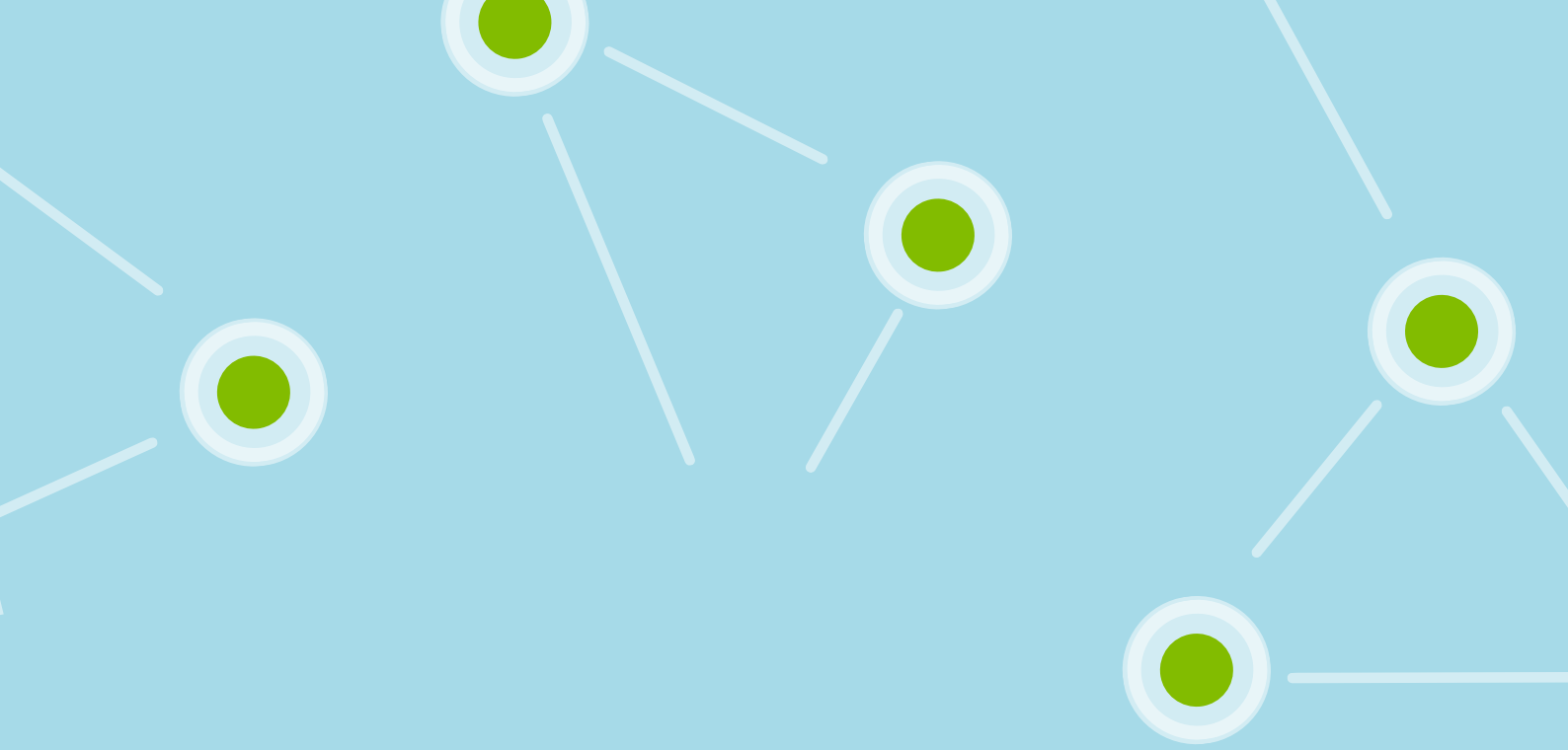


# Lifting the Lid on Greentown



Why we should be concerned about the influence criminal networks have on children's offending behaviour in Ireland

## Key Findings



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## What was the study's purpose?

Statistical data in Ireland indicate that similar to other comparable jurisdictions the majority of children in Ireland who have offended grow out of crime by the time they reach their late teens or early twenties. Now, significant data support what has been called this age/crime *curve*. Combined with improved knowledge about which types of programmes work best and in what circumstances (where intervention is required) this permits increasing confidence about managing normal patterns of youth crime.

However, mainstream sources of evidence often fail to account for the smaller numbers of children who persist in their offending, or are involved otherwise in atypical patterns of offending behaviour. Explanations of serious and persistent criminal behaviour by children have received far less scholarly attention; certainly in Ireland.

Prompted by multiple anecdotal accounts of children engaged in patterns of serious offending, coupled with particular concerns about children's involvement in adult crime networks, the Greentown study was commissioned to understand better the contexts of this relatively small number of children.

