Feeling Safe in Our Community

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**Research commissioned by
Limerick Regeneration Agencies & the
Faculty of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, University
of Limerick.**

October 2011.

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Executive summary

Research context

As modern cities have developed and evolved real concerns have been generated among city dwellers about (in)security; concerns which have often become focused on public spaces, or particular "dangerous neighbourhoods" within the city environs (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2736). Much research shows that residents perceptions / fear of crime and feeling unsafe is not always related to actual levels of crime in their locality. People may perceive that they are unsafe as a consequence of how they "label their mixed experience of unsafety, insecurity and uncertainty" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2738). Indeed, such perceptions (peoples subjective fear of crime) can be even more pronounced in large housing estates where many inhabitants themselves label their estate as unsafe" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2738-2739). Brunton-Smith & Jackson's (2011) findings from work undertaken in England and Wales demonstrates that people draw on more than their experience of life in the neighbourhood when evaluating their personal risk of crime. Elevated levels of fear of being a victim of crime were found in women and younger residents, those who had previously been a victim of crime, those with lower educational credentials, and those who read tabloid newspapers.

Research on the role that neighbourhoods play in their resident's experience / fear of crime largely falls into two categories. The first school of thought emphasises the "role of social disorganisation in undermining community-level informal social control mechanisms", in areas which have experienced fairly rapid population change, and which have resulted in an over concentration of residents from lower socio-economic groups living there. In contrast, other residents both internationally (see Aalbers and Rancati 2008; Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011), and nationally (see Hourigan 2011) express sentiments about insecurity and fear of crime, which appear to be enhanced by <u>visible signs</u> of disorder or deviance. Additionally, "anti-social behaviour - has a strong impact on the level of perceived insecurity" (Zajczyk et al., 2005 cited in Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). Such signifiers "are considered signs of abandonment by the police and public institutions", which in turn create fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). Significantly, such visual signs of disorder may have a greater impact on residents'

fear of crime than the actual crime rates in that locality (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011).

This body of academic literature has informed a number of policy initiatives, including an emphasis on community policing (Skogan 2003), zero tolerance strategies (Denis 1997), and the use of Community Support Officers to provide a link between communities and the police (Hughes and Rowe 2007, cited in Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011). An opposing policy path was offered by Ginsburg (1999) who suggested that social regeneration, which strives for "the improved and appropriate delivery of welfare services in poor neighbourhoods and the empowerment of local communities" while it has never been a prominent feature of urban regeneration, is the route we should travel.

Internationally, "from an institutional point of view, security seems to be perceived as an autonomous issue" which is disconnected from economic, social and physical policies of urban regeneration. In effect, such a strategy sees security primarily as "a question of order and control (safety), while ignoring the social conditions which produce deviant behaviour" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2746-2747). Accordingly, there is a strong argument that in order to be effective in addressing community (un)safety and (in)security, it is important to simultaneously implement policies which tackle unsafety – in "the immediate environment in which the fearful reside" (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011) - such as "police control and zero tolerance" - with policies which seek to create and sustain "social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). Such a strategy can "increase levels of social-economic security", in turn addressing social inclusion, which ultimately impacts positively on residents' perceptions of their safety (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). In essence, policies which are aimed at "addressing simultaneously the four pillars of economic, social, physical and safety-related problems" are the best approach to counteract the sense of insecurity, unsafety and uncertainty (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2743) that are manifest in the residents of certain neighbourhoods. However it is crucial to understand that achieving such regeneration is a long-term process.

Limerick is a low-crime city with a serious crime problem (McCullagh 2011, p.23). What McCullagh's analysis of victim surveys confirms is that in many respects Limerick is not distinctively different from the national picture in terms of its "level of victimisation", or the "associated problems of fear and non-reporting to the Gardaí" (McCullagh 2011, p.30). Yet the situation is different in parts of the estates we were interested in, where a completely different status system exists, which is "linked to being a hard man who embodies toughness and a capacity for violence" (Hourigan 2011, p.75; see also Kelleher & O' Connor 2011). A key issue identified in terms of the (un)safety of parts of Limerick's local authority housing estates is the pervasiveness of anti-social behaviour, in particular behaviour that is perpetrated by children under the age of criminal responsibility. This behaviour has profound impacts on residents who are the targets of the anti social activities and who consequently "feel vulnerable to random attacks" and who "experience considerable anxiety as a result" (Hourigan 2011, p.78).

The State has attempted to respond to this (un)safety in the estates via the actions of a number of state agencies. John Fitzgerald made recommendations directly to the Government's Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. In particular the Fitzgerald Report recommended the increased involvement of the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB), and a highly visible Garda presence in the estates. His recommendations were fully endorsed and approved by the Cabinet. A key element of the approved recommendations was the creation of two new special purpose Government Agencies for the Southside and Northside of Limerick City and these Agencies were established by Government Orders dated 15th June 2007. The Boards are to oversee the Planning and Implementation of a comprehensive and integrated Regeneration Programme for the four estates chosen for Regeneration. Regeneration is to consist of three prongs, social, economic and physical, of which the social element has been designated the most important.

The Agencies have played a key role in facilitating the improvement of the living conditions of some residents (Hourigan 2011, pp.151-152). Progress on the physical regeneration of the estates has been slow but significant emphasis to date has been placed by the Limerick Regeneration Agencies (LRA) on promoting social

regeneration – particularly in the areas of children, youth and family support, education and training, health and well being, neighbourhoods and people, and sport (see Limerick Regeneration Agencies 2008, pp.35-65). In some of these areas of impact, significant funding has been provided and tangible progress has been made.

It should be noted that while the Regeneration Agencies are actively engaged in promoting and facilitating greater co-ordination, integration and accountability, they can only persuade, influence, and lobby the statutory bodies and according to Regeneration staff this has had only limited success and limited impact on some communities. The Regeneration Agencies have failed to communicate these particular dynamics of the process to the wider communities in Limerick City.

Internationally, we have seen the emphasis on community policing (Skogan 2003), and the use of Community Support Officers to provide a link between communities and the police (Hughes and Rowe 2007, cited in Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011) as a way to tackle community (un)safety. In Limerick, similar approaches have been developed. The LRA (in keeping with the commitments made in the 2008 Master Plan document) have actively supported the development of local structures such as resident forums, local regeneration committees and a city–wide regeneration community consultative forum to promote and facilitate community involvement and participation and to create a mechanism whereby residents have an opportunity to interact with senior public servants from the Gardaí Siochana and the Local Authority and to hold them to account for their actions or non – actions. The Gardaí have achieved some very notable successes in tackling serious crime in Limerick, with many high profile gang figures now incarcerated. Additionally, we have seen significant reductions in the crime rates in the city. However the impact of these measures has not been experienced uniformly in the regeneration estates and given the scale of the issues in some parts of the estates designated for regeneration, the response of the Gardaí to all incidents is of crucial importance.

Limerick City Council has responsibility for the management of public housing in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston and under powers given to the local authority by the Housing Act of 1997, tenants can be evicted for anti-social behaviour. It must be noted that the local authority has no powers to address the behaviour of residents in

either owner occupied or private rented housing. Limerick City Council have taken numerous steps to enforce their statutory powers through issuing warnings, exclusion orders, taking (re)possession of houses, assigning antisocial behaviour officers and creating a standalone hotline to report anti-social behaviour (Hourigan 2011, p.133). However it is noteworthy that "some residents in some estates have argued that some housing management decisions have made antisocial behaviour worse and destabilised previously settled areas" (Hourigan 2011, p.133). There is a strong view, even among Regeneration Agency staff that the Local Authority could and should be doing more in the area of estate management and while some of the perpetrators of anti-social behaviour can only be dealt with through the criminal justice system there are many other situations that could be dealt with adequately through the legislative powers of the local authority.

Finally, "the single biggest gap in the state's response" has been identified as the failure to address the anti-social / criminal behaviour of minors. This has serious implications for successfully addressing (un)safety in the estates. Many observers would lay this responsibility for addressing this issue at the feet of the HSE who have a "duty of care" towards such children under the Children's Act (2001). Under powers granted under Section 115 of this Act the state can compel parents to address their children's behaviour though it is significant that these powers have not been widely utilised (Hourigan 2011, p.134).