The study focused on an actual crime network operating in Greentown in 2010–2011. *Greentown* is a pseudonym for a Garda Sub-District based outside Dublin in Ireland. The Sub-District is a mixed urban and rural population. Greentown was selected because of comparatively high levels of burglary and drugs for sale and supply offences committed by minors during the examination period.

## What are the key findings?

- a. The study provides evidence supporting **the existence of a criminal network in Greentown** and that the network involved both adults and children in collaborative offending relationships. This finding supports the hypothesis that children's involvement in offences such as burglary and drugs for sale and supply can be predictive of network activity. In itself this finding is perhaps not surprising. It is logical that children could only realistically perform 'retail-end' functions in a drugs supply system and, similarly, would require assistance with disposing of stolen goods from the proceeds of burglary. Nonetheless, the study suggests that children's involvement in these types of criminal behaviour should alert authorities that the children may need protection from quite powerful influences.
- b. The study also provides evidence that **the Greentown network was hierarchical in nature** and that membership of a key family and kinship grouping was linked with higher status. The family and kinship grouping in question had been established in the Greentown area for a long time (certainly for more than 10 years) and was thus integrally stitched into the

community fabric. The study identifies clear superior and subordinate classes in the Greentown network. Elevated privilege (although not exclusively) was conferred on those who were part of a core family and kinship group where ‘trust’ was the key governance mechanism. Those who are referred to as ‘associates’ because of their effective ‘contractor’ status, (that is, *not* part of the core family and kinship group), were largely subordinate. These individuals were governed by other mechanisms (referred to in point c) below). As in the governance of any contract, these mechanisms were intended to iron out opportunistic behaviour by ‘associates’.

There appeared to be significantly different life experiences for children from the core family and kinship group, who appeared to be reasonably well cared for, and children from ‘associate’ families, who appeared by and large to have experienced very chaotic and dysfunctional circumstances including chronic drugs and alcohol use by parents, mental health problems and generally poor guardianship. Indeed, there was evidence to suggest that families with such vulnerabilities were actively targeted by the core family leading the network. In addition, in many cases engagement with younger children by the core family was a succession of client-patron relationships with older siblings (usually brothers) that had been in place for a number of years.

To re-emphasise, the criminal network in Greentown was not a transient phenomenon; it is what has been referred to as a *harm in equilibrium*, resistant and absorbent of short-term strategies designed to disrupt or otherwise counter its dominance.

- c. The hierarchical structure in Greentown was supported by **powerful processes and a sympathetic embedded culture**. The economics literature on networks clearly identifies their capabilities to set expectations and delineate opportunities for individuals who are engaged in them. From a Greentown network perspective, as has been found elsewhere, ‘trust’ trumps ‘contract’ in terms of efficient implementation of network activities and management of risks associated with criminal activity. However, governance by trust was generally restricted to family and kinship members. Governance by overt surveillance, but also subtler influences of attraction, compulsion and the cultivation of a compliant culture by the core family led to self-managed behaviour by associates and by other community residents who were not engaged. Beliefs about the core family’s dominance and surveillance capabilities were underpinned by stories and myths about how errant associates and neighbourhood residents had been dealt with in the past. Not *all* the stories were myths and there were accounts of punishment being meted out by middle-ranking associates. The culture of community deference also seemed to be underpinned by many Greentown residents’ perception of the core family’s successful gaming of the criminal justice system.

- d. **Network power and influence was not only mediated by geography but also by the degree of obligation and intensity of individual *associate/client* relationships with network patrons.** The network appeared to be physically located in a small number of neighbourhoods in Greentown. However, it seems that relationships based on obligations relating to debt or to previous criminal collaboration offered as much (or possibly more in some circumstances) governance leverage as geographical proximity by the core family over associates. This may seem an obvious point. However, this finding counters an intuitive expectation that *any* family in the immediate proximity (walking distance) of the core family's homes would be to some degree compromised, i.e. influence-by-location only. Contrary to this logic, the evidence in the Greentown study highlighted defiant 'stoics' – families who, irrespective of their physical proximity, appeared to withstand the influence of the core family and provide adequate protection for their children. This is not to say that these families were unaffected. Their quality of life was significantly and negatively affected by a necessary but over-protective siege lifestyle. It was also observed that very little crime was reported from the neighbourhood where the core criminal family lived; this was despite overt signs of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage indicating that stoic families were also 'docile', simply keeping their eyes down and themselves to themselves. Some network associates outside the immediate geographical proximity of the core family and based in locations across the Greentown Garda Sub-District were truly embedded. The depth of embeddedness relates to the degree of obligation and was significantly reinforced by what has been called 'redundancy', a closed network that tends to look inward at a limited number of similarly inward-looking members. Such redundancy can amplify the usual effects of peer (and adult network member) influence. This means that 'relationally' the Greentown network was a small place offering little or no anonymity and severely limited routes out. Options for 'knifing off' from your criminal past and creating a new redemptive narrative were scarce, especially for those most embedded. In the view of respondents there were few State-supported incentives and protections for the pursuit of such pro-social strategies if individuals caught in the network's influence did want to change.
- e. It is submitted that these four findings provide plausible evidence to suggest that **network influences in Greentown acted to encourage and compel certain young children into abnormal patterns of criminal behaviour.** This finding is of key significance because (if only for this case study) it makes the case for including network presence as an additional and discrete factor in the list of possible risks to be considered in terms of programme design for children involved in certain types of crime. Although the numbers are very small, (n=8 in the main network under scrutiny) children involved in the network were detected for a level of serious crime at a rate five times higher than the equivalent national average for burglary. However, causality evades this study because it is impossible to attribute impact to a network effect without a comparison group of children in Greentown who were not engaged.

## What are the policy considerations?

Even though the children involved in the Greentown network represent a small minority of all children in the Greentown area, their activities from a criminal justice system perspective pose a considerable challenge. This small population of children in Greentown was, during 2010–2011, responsible for a significant level of serious crime, five times higher than equivalent national averages for burglary. More generally, given clear associations with repeat offending, a referral of a child to the Diversion Programme for burglary should presume enhanced concern requiring further examination of individual circumstances. Nevertheless, this research suggests that burglary predicts possible adult influence and that any such efforts should be welfare oriented and protective as opposed to justice related and punitive.

The criminal justice system appears to have been routinely gamed by certain actors in the Greentown network. The study has suggested that reasonable expectations regarding individuals following through on complaints to An Garda Síochána or providing witness testimony are unlikely to be realised for clients of the Greentown network and those living in close proximity to its leading actors. The organic governance mechanisms in place in the Greentown network are seemingly far more influential than any formal agency or court sanction in directing behaviour and retaining control of associates. The suggestion that adults in the network appear to actively recruit and groom certain children towards criminal activity, coupled with the absence of nurturing and protection from their own families, challenges authorities to consider welfare interventions as the primary concern for children in such cases.

The state of *equilibrium* suggested by the study, and sustained by the family presence in Greentown, infers that short-term law enforcement (or other) campaigns will do little to disrupt the network's essential *balance*. Shortening the individual careers of youth offenders is of little value if the network acts to generate a constant throughput of young people. Such situations can only be effectively addressed through sustained long-term planning and intervention. A long-term view may also permit reimagining of the relationship between the State and an individual in terms of rewarding *and protecting* those who are prepared to 'knife off' from their offending past.

It is recommended that the study be repeated in further sites, including Dublin, to test the validity of the Greentown findings. In parallel, an action research project may be a useful and prudent means to process the findings of Greentown in the context of designing and trialling new forms of response and intervention.

## What is the benefit of this study?

The key outcome of this study has been to highlight an area of risk for children which has, to date, been given relatively little attention, certainly in the Irish literature. The evidence that the Greentown criminal network (2010–2011) functioned as a factor *additional* to the usual inventory of risks associated with youthful offending presents significant revisions when considered against a largely (and appropriately) optimistic assessment about the management of youth crime. These findings will be of value in terms of wider deliberation relating to

children involved in criminal networks and/or more general treatments of high-crime neighbourhoods in Ireland. Future research in this area would obviously benefit from multiple viewpoints, including those of children, network participants and, in the experience of Greentown, better insights into the coping strategies of those families identified as *stoics*. However, the ethical and logistical challenges associated with such engagements should not be underestimated.

### How was the study undertaken?

The Greentown methodology leverages the utility of statistical data, social network analysis and grounded theory. ‘*Twinsight*’, a technique developed for this study, permitted intimate examination of the Greentown network and disclosed complex relationships while safeguarding ethical imperatives to protect subject anonymity. The methodology is divided into seven interdependent steps. All data relate to the period 2010–2011 inclusive.

#### 1 Identification of offence categories to indicate network activity in Ireland

Informed by the extant literature, burglary and drugs for sale and supply were selected as offence categories likely to predict children’s involvement in a criminal network.

#### 2 Ranking of Garda Sub-Districts based on burglary and drugs for sale and supply offences committed by children

A national ratings table was constructed identifying Garda Sub-Districts) where children were detected for burglary or drugs for sale and supply offences (2010–2011). Table 1 is a truncated version showing the first 20 from a master list of 326.