Research Methods

This research study sought to begin the process of auditing experiences and concerns related to community safety in and around Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. We have endeavoured to explore, identify and document the most pressing concerns related to community safety as expressed by a diverse group of community residents and stakeholders, and to examine residents' experiences and evaluation of the existing community safety frameworks. Ethical Approval was received from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick, approval reference number **FAHSS_REC278.**

We employed a qualitative methodology as we felt that it would provide invaluable

insights into our participants' perceptions of what community safety means to different people and ultimately how communities can take control of their own safety. Working in collaboration with the Southside Regeneration Agency, community and youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders, a purposive selection strategy was deployed in order to convene and run a series of five focus groups (young men aged between 19 - 30, young women aged between 19 - 30, parents, & elderly) in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. Additionally, three focus groups were conducted with the Gardaí, estate management personnel, community activists and local authority workers. These focus group interviews were conducted in quiet, private locations, and recorded. All of the focus groups lasted approximately sixty minutes and endeavoured to obtain the participants' views on topics such as

- What is meant by safety, risk and community,
- Do existing community safety provisions fulfil their function,
- What are the key safety concerns in the communities,
- Are there dangerous places/safe places within the communities,
- Community suggestions to improve their sense of security and well being.

Eight in-depth individual interviews were also conducted with both residents and a number of key informants from various state agencies and community organizations to examine and expand on issues emerging from the focus groups. The interviews varied in length but on average they lasted for approximately sixty minutes.

As a result of this sampling strategy a total of sixty five individuals participated in the research. Fifty seven individuals participated in the focus groups, and a further eight individual interviews were completed. As our sample represented numerous positions (residents of the Southside Regeneration estates, officials from the Local Authority, Regeneration Agencies, estate management groups, HSE, Gardaí, Probation Services, and community workers) it meant that we could produce true to life explanations of the phenomenon under investigation.

The data collection generated a massive amount of information, consisting of audio recordings, which were transcribed. Our analysis was subsequently based on data reduction and interpretation of that data.

Key Research Findings

- This research finds that despite a significant reduction in the crime rate, residents in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston continue to exhibit elevated fears of being a victim of crime and / or anti-social behaviour in their estates. This is compounded by the historical experiences that many residents have had in these areas.

- The residents express most concern about the behaviour of children and teenagers. In general, low level anti-social behaviour and low-end criminal acts are causing a massive amount of distress and anxiety for residents and they perceive that very little is being done to address such behaviour. Such perceptions have implications for relationships between residents and statutory agencies and service providers in the future. Dislocation from open private and public space is hugely problematic and is playing a key role in the further demise of parts of these areas. Safer localities are said to be those that have "more active streets; where people use those streets" in the evening and at night, in the process ensuring that many different people "often cross paths" (Ray 2011, pp.73-74). This clearly is not the case in the estates we are concerned with.

- The issue of poor parenting united the residents across all of the estates. These concerns centre around the growth in the numbers of young parents who are disengaged from the community, disengaged from work, and who are seen as either unable or unwilling to discipline and educate their children. Residents clearly see a cyclical process of neglect and the subsequent impact it has on their communities. Additionally all residents mention a fear of informally sanctioning children for bad behaviour which is clearly impacting on the "ability of local residents to control deviancy" (Eck et al., 2005, p.8) and demonstrates quite significantly reduced levels of "collective efficacy" in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston.

- We found an understanding that young people and particularly troublesome young people (mostly young men) are over represented and over catered for in terms of programmes, projects and public concern. There is deemed to be

nothing for younger kids and nothing for the 'good kids'. Such perceptions have the potential to do serious damage to the (often) fragile relationship between the residents of these estates and the various statutory agencies. The provision of accurate information on these matters is urgently required.

- It is disappointing to find that while a 'bottom up' approach to the regeneration of the estates is seen as being of vital importance if the project is ultimately to succeed, there is a very strong perception among the elderly residents in particular that official bodies are unwilling to come out and listen to voices on the ground. This in turn is seen to be impacting on the residents' attitudes towards meetings between resident committees and authorities. There is a strong sense of disillusionment surrounding events of this kind where it is felt that nothing of practical value is achieved. While there is certainly evidence that such a bottom up approach is happening there are significant issues around communication which must be improved as a matter of urgency.

- The research clearly finds that residents are acutely aware of the stigmatised identity of the communities in which they live. Some residents (and the vast majority of our non-resident interviewees) identified the media as a source of this stigmatised identity. They perceive that the media has played a prominent role in the negative / stereotypical / stigmatised construction of their localities, and more significantly that it plays a role in the empowerment of criminals in these communities. As such addressing the stigmatised image / media representations of these estates needs to be a key part of any strategy to achieve better community safety in these localities.

- A key issue for many of the residents is the visibility of the regeneration project, which has both a symbolic and real value for people living in the communities in question. The symbolic value of physical regeneration for the residents centres on the sense that something is being done and that they, as a community, have not been forgotten. The feeling of being 'left in limbo' was very strong among elderly residents in particular. Symbolically this has a very detrimental impact on people's quality of life. Short-term residents, often

younger people, move in and out reflecting what the elderly residents see as a key issue in the problems of their estates. The high turnover of residents has contributed greatly to the sense that the community which existed previously has been lost. Further to this is the fact that many of the younger residents feel no sense of attachment to these neighbourhoods.

- The residents clearly identify that while physical regeneration is urgent, there is little point in simply rebuilding houses and putting people back into similar situations. The respondents were especially adamant that the underlying social problems must first be addressed. The Limerick Regeneration Agencies have concentrated considerable resources on social regeneration up until this point in time in order to address such issues. However, many of the residents (and indeed key individuals) that we spoke to expressed concerns that little has happened on the issue of social regeneration. This is a very serious finding and again evidence poor communication of details by the agencies to the residents. The provision of information about the social regeneration project and the initiatives that are being undertaken needs to be vastly improved. In particular, the Regeneration Agencies must make people aware that there are no easy short term solutions in bringing about social regeneration and that the difficulties manifesting in these communities which have been allowed to worsen over the last two decades can not be turned around in a short period of time.

- The highly visible physical degradation and neglect of areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities. The issue of boarding up houses has implications beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. There are very real health and safety concerns relating to the abandoned houses. These health issues are all related to the slowness in dealing properly with empty houses. It is our view that properties should not be left boarded up indefinitely as they are detrimentally impacting on the quality of life for the residents of both estates.

- While some residents see the installation of CCTV cameras as performing an important 'visible' function in relation to residents' perceptions of their own

safety, there is a huge demand that any future cameras should be monitored live by the police as they see this proving to be a much more effective strategy.

- There is a very strong perception among the residents of both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston that problems in these areas are not taken as seriously as they would be were they to occur in more middle class communities in the city.

- Residents see a reduced Garda presence on their estates, often perceiving that this absence is as a result of the Gardaí not seeing problems in the regeneration areas as being problematic once they are contained within these communities. These perceptions are hugely significant and need to be addressed immediately.

- There was also disagreement among residents in both groups as to whether or not the Gardaí respond to calls in a timely manner. The loss of a visible Garda presence in the neighbourhoods has led to the widely held belief that the Gardaí only have a reactive presence in the estates. Additionally the lack of sensitivity on the part of some police officers is extremely worrying. These issues have led to a sense of dislocation from local law enforcement, despite the efforts of community Gardaí (many of whom were mentioned by name by our resident interviewees). Again, these are hugely significant findings given that the Fitzgerald Report recommended a highly visible Garda presence in these estates. For residents (and particularly young residents) to feel safe in making complaints or passing on information about criminal and anti-social activity there needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused.

- Significantly, our study has identified major misunderstandings on the part of many residents about which agency had responsibility for addressing the various issues in the estates. The role of City Council and the HSE are

particularly poorly understood and many residents think the Regeneration Agencies are responsible for everything. Such misunderstanding has obvious implications in terms of residents' frustrations with the various statutory agencies. If residents perceive that an agency has responsibility for certain issues and those issues are not being addressed then they are increasingly likely to be dismissive of / lose trust in that agency, irrespective of whether or not the agency has actually got responsibility in that area. These misunderstandings must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

Recommendations

While we must acknowledge that the regeneration project and the ability of the Regeneration Agencies to communicate progress has been hampered by ongoing uncertainty as a result of economic recession, the findings of this research strongly suggest that the process of communication between the Limerick Regeneration Agencies and the residents of the estates concerned must be significantly improved. The voices of the residents needs to be sought out and listened to in terms of their local on the ground knowledge. Our study also identified major misunderstandings on the part of many residents about what social regeneration entails and which agency had responsibility for addressing the various issues in the estates. If residents perceive that an agency has responsibility for certain issues and those issues are not being addressed then they are increasingly likely to be dismissive of / lose trust in that agency, irrespective of whether or not the agency has actually got responsibility in that area. These misunderstandings must be addressed as a matter of urgency. It is our view that a multi-faceted approach to these issues may prove to be the most effective strategy. We recommend that information flows are improved through the use of newsletters which are delivered to all households in the estates concerned, in conjunction with public meetings held in the communities. Finally, consideration should be given to the use of a dedicated liaison officer whose job would be to impartially explain the concerns / difficulties of both sides to one another.