**Table 1: Ranking of all Garda Sub-Districts (2010–2011) based on frequency of detections for drugs for sale and supply, burglary, and robbery offences by minors**

		Offences 2010 and 2011 offender aged 17 or less				Number of unique offenders 2010 and 2011			
Rank	Location	01 Drugs for sale or supply	02 Burglaries	03 Robberies	Total	01 Drugs for sale or supply	02 Burglaries	03 Robberies	Total
1	Bluetown	28	4	2	34	20	4	2	26
2	Redtown	23	61	27	111	15	33	21	69
3	Yellowtown	21	12	13	46	15	7	4	26
4	Orangetown	18	10	13	41	14	1	8	23
5	Whitetown	17	7	16	40	5	2	13	20
6	Blacktown	16	23	13	52	12	8	5	25
7	Greytown	13	23	11	47	11	12	4	27
8	Browntown	12	5	5	22	9	3	3	15
9	Purpletown	12	3	31	46	6	1	19	26
10	Pinktown	11	15	15	41	6	6	3	15
11	Greentown	10	17	23	50	8	13	11	32

*continued*



		Offences 2010 and 2011 offender aged 17 or less				Number of unique offenders 2010 and 2011			
Rank	Location	01 Drugs for sale or supply	02 Burglaries	03 Robberies	Total	01 Drugs for sale or supply	02 Burglaries	03 Robberies	Total
12	Area 12	9	31	23	63	9	19	14	42
13	Area 13	9	6	4	19	2	4	4	10
14	Area 14	6	40	41	87	6	13	21	40
15	Area 15	6	5	2	13	6	5	2	13
16	Area 16	5	13	7	25	5	7	7	19
17	Area 17	5	3	13	21	5	1	7	13
18	Area 18	5	8	4	17	5	4	3	12
19	Area 19	5	2	1	8	5	1	1	7
20	Area 20	5	12	0	17	4	9	0	13

Source: Central Statistics Office 2013

### 3 Greentown as a case study location

As Table 1 indicates, Greentown ranked high in terms of children involved in burglary and drugs for sale and supply. Additionally, as Greentown was a provincial location outside Dublin, it was more likely that identification of children involved in serious offending would be more observable due to its smaller, more discrete population.

### 4 Constructing the Greentown network map

The focal point of the study is the Greentown criminal network. The network is an evidence-based illustration produced specifically for this study by An Garda Síochána Analysis Service using PULSE data.

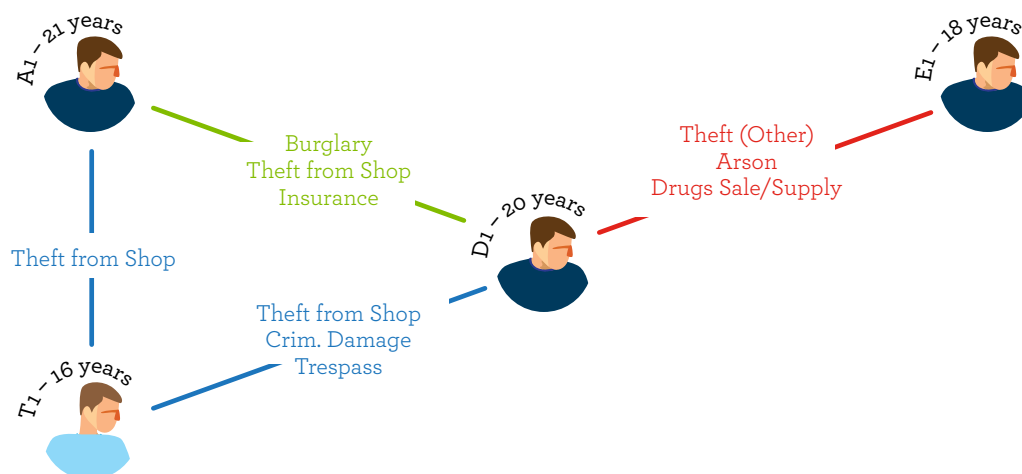


Figure 1: Constructing the Greentown network

The network was prepared by Garda analysts at Garda Headquarters in Dublin without input by the researcher or local Garda from Greentown. The network was constructed by linking individuals through common incidents involving both minors and adults (see Figure 1). All individuals had an address in the Greentown Sub-District during 2010–2011 and all offences occurred within the Greentown Sub-District. A **green link** indicates that one or more burglary offences link the respective individuals. A **red link** indicates that one or more drugs for sale/supply offences link the respective individuals. A **blue link** indicates other relevant crime types which link individuals.<sup>1</sup> Each network member was labelled with a unique identifier which took the form of a capitalised letter followed by a numeral (e.g. A1, B1, C1), a colour denoting gender, and the individual's actual age in years.

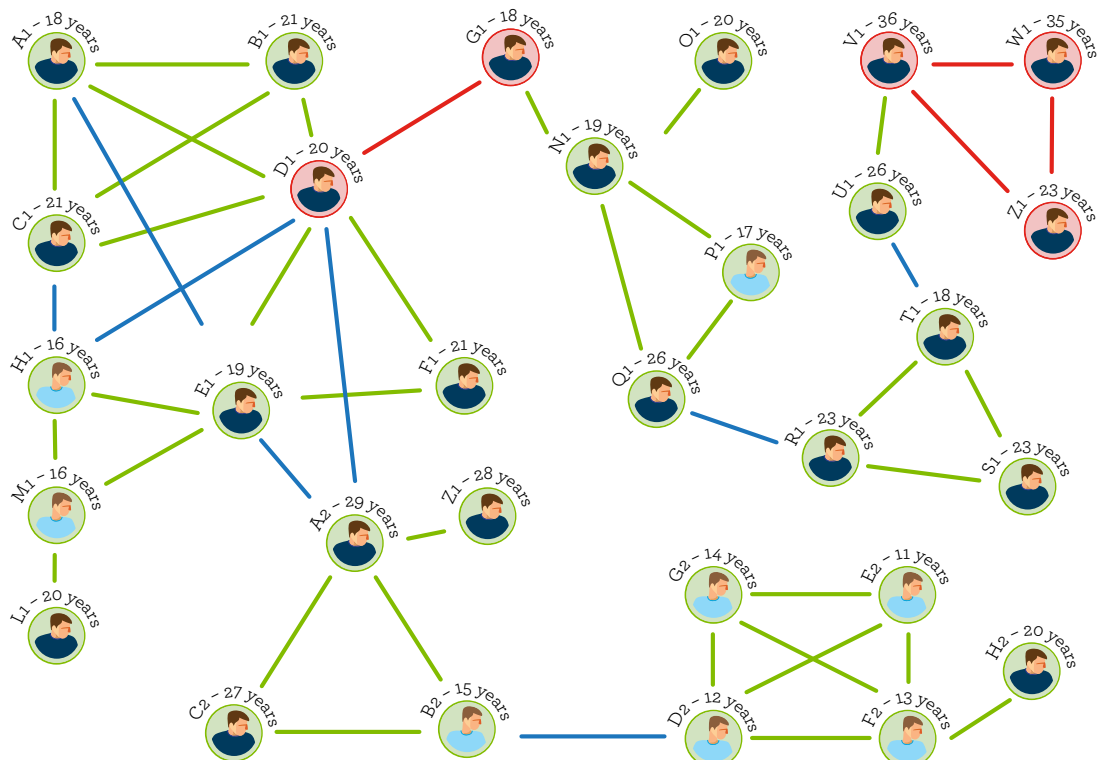
Once constructed, the network map formed the basis of examination in individual interviews with 16 members of An Garda Síochána based locally in Greentown.

#### Greentown Sub-District linked suspect offenders 2010–2011:

- Only offenders with one or more Burglary or Sale of Drugs offences included.
- A link between two people signifies they were involved in an offence together.
- Networks are based on groups of offenders with common links.

— common Burglary offence    — common Drugs Sale offence    — link based on any other offence type

#### Network 1



**Figure 2: Greentown network with identifier codes for use in semi-structured interviews**

<sup>1</sup> Garda analysts used their discretion with **blue links** where they believed that an offending link other than burglary or drugs for sale and supply would add to the understanding of the illustration. Thicker lines linking respective individuals indicated a greater number of detections connecting them.

The Greentown network involved 31 individuals (all male) with age ranges from 11 to 36 years. The individuals were linked through 48 separate incidents: nine burglaries, two aggravated burglaries, five theft/other, five trespass, four arsons, four handling stolen property, three assaults causing harm, two drugs for sale/supply, and 14 other offences.

### 5 Examining the Greentown network map – Twinsight

The Greentown network was examined in individual semi-structured interviews with 16 locally based members of An Garda Síochána. An innovative protocol called *Twinsight* developed specifically for this study was employed to undertake the examination. *Twinsight* utilised ‘twin’, or near-identical versions of the network map. The first version of the network identified each of the 31 individuals with a unique reference. In this version there was no personal information that could identify the individual; only details of age and gender were provided. This version was used as the key reference map by the researcher. The second version of the network map contained confidential information, adding the individual’s name to the unique reference number. This version was issued by Garda analysts directly to Garda officers. It was only ever seen by Garda members or analysts. It was concealed securely and was used by Garda respondents in the semi-structured interviews to link unique code identifiers referred to by the researcher with real cases.