- It is apparent that for the vast majority of the estates residents the demolition of derelict / damaged properties and removal of rubble is key to the sense that the regeneration project is progressing. Additionally, the Gardaí believe that the demolition process has contributed to the establishment of what are seen as safer communities. However, the highly visible physical degradation and neglect of parts of these areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities. The issue of boarding up houses in particular has very real health and safety concerns beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. Given the scale of the housing waiting lists in Limerick City, it is our view that new tenants should be moved into vacant properties as quickly as possible. In the case of properties which are marked for demolition rather than new tenancies, then these demolitions should occur as quickly as possible after the property has been vacated. We would recommend that properties should not be left boarded up indefinitely as they are detrimentally impacting on the quality of life for the residents of both estates.

- A major concern for residents taking part in this research was that the water supply is not automatically turned off at the time of a house being vacated. In many instances this has led to flooding, the subsequent loss of water pressure to surrounding houses etc when these houses are subsequently vandalised. It is our view that this situation is unacceptable. There are no circumstances in which this practice should be allowed to continue. We recommend that the water supply is turned off at the mains prior to any house being boarded up by the Local Authority. This is a very simple / practical measure but it is one which has inexplicably has not been happening to date.

- The public space in the estates needs to be reclaimed as a public space which can safely be utilised by all residents of the estates at all times. To achieve this outcome we recommend that there should be an increased proactive Garda presence in the estates. If we are to increase the confidence among residents that they can use communal spaces free of fear, then there needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused, which is largely what occurs at present.

- While we welcome the fact that the Regeneration Agencies are facilitating the integration of the relevant statutory bodies including Gardaí. City Council, Probation, HSE and Social Protection in dealing both with strategic community safety issues, given the perceptions of many residents in these estates that the Gardaí are not overly concerned with the problems in these estates we recommend that measures are put in place which results in quicker response times and increased sensitivity on the part of _some_ Gardaí to the particular situation in which residents find themselves. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a group which would oversee individual policing plans for particular areas.

- The installation of CCTV cameras most certainly performs an important 'visible' function in relation to residents' perceptions of their own safety. We would recommend that any future deployment of CCTV cameras should be monitored live by the police. We believe that this would prove to be much more effective than the current situation where the Gardaí have to request tapes after an event has happened.

- Our discussions with Limerick City Council officials revealed that a large number of interventions had been made against unruly tenants in the previous year. Residents however perceive that nothing is being done to tackle the behaviour of tenants engaged in anti-social / criminal behaviour, which lead to feelings of unsafety as a consequence. We believe that that dissemination of information to residents about the measures taken by Limerick City Council against unruly tenants could demonstrate that actions are taken against Local Authority tenants who breach the terms of their tenancy. This in turn may increase perceptions of community safety amongst the residents of these estates. Accordingly we recommend that Limerick City Council widely publicise the number and type of interventions that they have made on a six monthly basis.

- The lack of complaints that are being received through the Council's dedicated anti-social behaviour number is a concern. We have some concerns about how widely publicised this telephone number has been. We recommend that a flier

be distributed to every house in the areas concerned with these details on them. All estate managers etc, should encourage residents where appropriate to call this number.

- The Community Safety Partnership project would appear to be having a good deal of success in the areas where it is established. We recommend that consideration be given to establishing the project on a pilot basis in the most stable areas of the estates concerned.

- A key issue identified by almost all of our participants was that of parenting, particularly by young parents. In terms of addressing this we would recommend that greater support be provided (particularly by the HSE) for parenting and / or household management. In particular the further support / provision of Family Support Programmes may prove to be beneficial in this regard.

- The research identifies a growing disconnect between older and younger residents in the estates, which again has huge implications for community safety. To address this disconnect we recommend that consideration should be given to the introduction (on a pilot basis) of intergenerational projects, which allow older and younger residents to work together.

- The dominant perception of residents is that there is nothing for younger kids and nothing for the 'good kids' in the estates. Many of the facilities etc are perceived as only being available to kids who have already been in trouble. Such perceptions have the potential to do serious damage to the relationship between the residents and the various statutory agencies. Once again, we recommend that accurate information on these matters is urgently provided. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the deployment of resources that are within the remit of the Regeneration Agencies. We would suggest that the Agencies should evaluate if some parts of the communities are oversupplied while others are undersupplied? Resources should be deployed accordingly to address any imbalance.

- Male involvement in community engagement is essential and needs to be targeted as men are regarded as being at the root of many community problems while also being most at risk from them. We would recommend that appropriate attention is paid to encouraging more males to participate in residents' forums and other community organisations.

- The media are identified as playing a role in the empowerment of criminals and the creation of fear among residents, together with the provision of (mis)information about which of the statutory agencies has responsibility for addressing which issues within these communities. While there is an organisation in Limerick City which monitors media coverage of the city, it is not seen to be challenging the unrepresentativeness of the stories about these estates in particular. These representations contribute to the stigmatised identity of these neighbourhoods. We would recommend that the media coverage of the Regeneration estates be monitored on a yearly basis and where inaccuracies / unrepresentativeness are found to be occurring that they are challenged by the Limerick Regeneration Agencies. Moreover, a concentrated effort need to be made to get alternative (positive) stories and features about these communities into the media (something which has been happening in relation to Moyross, for example). Tackling the stigma associated with these estates should be seen as an integral part of the social regeneration project.

- Finally, we believe that in order to effectively address community (un)safety we must simultaneously implement policies which visibly demonstrate to the residents that they have not been abandoned by the state, with policies which increase "social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). Accordingly, we recommend that only policies which simultaneously address the social, economic, and physical regeneration of these estates be pursued. In that context, the fact that achieving such urban regeneration is a long-term process must be better communicated to the residents.

Overview

Neighbourhoods, Fear of Crime, and Community Safety: International Evidence

> *"A sense of security can be considered as one of the primary necessities of life…One of the main features of contemporary societies is the increasing loss of control capacity. The result is increased demand for security and protection… but what does security mean? (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2735-2736).*

As modern cities have developed and evolved real concerns have been generated among city dwellers about (in)security; concerns which have often become focused on public spaces, or particular "dangerous neighbourhoods" within the city environs (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2736). Indeed, we are increasingly noticing that marginalised / excluded neighbourhoods (and the residents of these neighbourhoods) are becoming the "focal point for the feelings of insecurity for the entire city" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2740). In answering Aalbers and Rancati's (2008) question about what security means, it is very useful to examine Bauman's definition which "encompasses three different elements – unsafety, uncertainty, and insecurity. (Un)safety concerns the safety of our selves, our families and property, (un)certainty concerns the control over the future and being able to make risk free choices; (in)security deals with the capability of facing up to the risks of existence and the values and principles determining participation in society" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2737).

Neighbourhoods and fear of crime
Bauman's interpretation allows us to examine the difference between "objective and subjective safety", which is related to crime levels, and "objective and subjective fear", which is related to peoples' perception of how safe they actually are. Much research shows that residents' perceptions / fear of crime and feeling unsafe is not always related to actual levels of crime in their locality. People may perceive that they are unsafe as a consequence of how they "label their mixed experience of unsafety, insecurity and uncertainty" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2738). Indeed, such perceptions (peoples subjective fear of crime) can be even more pronounced in large

housing estates where many inhabitants themselves label their estate as unsafe" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2738-2739). Brunton-Smith & Jackson's (2011) findings from work undertaken in England and Wales demonstrates that people draw on more than their experience of life in the neighbourhood when evaluating their personal risk of crime. Elevated levels of fear of being a victim of crime were found in women and younger residents, those who had previously been a victim of crime, those with lower educational credentials, and those who read tabloid newspapers. Interestingly, they also found that fear of crime declines with age. Brunton-Smith & Jackson's (2011) work suggests that the crime rate in a particular neighbourhood becomes of increased importance after the first experience that a resident has as a victim of crime. They argue that residents in areas which have low levels of crime are likely to view their first experience of being a victim of crime as "an isolated incident", but in contrast residents in areas with high rates (or perceived high rates) of crime may interpret their experience in a totally different way, with the experience serving to "bring home the real and present danger" they must live with on a day to day basis, "in a particularly vivid way".

Explaining the neighbourhood effect on fear of crime

Research on the role that neighbourhoods play in their resident's experience / fear of crime largely falls into two categories. The first school of thought emphasises the "role of social disorganisation in undermining community-level informal social control mechanisms", in areas which have experienced fairly rapid population change, and which have resulted in an over concentration of residents from lower socio-economic groups living there. Much of this work focuses on "the ability of local residents to control deviancy" (Eck et al., 2005, p.8) with the "active ingredients" in high crime rates being explained in terms of structural disadvantage" and reduced levels of "collective efficacy"[1]. "In the context of limited legitimate routes into formal employment, "illegal activities become more widespread… and violence becomes a major currency of social interaction" (Parker 2008, p.85 cited in Ray 2011, p.76). Parental – child relationships, supervision & discipline, family conflict, and parental underpinning of unacceptable behaviour and attitudes were all cited by Ray (2011,

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[1] Collective efficacy is the level of communal trust and solidity among a particular community's residents

p.79) as key influences on the behaviour of perpetrators of violence in neighbourhoods, reflecting the reduced levels of "collective efficacy" understanding.

In contrast, other residents, both internationally (see Aalbers and Rancati 2008; Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011), and nationally (see Hourigan 2011) express sentiments about insecurity and fear of crime, which appear to be enhanced by <u>visible signs</u> of disorder or deviance. Additionally, "anti-social behaviour has a strong impact on the level of perceived insecurity" (Zajczyk et al., 2005 cited in Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). Wilson and Kelling's (1982) seminal work "Broken Windows" argues that the "malign influence of a range of low level disorders" such as graffiti, vandalism, car crime, burglaries, damaged properties and poorly kept public spaces impacts on residents fear of crime. These "visual displays" demonstrate that the neighbourhood no longer exerts "social control" over crime and anti-social behaviour (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011), which in turn suggests to residents that they face a greater risk of being a victim of crime. As a result, such signifiers "are considered signs of abandonment by the police and public institutions", which in turn create fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). Significantly, such visual signs of disorder may have a greater impact on residents' fear of crime than the actual crime rates in that locality (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011). Safer localities are said to be those that have "more active streets; where people use those streets"; and "where there is a substantial number of stores and other public places", which can be / are used in the evening and at night, in the process ensuring that many different people "often cross paths". In essence "busy places reduce risks while empty public land might create dangerous hang outs" (Ray 2011, pp.73-74).

International Policy Responses

This body of academic literature has informed a number of policy initiatives, including an emphasis on community policing (Skogan 2003), zero tolerance strategies (Denis 1997), and the use of Community Support Officers to provide a link between communities and the police (Hughes and Rowe 2007, cited in Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011). An opposing policy path was offered by Ginsburg (1999) who suggested that social regeneration, which strives for "the improved and appropriate

delivery of welfare services in poor neighbourhoods and the empowerment of local communities", while it has never been a prominent feature of urban regeneration, is the route we should travel. Consultation with the communities involved and the participation of the residents of those communities in addressing community safety concerns is vital, as "policies and services … are much more likely to work if the people and communities they are designed for are involved in their planning and implementation" (Combat Poverty Agency 2005).

Internationally, "from an institutional point of view, security seems to be perceived as an autonomous issue" which is disconnected from economic, social and physical policies of urban regeneration. In effect, such a strategy sees security primarily as "a question of order and control (safety), while ignoring the social conditions which produce deviant behaviour" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2746-2747). Accordingly, there is a strong argument that in order to be effective in addressing community (un)safety and (in)security, it is important to simultaneously implement policies which tackle unsafety – in "the immediate environment in which the fearful reside" (Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011) - such as "police control and zero tolerance", with policies which seek to create and sustain "social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). Such a strategy can "increase levels of social-economic security", in turn addressing social inclusion, which ultimately impacts positively on residents perceptions of their safety (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). In essence, policies which are aimed at "addressing simultaneously the four pillars of economic, social, physical and safety-related problems" are the best approach to counteract the sense of insecurity, unsafety and uncertainty (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2743) that are manifest in the residents of certain neighbourhoods. However it is crucial to understand that achieving such regeneration is a long-term process.

Crime and Community Safety: The Limerick Context.

> *"Criminality and severe poverty are a relatively small part of Limerick's story, yet there is also evidence that the poverty-linked crime in the city represents a very distinct problem which must be fully understood to be resolved"*
> (Hourigan 2011, p.xvi)

Examining crime rates in Limerick

Limerick is a low-crime city with a serious crime problem (McCullagh 2011, p.23). The rate of armed robberies in Limerick is low in comparison to national averages, but a different picture emerges when we look at "robbery from the person" where the rate of such offences increased between 2003 and 2007. Additionally, when examining rates of firearms offences, arson, and knife crime, Limerick was significantly above the national average during this period (McCullagh 2011, pp.25-27). Yet "figures from the 1998 and 2006 victims surveys show Limerick has a lower level of crime victimisation, a lower level of fear of crime, and a higher sense of safety than Dublin (McCullagh 2011, p.28). Fear of reprisals was ranked very low by most victims of crime. The most significant reasons for the non-reporting of theft were that the victims believed the crime was "not serious enough" or more worryingly, "that the Gardaí could … or would do nothing" about it. While "the percentage of people who would feel unsafe "walking alone in their neighbourhood" was above the national average, this pattern is consistent in "all regions with a major city in them". Indeed, it is striking that "perhaps the most significant increase recorded in the victim survey was in *perceptions* of the seriousness of the crime problem" (McCullagh 2011, pp.28-29).

What McCullagh's analysis of victim surveys confirms is that in many respects Limerick is not distinctively different from the national picture in terms of its "level of victimisation", or the "associated problems of fear and non-reporting to the Gardaí" (McCullagh 2011, p.30). In parts of the local authority estates that this study is concerned with, there are very strong community ties and levels of social capital, but in the parts where the "disadvantaged of the disadvantaged" (Hourigan 2011) live community violence and intimidation are more prevalent. Research in an Irish context has argued that such community violence is "more likely to occur" in local authority

housing estates "as a consequence of the spatial clustering of the disadvantaged" (see Fahey 1999; Norris & O' Connell 2002; O' Connell 2007; Hourigan 2011, p.42). But how did this spatial clustering occur?

Creating the conditions for community (un)safety

It is necessary to examine the local economic structure and the historic process of industrial restructuring that occurred in Limerick as a starting point for understanding the process of the residualisation of the local authority estates which are to be regenerated. The 1970s saw Limerick City suffer from the decline of the food and beverages and textile industries which had been hugely important in the local economy. Over the years this old industrial base greatly reduced and there was major growth in light manufacturing, which in some instances drew large numbers of their workforces from the local authority estates. For example Krupps established a factory in Limerick in the 1960s and at its peak it was providing 2500 jobs into Southill. When it closed in 1997 almost €9million went out of the local economy (Humphries 2010). "The effects of this industrial restructuring process has been "socially and spatially uneven, imparting to the city a distinctive, and highly differentiated, social geography" with local authority estates such as Southill and Ballinacurra Weston having exceptionally high unemployment rates, and the "highest percentages of unskilled and semi-skilled manual social classes, children under fifteen years of age and lone-parent families in the city" (McCafferty 2011, pp.3-9; see also Humphries 2010).

The process of industrial restructuring was compounded by poor housing policy; such as the introduction of the Surrender Grant in 1984, which had the unintended consequence of further residualising these estates. The grant was made available to tenants who wanted to leave their local authority house and purchase a house in the private housing market. The rationale underpinning this policy was that it would be an efficient way of increasing social housing stock levels for local authorities, yet the policy resulted in the loss of the better educated and employed tenants. This led to even further residualisation of these local authority estates because they were populated to an increasing extent by people who were getting progressively more disadvantaged (see Considine & Dukelow 2009; McCafferty 2011; Hourigan 2011; Humphries 2010). Moreover, the poor design and layout of the estates led to problems

of environmental degradation (vandalism, graffiti), anti-social behaviour and low level criminality (Limerick Regeneration Agencies, 2008). For example, Ballinacurra Weston has no focal point and as a result has an increased involvement in illegal drugs use and houses many of the individuals involved in serious criminal activities (Limerick Regeneration Agencies, 2008).

In addition, the residualisation of the local authority housing estates in Limerick City is "closely related to population trends". For example, O' Malley Park experienced a decline of 69% in its population between 1981 and 2006. This population collapse is a significant indicator of "the problems experienced in the area and the failure of the City's housing programme" (McCafferty 2011, pp.18-19; see also Humphries 2010). In essence these examples should be seen as a mark of failure of local authority management of the estates, their housing strategy, and their planning of the city etc. This trend has continued with more dispersal since 2006 because other policy initiatives like rent allowance and the regeneration process have facilitated it.