**During interviews, the researcher used only the anonymised version. The respondents used only the confidential version, which could not be seen by the researcher. Both versions were used in tandem, the anonymised version by the researcher and the confidential version by the Garda respondents. The use of anonymous but unique identifier codes permitted precise and simultaneous identification of individuals (*Twinsight*) for discussion, while observing ethical requirements to use only anonymised data.**

### 6 Examining the Greentown network map

Another key feature of the examination of the network was that navigation of the network was respondent led, meaning that Garda respondents selected individuals in the network that they wished to discuss. Combined with the *Twinsight* protocol this respondent-led approach helped to disclose features such as hierarchies within the network. For example, two straightforward exercises involved simply counting references from transcripts to ‘a’ the first few individuals that respondents referred to in interview (in the study called ‘First sweep’), and ‘b’ the total number of ‘mentions’ of individuals made by all respondents over the full period of interview. These exercises offered an indicative preview of individual importance based on the weight given to each network actor by repeated reference.

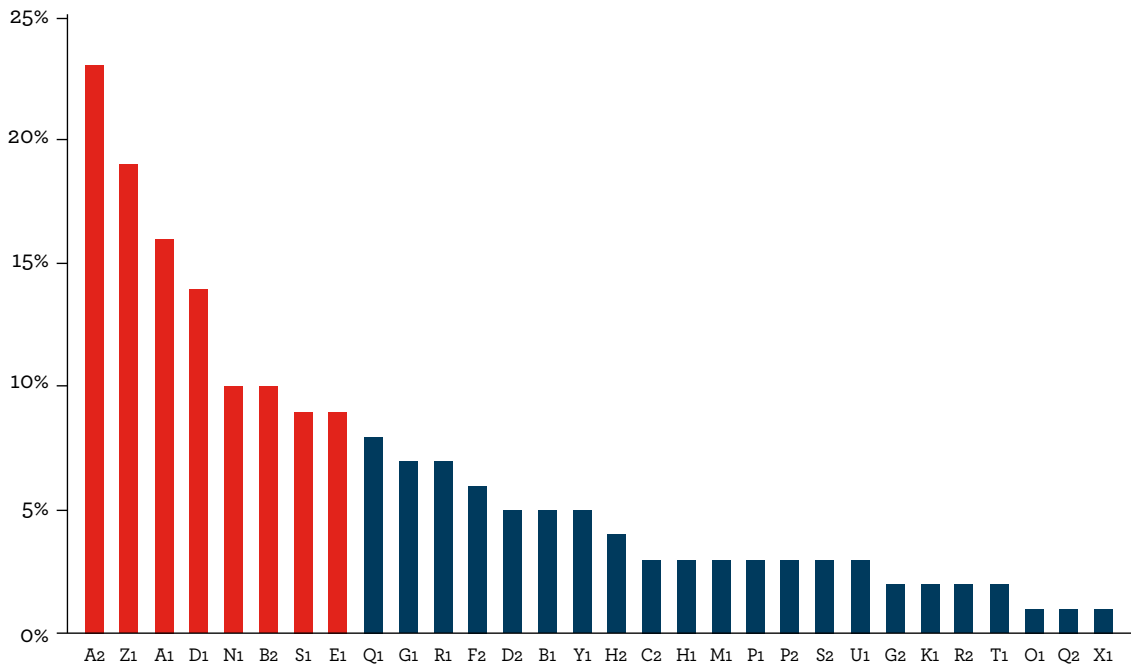


Figure 3: First sweep of cases

Eight individuals from a total of 31 dominated the share of references when counted for both ‘First Sweep of cases’ (Figure 3) and ‘Total frequencies of mention’ (Figure 4).

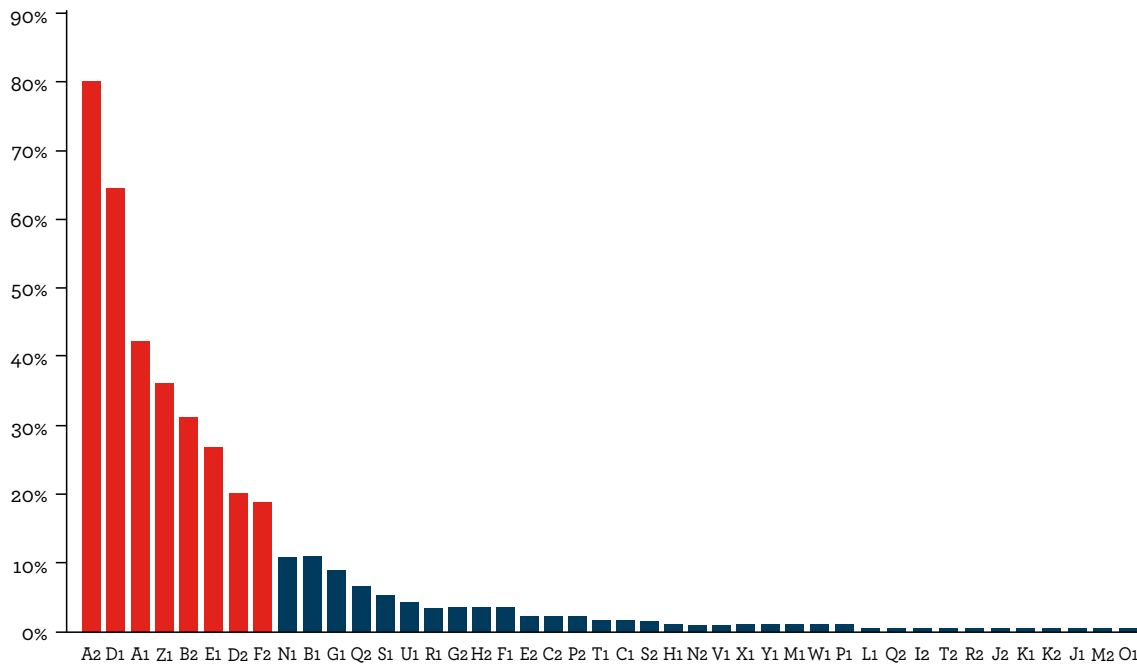
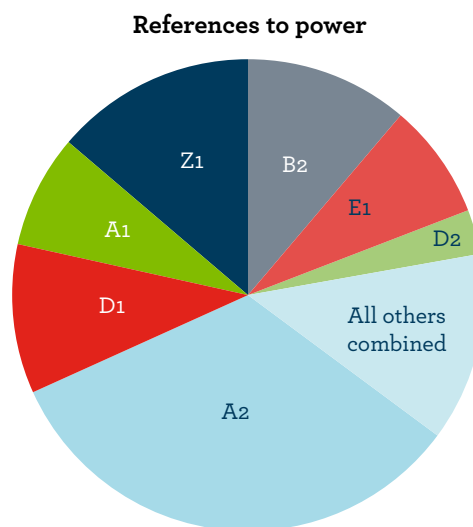


Figure 4: Total ‘frequencies of mention’ of individual network participants by breadth of interviews

Unique identifying codes for each individual in the Greentown network also permitted the emergence of patterns and themes from interview data. Figure 5 identifies respondent references to power and associations with network participants. This exercise indicates clearly that the same eight individuals who were referred to most frequently in interviews (Figure 3 and Figure 4) also shared disproportionate weight in terms of references to ‘power’. Similar patterns emerged in the findings, with respondent references to how *leadership* and *influence* were associated with individual network members.



**Figure 5: Referencing ‘power’ to network participants**

## 7 Coding and analysis of data

The approach to coding and data analysis was significantly informed by grounded theory.<sup>2</sup> In the Greentown study this involved a nine-stage coding, sorting and analysis process designed to control excessive interpretation by the researcher. This approach makes clear incremental links specifying the progression from raw data to findings. Demonstrating a clear audit trail, where each stage of the process can be available for scrutiny, is a necessity in undertaking high-value qualitative research.

The network tool and its associated procedures offer possible wider utility for academic/law enforcement collaboration in the study of criminal networks.

- The application of the network tool to the phenomenon of criminal network provides an evidence-based means to examine individual activities and narratives; and complex links between individuals and groups of individuals.
- Such utility offers a better practical sense of the natural size and state of the problem in a particular context and the effort required in order to reduce a network’s effect.