While housing policies have contributed to the creation of segregated and marginalised social spaces in Limerick City, Devereux et al., (2011a; 2011b) document the manner in which media constructions also contribute to this process through the construction of stigmatised localities. In the 1980s there was a perception that no amount of education was sufficient to overcome the stigma associated with living in the local authority estates that are now undergoing regeneration (Hourigan 2011, p.49). Indeed, the international research literature (Greer and Jewkes, 2005; Bauder 2002; Blokland, 2008; Hastings, 2004; Kelehar et al 2010) continues to demonstrate that negative reputations of such places can, in themselves, have a profound effect upon the life chances, experiences and self-image of those who live in neighbourhoods which carry a stigma (Permentier et al. 2007; 2008; 2009 cited in Devereux et al., 2011b). International research also identifies that the media reporting of crime, particularly violent crime, is "consistently over-reported" in comparison to the official crime rates, which sometimes creates a heightened "fear of a crime surge" (Jewkes 2011, p.155). Accordingly, we would argue that this process may be actively contributing to feelings of unsafety in the estates. Indeed, "if the media notoriety of Limerick gang leaders is reinforcing their fear based status, then media coverage

which heightens this status is actively contributing to the crime problem in the city[2]"
(Hourigan 2011, p.248) and in the context of community safety it should be urgently
addressed.

Finally, the budgetary strategy which successive governments have pursued since
2006, combined with the social difficulties being experienced as a result of massive
unemployment, consecutive welfare cuts and ever reducing household incomes, have
created the very real possibility that the serious problems evident in the estates may
become even more pronounced in the near future (McCafferty 2011, pp.20-21). The
economic difficulties have made employment prospects for some people in the estates
even more bleak (McCullagh 2011, p.37) with involvement in organised crime
appearing to offer a "visible route out of poverty" for the "disadvantaged of the
disadvantaged", who in such circumstances will continue to provide "the reservoir of
new members for Limerick's criminal gangs" (Hourigan 2011, p.70) unless processes
are implemented which impact on their poverty and social exclusion.

(Un)safety in the estates

Recent research documents that in parts of the estates, a completely different status
system exists, which is "linked to being a hard man who embodies toughness and a
capacity for violence" (Hourigan 2011, p.75; see also Kelleher & O' Connor 2011).
Interestingly, there is evidence that female residents of the estates are progressively
likely to be engaging in similar types of behaviour (Hourigan 2011, p.77). Such
evidence would appear to support Phillips' (2003) claim that girls involvement in
"physically aggressive behaviour seems to be rather more common that previous
research would suggest".

A key issue identified in terms of the (un)safety of parts of Limerick's local authority
housing estates is the pervasiveness of anti-social behaviour, in particular behaviour
that is perpetrated by children under the age of criminal responsibility. This behaviour
has profound impacts on residents who are the targets of the anti social activities and

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[2] The Limerick Regeneration Agencies would appear to be cogniscent of such processes. Chief
Executive Officer Brendan Kenny, is quoted in a Limerick Chronicle article entitled 'Anger at 'unfair'
portrayal of city' (7/12/2010) as saying that they had concerns about an RTE Primetime programme
because "some of the people they gave a platform to… have caused havoc in these estates".

who consequently "feel vulnerable to random attacks" and who "experience considerable anxiety as a result" (Hourigan 2011, p.78). Two general explanations are offered for such anti-social behaviour. The first sees anti-social behaviour being directed against certain residents "on the basis of their vulnerability or the likelihood of their obstructing gang activities", while the second explains anti-social behaviour in terms of participants getting a level of excitement (a buzz) from participating in such activities (Hourigan 2011, pp.82-83), which is in contrast to the mundane existence that such youngsters normally experience.

The State response to (un)safety in the estates

The Regeneration Agencies

In September 2006 two young children were very seriously injured in an arson attack in Moyross. This incident led to a national outcry about conditions in some of Limerick's local authority estates. In response, the Government appointed Mr. John Fitzgerald, the former Dublin City Manager, to carry out a speedy and comprehensive investigation of issues prevailing in Moyross and other parts of Limerick City, and to make recommendations directly to the Government's Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion. Mr. Fitzgerald reported back in March of 2007. In particular the Fitzgerald Report recommended the increased involvement of the Criminal Assets Bureau (CAB), and a highly visible Garda presence in the estates. His recommendations were fully endorsed and approved by the Cabinet. A key element of the approved recommendations was the creation of two new special purpose Government Agencies for the Southside and Northside of Limerick City and these Agencies were established by Government Orders dated 15th June 2007. Regeneration is to consist of three prongs; social, economic and physical, of which the social element has been designated the most important. It is crucial to note that "many of the social regeneration proposals come under the remit and responsibility of other state departments and agencies and a major onus and challenge is being placed on them (by the Regeneration Agencies)… to meet the essential objectives within this Social Plan" Limerick Regeneration Agencies 2008, p.35).

While progress on the physical regeneration of the estates has been slow, Limerick Regeneration Agencies CEO, Brendan Kenny argues that some "progress has been made. Derelict houses have been demolished, the areas are cleaner and they are more stable in most parts…Having said that we know there are people out there who are in no way any better than they were three years ago and in some cases might be even worse. There are still some pockets that are pretty bad." (Byrne 2011, p.32) Significant emphasis to date has been placed by the Limerick Regeneration Agencies (LRA) on promoting social regeneration – particularly in the areas of children, youth and family support, education and training, health and well being, neighbourhoods and people, and sport (see Limerick Regeneration Agencies 2008, pp.35-65). The Masterplans dealing with the social regeneration of Limerick City were launched by

the LRA in 2008. The following key areas of impact are comprehensively addressed in the Social Regeneration Plan: Education; Children, Youth and Family Support; Health; Neighbourhoods and People. In some of these areas of impact, significant funding has been provided and tangible progress has been made (despite many of the initiatives not being widely known about by the general public). The LRA has for example contributed significant funding to Family Support initiatives and services such as the Family Support Centre in Southill (the alternative therapy/medicine programme), the domestic violence project in the CDP in Southill, Sophia Housing, and the Bedford Row Project which supports families dealing with imprisonment. More recently a family support outreach initiative has been set up in Southill, with a similar type project soon to be rolled out in Ballinacurra Weston / Prospect. In addition, the old Fullflex site (now called The Factory[3]) which has received intensive funding from the LRA, provides a range of broad based recreational / educational programmes and facilities for young people living on the Southside of the City.

Moreover, if we examine one of the pillars of social regeneration, namely education, in more detail, we see that since the outset the LRA have sought to promote Community Adult Education and progression onto and through Further and Higher education. Accordingly the LRA has committed funding support to the following:

- A Community Adult Education Coordinator for the Southside of Limerick City.

- The 3rd level Bursary Programme (to facilitate progression into and through 3rd level education) across each regeneration area in 2010 & 2011 [This is administered through the local area CDPs].

- Limerick Community Based Education Initiative (LCBEI) which aims to foster retention & progression to 3rd level students living in Regeneration Areas.

- Funding support for general improvement works in some regeneration area schools.

- The development and sustainability of the Incredible Years programme at primary level across regeneration areas schools.

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[3] The Fullflex site consists of a disused factory space now repurposed as a youth centre.

- Funding support to the Blue Box creative learning centre. This delivers a range of counseling and therapeutic support services at schools in the regeneration areas.

- Funding support to the local school completion programmes.

- The UL Access Campus at the Limerick Enterprise Development Partnership (LEDP) which provides after school supports for 3rd & 6th year students – many from Southill, Ballinacurra Weston and Prospect.

- Funding support for the Irish Chamber Orchestra's very successful 'Sing Out with Strings' programme for schools on the Southside of the city. The hope is that this can be further extended to schools throughout the regeneration areas.

- Funding Student Summer Placement schemes in the communities of Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. (and Moyross/ St Mary' on the Northside)

- The LRA has provided intensive support to summer camps in the areas

- Funding and support to a new alternative Education facility on the Southside COISCEIM

- Funding and support to a boat building project on the Southside as well as several other training initiatives.

Crucially, the Regeneration Agencies have also played a key role in advocating to Limerick City council on behalf of some local residents. Weekly 'Walk in Clinics' in Our Lady of Lourdes Community Centre for example have provided residents and community workers with an opportunity to meet with a representative from the LRA to confidentially discuss issues relating to the regeneration programme. As part of this work representation is then made to City Council on their behalf, which has facilitated them in improving their living conditions (Hourigan 2011, pp.151-152). Additionally it is argued that the provision of funding by the Regeneration Agencies to install, improve / upgrade, and maintain the CCTV systems in Southill and Ballinacurra Weston has gone some way towards increasing residents' sense of safety (Hourigan 2011, p.127).

Within Irish social policy the established understanding (see Considine & Dukelow 2009) focuses on the need to provide facilities and activities for marginalised

children, as a key strategy to address anti-social behaviour. This is an area that the Regeneration Agencies have focused significant attention (Hourigan 2011, pp.135-136). In Ballinacurra Weston for example they have supported the Youth Centre Apprenticeship Programme, and provided significant funding to support local football clubs. Additionally, it was agreed to support the development of a playing pitch for youth in the Our Lady of Lourdes Parish, which is due to commence shortly. In addition, the LRA in conjunction with Limerick City Sports Partnership have a number of sports development officers in place across the city to promote sport development in the communities. Hourigan (2011, p.136) is somewhat dismissive of the impact of such a strategy, stating that "despite the scale" of funding for these projects, "there has been only a 25% reduction in referrals to Garda diversion schemes... suggesting a fundamental weakness in understanding of the problem". However, we would suggest that - given the scale of disadvantage and the (now widely accepted) argument that the state had abandoned / neglected the people in these estates over many decades - a 25% reduction in referrals to Garda diversion schemes over the short life-span of the Regeneration Agencies should be seen as a significant impact and evidence of positive social change.

Policing

Internationally, we have seen the emphasis on community policing (Skogan 2003), and the use of Community Support Officers to provide a link between communities and the police (Hughes and Rowe 2007, cited in Brunton-Smith & Jackson 2011) as a way to tackle community (un)safety. In Limerick, similar approaches have been developed and Humphries (2011, pp.198-199) demonstrates that communities in Limerick have a high level of trust in the Gardaí. In that context, it is important to note that the LRA (in keeping with the commitments made in the 2008 Master Plan document) have tried to support the development of Regeneration Committees (which comprise of residents from the Residents Forums, and representatives from the Community & Voluntary sector, Limerick City Council, and youth and education providers) to work with the Gardaí, through these Regeneration Committees, to ensure a visible Community Policing presence in the communities. Hourigan (2011, p.127-128) argues that community policing (and the "visibility of the Emergency Response Unit") in Limerick is a hugely effective policy response, which represents

"a frontline intervention" operating as "a targeted response to specific problems". Moreover, it has seen reductions in crime rates and "improved relationships between the Gardaí and local communities".

Garda Chief Superintendent Sheahan described the 12% decrease in crime in the Limerick Garda Division between 2008 and 2010 as "phenomenal". Significantly, the detection rates for those crimes that are occurring are also up (Byrne 2010, p.59). This process has continued up to the present time. The Recorded Crime statistics for April – June 2011, show a 28% reduction in reported thefts across the Limerick Garda Division, the lowest rate since 2004. Public Order offences are now at their lowest level for more than three years, and there were no incidents involving the discharge of firearms for the first time since official records began in 2004. (Hurley 2011). Finally, it is significant that the Gardaí have also achieved some very notable successes in tackling organised crime in Limerick, with many high profile gang figures now incarcerated.

However, the CEO of the LRA, Brendan Kenny, acknowledged that while community policing has made a significant impact on criminality in the regeneration estates in particular, "it hasn't solved everything." He added that the additional police resources have had a more positive effect on some of the areas than others, and that Weston Gardens and Southill for example still "hadn't seen the full effect of these measures" (Byrne 2010, pp.59-67). In that context, and given the scale of the issues in some parts of the estates designated for regeneration (for example Keyes Park in Southill), the response of the Gardaí to all incidents is of crucial importance. In the context of Aalbers and Rancati's claim (2008, p.2742) that certain signifiers "are considered signs of abandonment by the police and public institutions", which in turn create fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742), "it is essential that Gardaí respond fully to call-outs and deal comprehensively" with even the smallest issues on these estates (Hourigan 2011, p.129).

City Council

Limerick City Council has responsibility for the management of public housing in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston and under powers given to the local authority by the Housing Act of 1977, tenants can be evicted for anti-social behaviour. It must be noted that the local authority has no powers to address the behaviour of residents in either owner occupied or private rented housing. Limerick City Council have taken numerous steps to enforce their statutory powers through issuing warnings, exclusion orders, taking (re)possession of houses, assigning antisocial behaviour officers and creating a standalone hotline to report anti-social behaviour (Hourigan 2011, p.133). However it is noteworthy that "some residents in some estates have argued that some housing management decisions have made antisocial behaviour worse and destabilised previously settled areas" (Hourigan 2011, p.133).

The HSE

Finally, "the single biggest gap in the state's response" has been identified as the failure to address the anti-social / criminal behaviour of minors. This has serious implications for successfully addressing (un)safety in the estates. The system at present sees the Gardaí having a very limited ability to tackle the behaviour of these children. Moreover, the juvenile justice system, has to date, not dealt with this issue adequately (Hourigan 2011, p.131). In such circumstances the question arises as to who exactly has responsibility for addressing the issue? Many observers would lay this responsibility at the feet of the HSE who have a "duty of care" towards such children under the Children's Act (2001). Under Section 115 of this Act the state can compel parents to address their children's' behaviour (through "parental supervision orders, fines, and court orders to control their children") though it is significant that these powers have not been widely utilised (Hourigan 2011, p.134).

Methodology

This research study sought to begin the process of auditing experiences and concerns related to community safety as a quality of life indicator, in and around the residential areas of Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. We have endeavoured to explore, identify and document the most pressing concerns related to community safety as expressed by a diverse group of community residents and stakeholders, and to examine residents' experiences and evaluation of the existing community safety frameworks.

Qualitative research:

We chose to employ a qualitative methodology for this study. Creswell (1998, p.15) argues that qualitative research is a way of developing an understanding of social problems, based on distinct procedural "traditions of inquiry", which construct a multifaceted picture, through the analysis of the participants' comprehensive views on the issues at hand. We felt that a qualitative methodology would provide invaluable insights into our participants' perceptions of what community safety means to different people and ultimately how communities can take control of their own safety. This research is not only concerned with the experiences of the participants, but also with the subjective meanings that these experiences have for them (see Flick 2006, p.16). Thus it was understood that the participants taking part in this research might attribute different meanings to things and have different perspectives than people who have not experienced 'unsafe' living arrangements (McGrath 2000, p.5). We believed that qualitative research methods would allow for the intensity of interaction between the researchers and participants, which we deemed necessary in order to get to the core of the issues under investigation.

Selection of participants:

Most qualitative research is guided by purposive sampling (Lindlof 1995) with the sample chosen to provide conceptual richness. Our sample consisted of individuals who were theoretically meaningful and information rich, and reflected important aspects of our research questions. Working in collaboration with the Southside Regeneration Agency, community and youth groups, and other relevant stakeholders, a purposive selection strategy was deployed in order to convene and run a series of five focus groups with residents (young men aged between 19 - 30, young women

aged between 19 - 30, parents, & elderly) in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston. Additionally, three focus groups were conducted with the Gardaí, estate management personnel, community activists and local authority workers. These focus group interviews were conducted in quiet, private locations, and recorded. All of the focus groups lasted approximately 60 minutes and endeavoured to obtain the participants' views on topics such as

- What is meant by safety, risk and community,
- Do existing community safety provisions fulfil their function,
- What are the key safety concerns in the communities,
- Are there dangerous places/safe places within the communities,
- Community suggestions to improve their sense of security and well being.

When the participant said something of interest on the key themes, additional questions were asked to guarantee elucidation of their answers. Gaskell (2000) explains that with appropriate probing and targeted questioning, the researcher can obtain clarification and amplification of interesting points. The flow of ideas and information from the participants was enhanced by being able to listen to each others experience and interact with each other, thus the group interview format facilitated the participants in building on each others ideas through their shared experience (Callahan 1983, cited in Reinharz 1992, p.223). Morgan (1993, p.15) argues that focus groups are useful when working with categories of people who have traditionally had limited power and influence, (in our case residents of Southside Regeneration estates) as it allows groups of peers to express their perspective with the security of being among others who share many of their feelings and experiences. As such, we conducted the focus groups with the intention of giving the (resident) participants as much control over the process as possible.

Eight in-depth individual interviews were also conducted with both residents and a number of key informants from various state agencies and community organizations to examine and expand on issues emerging from the focus groups. These interviews were flexible in format and therefore participants talked about what they deemed to be important to them, relative to the topic that we were exploring. This resulted in the interviews varying in length but on average they lasted for approximately sixty minutes.

As a result of this sampling strategy a total of sixty five individuals participated in the research. Fifty seven individuals participated in the focus groups, and a further eight individual interviews were completed. As our sample represented numerous positions (residents of the Southside Regeneration estates, officials from the local authority, Regeneration Agencies, estate management groups, HSE, Gardaí, Probation Services, and community workers) it meant that we could produce true to life explanations of the phenomenon under investigation.