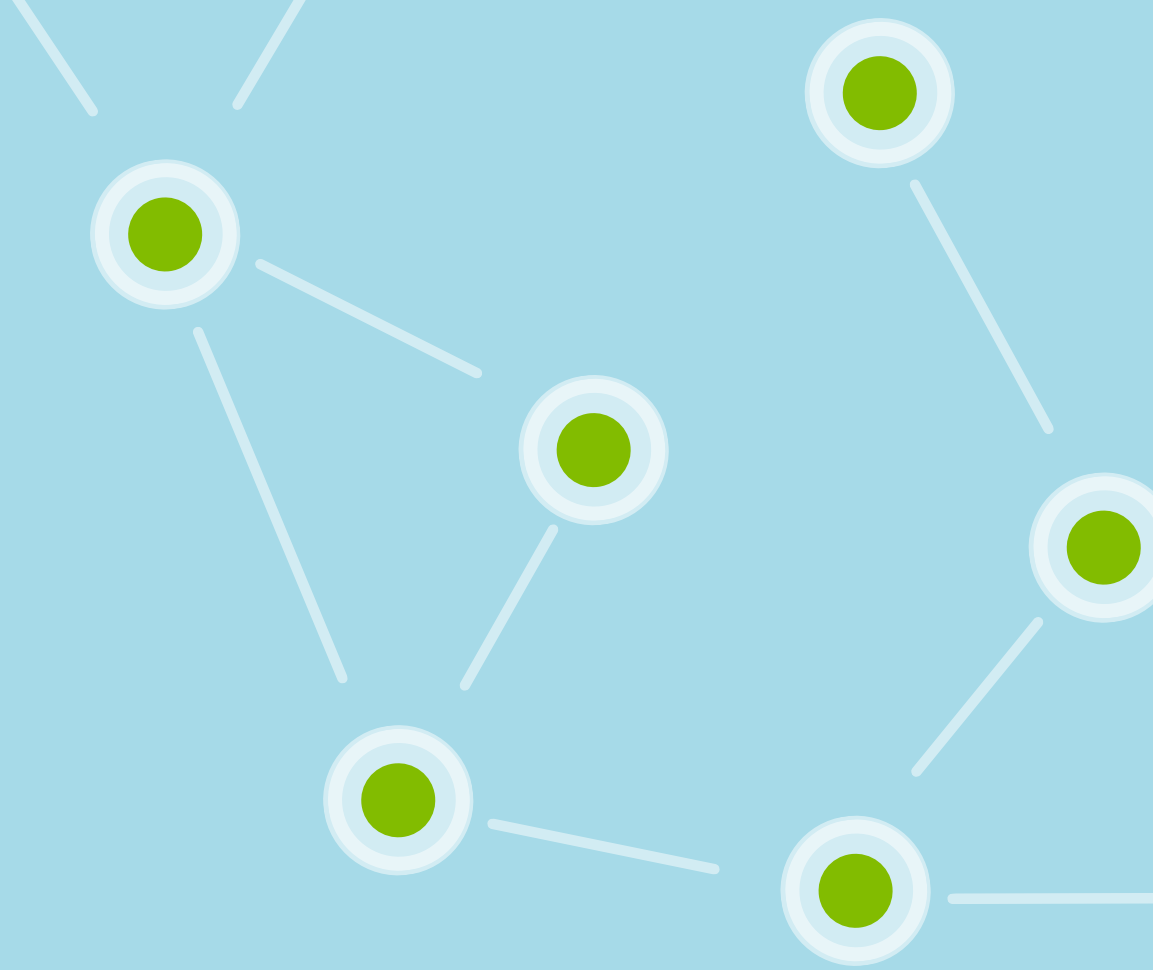
<sup>2</sup> Grounded theory, deriving from the seminal work of Bernard Glaser and Anselm Strauss, provides ‘a systematic method of analysing and collecting data to develop middle-range theories’ (Charmaz, 2012, p.1) and is particularly apposite for exploration of phenomenon and contexts which present with low paradigm (Thomas *et al*, 2011, p. 1075) levels of pre-existing knowledge.

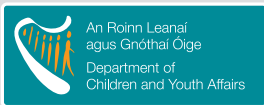
- In terms of law enforcement, the approach may highlight opportunities to identify points of vulnerability and employ *saboteur* tactics to reduce a network's influence.
- For academics, *Twinsight* offers a robust protocol for engaging statutory authorities to undertake sensitive areas of study.

The *Twinsight* technique provides a novel 'non-invasive' means for examining sensitive issues and material in an in-depth but ethically compliant manner to produce authentic, detailed narratives about relationships and transactions between individuals and groups of individuals in networks. This in turn could help with new theory development from detailed empirical examination. However, in order to protect its integrity as a potentially powerful data collection technique for research into sensitive areas, and collaborations between academics and law enforcement personnel, the clear rules devised for this study, in particular relating to the strict separation of anonymised and live data and the protection of respondents' identities, must be observed in any future usage of *Twinsight*.

### What are the limitations?

Notwithstanding the strengths of the methodological approach and controls on researcher bias, there are a number of points that must be acknowledged. First, the network map was prepared by Garda analysts based on PULSE data. However, these data were statistically manipulated to meet prescribed parameters (burglary and drugs for sale and supply offences) which contrived to *cluster* the individuals together on the map. Therefore, the network map itself is an *artificial* construct, although based on evidence derived from records of actual activity. Second, prescriptions of 'time' (2010-2011) and 'offence type' (burglary and drugs for sale and supply) determined who, from the total population in Greentown, did and did not appear in the network map. Third, the key data source that the network is built upon, PULSE, has its own limitations and weaknesses. The PULSE data used to build the network relied on detections, and are obviously susceptible to the normal vulnerabilities associated with data inputted by human actors. During interviews with Garda respondents it became clear that relying on detection data alone actually had the potential to mislead if not treated cautiously, highlighting the importance of local intelligence. Fourth, and perhaps most significantly, while three data sources were utilised for the study – PULSE data, the network map, and individual semi-structured interviews – it could be argued that they are, in fact, just three different *iterations* sourced from the same data pool, at best offering only 'internal' triangulation.





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