Ethics:

Ethical decisions were taken throughout the research process, from conceptualisation and research design, to data collection and analysis, through to the final completion of this report (Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p.19). In making these decisions we had an ethical responsibility to safeguard the interests of the participants and to report our findings truthfully and accurately (Bryman 2004; Mauthner et al. 2002; Seale et al. 2004; Creswell 1998; Flick 2006). We made use of the "virtue ethics of skills" model which suggests that rather than merely adhering to a general set of principles, researchers' ethical instincts, feelings and reflective skills, including their sensibilities in undertaking conversations with the research participants should be emphasised (Edwards and Mauthner 2002, p.20). Ethical Approval was received from the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at the University of Limerick, approval reference number **FAHSS_REC278.**

Informed Consent:

It was necessary and appropriate that reasonably informed consent was obtained from the participants before commencing data collection. Our consent forms included a brief description of the purpose of the participant's involvement. The accompanying information letter ensured in as much as was possible that participation was voluntary. These documents informed the participants of the nature and extent of the research and asked the individual to reflect on whether they wished to participate.

Confidentiality:

Using focus groups presented difficulties in guaranteeing confidentiality given that there were numerous participants in each focus group. Any one of these participants could have decided to disregard the confidentiality of individual members in that

particular group. These issues were discussed openly in assembling focus groups. Group participants were aware that they might divulge sensitive information about themselves, which could be damaging to their situation. Their mutual acceptance of this shared risk seemed to set the participants at ease. A verbal agreement was reached that participants would not speak of the content of the focus groups to anyone else.

Analysis

The data collection generated a massive amount of information, consisting of audio recordings, which were transcribed. Therefore our analysis was based on data reduction and interpretation of that data. Once the transcription process was complete we used NVivo software to assist in the management of the data analysis. The software provides a formal structure for coding and storing data. This aids the researcher in developing the analysis and assists more abstract and theoretical interrogation of the data.

Grounded theory:

Strauss and Corbin (1990, p.24) describe grounded theory as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon". We decided to use grounded theory as our chosen method of qualitative data analysis. Grounded theory provided a procedure for developing categories (open coding), interlocking these categories (axial coding), building a story that joins the categories (selective coding) and ending with a set of discursive proposals (Creswell 1998, p.150; Flick 2006, pp.296-303). Through a process of reading through the transcripts line by line, time after time, we looked for emergent themes, codes and categories. In the following section the results of this process of analysis are presented under headings relating to the thematic categories emerging from the data.

Research Findings

This section will highlight residents concerns, as voiced to us, in relation to a number of key issues. Different issues arose in our discussions with the residents of Ballinacurra Weston and those from Southill, demonstrating the complexity, fluidity and rapidly changing nature of the problems experienced across the different communities. At the heart of these differences are the changes in demographics and neighbourhood populations. In parts of Ballinacurra Weston, there are very few families with young children remaining, something which has cut down on the experience of low level anti-social behaviour, however, other activities such as organised joyriding have dramatically increased. In parts of Southill there are currently serious problems with the behaviour of often very young children and teenagers.

Fear / Perceptions of Crime

Our research finds that despite significant reductions in the crime rate, among most of the residents that we spoke to there are elevated fears that they will experience / be the victim of some form of crime in their neighbourhood. The different experiences and perceptions of crime / anti-social behaviour expressed by residents are extremely important.

Organised Crime

There is huge 'outsider' interest (particularly by the media) in large scale criminality and serious crime happening in these estates. However, while there were some similar discussions by residents, this research finds that high-end criminality is not seen by them as having a major day to day impact on their lives. Obviously, the residents would much prefer not to have such activities occurring, but the torment that some residents experience as a result of the actions and behaviour of some young children and teenagers is found to be having a more detrimental impact on their day to day experiences. Low level anti-social behaviour and petty crime are causing a huge amount of distress for residents, but significantly they perceive that the least amount of resources are focused on addressing such behaviour. It is important to note that some of the key individuals that we spoke to (as well as previous research – see Hourigan 2011) argue that in some cases such anti-social behaviour is actively

encouraged by major criminal gangs. They argue that the encouragement of such behaviour is designed to keep the residents in a situation which ensures that they remain silent about criminal activity and that such anti-social behaviour is designed to ensure residents continue 'living in their back rooms', which leads to the loss of the street as a public space, in essence leaving it for criminality.

> *"I think if you have an area where there is that high level criminality there is a very deliberate tactic, if tactic is the word, on behalf of the people engaged in that, that they set the scene that enables the 9 and 10 year olds to act with impunity and all the focus of the community goes on that"* (Probation officer).

Joyriding

Car crime and joyriding in particular, appears to be a serious issue for residents in both estates. Organised joyriding was described to us by residents as joyriding specifically designed for an audience. In the case of Ballinacurra Weston joyriding is taking place in front of CCTV cameras and groups of young people who have been phoned by the joyriders subsequently assemble to cheer them on.

> *"As long as I've lived here there could have been a couple of robbed cars stolen cars just passing, one every few months or maybe 1 or 2 a year. At the moment for the last few months there are 7 or 8 every night and its in front of the church ... they are spinning up around the church ...but its like 7 or 8 stolen cars every single night and it's a huge problem for the last few months here like and that's something that's hasn't been here before"* (Female Parent Weston. Hereafter referred to as FPBCW)

> *"Criminality happens on the back alleys but anti-social behaviour and all of this burning out cars that has to happen where all the young fellas can see them doing it and where the bravado can be seen.... mostly over by the church, they'll have a bigger audience there because they're on Childers Road on a main road and they can stop the traffic lights then as well and you have people stuck in the traffic and they'll do their little show for them then".* (Estate Worker)

This is in contrast to the type of joyriding experienced in Southill where while the elderly residents and estate workers mentioned some instances of joyriding being performed for an audience, they predominantly relate stories of cars being driven in and burned almost immediately, usually in front of certain houses as a form of intimidation. There is usually no desire to seek an audience.

> *"The car will be got. Then the car will come up from town. It might take one spin around the area or one spin around the green and then it's put as near as possible to a house and burnt. So it's not the joy of joyriding... It's the power*

of getting that car and we'll burn it out on top of ya… Last week we had a funeral up here and a car came up. So that car, it only went around for a few minutes… They drove that car down the hill by the church. Revved and turned it so much that they couldn't hear themselves in the funeral mass that night and then burnt it out next to the church. Now, why did they do it? Because there was a funeral on there and they had an audience and that was their way of letting them know, We're here". (Estate Worker Southill)

The instrumental purpose of both forms of joyriding is fundamentally different and again is representative of the very different circumstances which exist across both Southside estates.

Substance Abuse

The young women that we spoke to, reflecting their life stage, were mostly concerned for their young children; in terms of the highly visible level of substance misuse in Southill. This has major implications for community life in Carew Park in particular, as several of the women told us they are afraid to use their gardens, back yards or the alleyways behind their houses due to the high possibility of attracting the attention of drug users.

> *"Out in Sunnyside now during the summer do you remember we'd all be sitting out and we'd have a few drinks or something just in our own gardens and the kids would be playing. The next thing then like you'd get a couple of stoners walking past and then they'd come in and they'd plant themselves with you for the night and they'd be there 'till four in the morning and then do you know it just got out of hand so we kind of stopped that then. We don't even bother doing that anymore.*
>
> ***Sit out and use your front garden?***
>
> *No, well I don't have a front garden but my neighbour would have a front garden so we'd sit in there do you know but we don't even do it anymore we can't do you know.*
>
> *Yeah I used to be able to .. over there out my back with the kids trampoline they'd be playing ... only the deckchair and in and out with the bottles because that's where my kids were reared, out the back. Like when I lived over there, I could sit there in peace for hours and say my sister would come down or my friends come down and they'd all hop in and out. You can't do it down there"*
> (Young Female Parents Group Carew / Kincora. Hereafter YFPGCK)

A related concern was articulated by one of the mothers who is concerned at the impact the high visibility of drug users in the locality is having on her daughter.

> *"I dread the summer… my first year in Carew Park was last summer and I*

hated it. Now I love the house, if I could just pick it up and move somewhere else but to leave my young one out she watches everything she's very clever, she picks up on everything and they do be out in the fields stoned off their heads asleep and they're asleep in the garden next door and then they're tapping you for a fag, they're after a little bit of sugar and she's taking everything in, she soaks up everything, she comes in at night then and I get a hundred more questions, why were his eyes like that? Why was she asleep in the garden? What am I supposed to tell her like? She soaks in everything, I'm dreading the summer now this year because she's older again and she watches everything" (YFPGCK)

The young people aged between 18 and 24 reported similar issues to those discussed above by the young women, and were particularly sensitive to sizeable drug problems in their estates.

"Heroin, you'd often see people off their faces on it…I often went to school with people and you'd see them now like and they are a total different person from when you knew them…wrecked, skinny, ugly, horrible…coming up asking you for money or help me please, you don't want to talk to them then…" (Mixed Group of Young People. Hereafter MGYP)

This group saw drugs as the main problem facing them in terms of community safety and related a series of stories of attempted robberies and general harassment by drug users. They also linked drug use to the empty houses and to the increase in general levels of crime in the estates, but also in Limerick City as a whole. Several of the young people noted that they would not walk around certain areas of their locality / Limerick City even in the daytime, due to the presence of so many drug users.

While the older residents focused more on the joyriding issue, it was suggested that one reason that they did not discuss the drugs issue as much as younger residents is related to differences in their lifestyle. Most of the elderly reported moving about the estates less frequently than their younger neighbours, as well as going to bed earlier and not looking out onto the street after six o' clock. This means that they are more likely to miss seeing or perhaps not recognising much of the drug related behaviour that was discussed by the younger residents that we spoke to.

Anti-social Behaviour

The young women from Southill also report low level anti-social behaviour by younger teenagers (this is discussed in detail in a later section of the report) as being a further reason why they don't use their gardens or yards. All report having golf balls

thrown at them, being verbally abused and / or being threatened for "looking at people". This was similar to concerns expressed by the elderly residents of Southill, but it is far more amplified in relation to this age group. Interestingly, for some of the estate workers that we spoke to, some behaviour that is identified as anti-social behaviour is understood simply as kids playing / messing about, and is seen as behaviour that they themselves had engaged in during their childhood / teenage years.

> *"Someone kicking a ball against your gate or your wall isn't bloody anti-social behaviour. All kids do that, we did it you know, our grandchildren are going to come on and do it.*
>
> *There's a pole down in the middle of Carew Park that we used for a swing… and I'll tell you one better the mothers came out in the summer and put the rope up and in the summer the mothers held the skipping ropes and done it and everyone chipped in and bought lollies and sweets and this was your summer. The same mothers whose children who I remember being on that swing right now are older women whose kids are all moved on and now call it anti-social behaviour.*
>
> *Yeah but their tolerance levels change as well you know*
>
> *And that's the difficulty now, but how do you define that line because it probably is to them, it is annoying them"* (Estate Workers Group)

In complete contrast, for some residents (particularly elderly residents) this type of behaviour is perceived of in a totally different way. These residents are intimidated and scared by such actions. Indeed, one of the key individuals that we spoke to recalled that

> *"someone actually told me the other day and it was the worst experience she ever had in her life was someone would not stop kicking the ball at the side of the house and she said to her living room or that side where the wall is she was sitting there watching the TV and the belting of the ball constantly you know, she was afraid to come out"* (City Council Official)

Being 'seen to see things'

Finally, all of the young mothers from Southill noted their concern at being out late in the evening or at night, not necessarily in relation to poor lighting and fear of mugging, which was noted by the elderly, but more in terms of being 'seen to see things'.

> *"I wouldn't walk down that hill now at 11 o'clock at night you know because you see too much and you don't want to be seeing anything"* (YFPGCK)

This also applies to looking out of windows, to using front gardens and to simply being around the streets:

> "*I just don't go out at night. I had to stop going out the front door to smoke a fag, I just kind of don't even look out the window if I see someone fighting and I was never like that living over there never. If there was something going on I was at the front door with a full view that was me, I would stand here and smoke a fag one or two o'clock in the morning and watch they'd be killing one another - hold on there lads that was it. If I stand at my door now they're attacking you, what are you looking at? Oh my God and I'm fairly loud to them as well I'd answer them back which is not good then you see that's what happens to you*". (YFPGCK)

Some of the elderly residents that we spoke to are so afraid to even be seen looking at groups of young people who may be causing trouble that many of them no longer even open their curtains. The reality for many of these elderly residents is a life spent primarily in the back rooms of their houses, only venturing out after dark if in a group or if they are being collected, never intervening, and feeling as though there is no one they can call upon to enforce law and order.

> "*If you hear a noise you're jumping*
>
> *You can't sleep*
>
> *I just cover my head at night*
>
> *Jumping out of your skin at the same time yeah saying is that someone trying to break in.*
>
> *I used to look out the window if I'd hear something before but I don't even go near the window now*". (Elderly Group Southill. Hereafter EGSH)
>
> "*A lot of people stay on their own though, a lot of people don't come out at all anymore like they used to, well I didn't see them anyway around.*
>
> *That's a fact now that people, the doors are closed at six o'clock and that's it*" (Elderly Group Ballinacurra Weston. Hereafter EGBCW)

The fear of "seeing things" when combined with the fear of "the junkies" is having a major impact on community safety for these residents who have most often abandoned the street as a public space, thus leaving it for those who engage in anti-social behaviour. Again this has huge implications for an overall sense of community. The main impact of this fear is the loss of street life and the freedom to use the street and the front of their houses as an extension of their home. This dislocation from

public space is hugely problematic. People are obviously limited by it, as related above, but it also reduces the chances of anti-social behaviour in particular being challenged or being dealt with in an informal manner.

The fear of being 'seen to be looking' also transfers to the low involvement of younger people in the various residents associations and committees. The young women we spoke to in Carew and Kincora Parks were keenly aware of what they saw as the dangers involved in joining such committees (along with the subsidiary feeling, shared by many, that such meetings, associations and committees are merely 'talking shops' from which no practical achievements or developments emerge)

> "*There is a lot of community things around but no one does it, no one do you know gets involved or you just get the right probably ten people from one estate that'll all go to all these meetings*"
>
> *I remember in Sunnyside when we were having all the big problems a couple of years ago and we had a meeting, a few meetings but like that the people that were causing problems found out about the meetings*
>
> *And they were coming to probably see who's meeting who*
>
> *Yeah and I ended up getting attacked for it. We couldn't go no more do you know what I mean? There was nothing done about it because we were all rats then at that stage do you know this kind of a thing, so you kind of tend to just keep your mouth shut*". (YFPGCK)

The loss of street life referred to in this section is playing a key role in the 'downfall' of these areas. All of our respondents related to us stories of how these places used to be central to the life of the community. The community was said to be involved in the street with mothers talking, kids playing, daily interactions with neighbours and shopkeepers and so on. The loss of this sense of community is seen to feed back into housing tenancies, creating the cycle of a high turnover of residents, vacated houses, rising anti-social behaviour etc.

Visibility of the Regeneration Process

A key issue for many of the residents we spoke to was Regeneration and the visibility of progress being made. Seeing progress being made has both a symbolic and a very real value for people living in the communities in question. Progress for these residents was primarily identified as being about the demolition and rebuilding of houses.

The symbolic value of physical regeneration for the residents centres on the sense that something is being done and that they, as a community, have not been forgotten. A key issue for the elderly residents from Southill was the sense that their community had been sidelined in favour of other neighbourhoods:

> "*I'm in Keyes Park as well and I love it there but unfortunately now nine of my neighbours have gone out of it through anti-social behaviour, burning houses, stolen cars, we've had a terrible few years up there and that was the start of the Regeneration when Fr. Pat brought it to a head and we were supposed to be one of the first people to be looked after but now we seem to be the last from what I heard recently that they're not going to be building up there for a long time*".

> "*Start in Moyross and Edward Street and it was Keyes Park that brought it all to a head and now we're just left in limbo again*" (EGSH)

The feeling of being 'left in limbo' was very strong with this group, many of whom had lived in the area for more than 40 years. Fewer than half of those we spoke to wanted to move, but felt the uncertainty, the lack of progress and the sense that while demolition and de-tenanting in the area is actively ongoing, the rebuilding is too slow to start in many areas. Compounding this is their belief that neither the City Council nor Regeneration Agency officials can tell them when to expect change. Symbolically this has a very detrimental impact on people's quality of life:

> "*We're trying to hold on to it (the house) like you know but we don't want to go any place either we want to stay there. But they're telling us that our place is not being touched until there are houses being built but like they say we'll be up in Mount St. Oliver's[4] by the time we get it do you know what I mean*" (EGSH)

Two of the parents in the Ballinacurra Weston Group are community activists who wholeheartedly welcomed the Regeneration project at the beginning. They state that

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[4] Mount Saint Oliver's is a municipal graveyard in Limerick City.

they now feel that the regeneration of their area has not yet begun. A lack of information and what is perceived as an unwillingness to listen to some residents is cited by residents in both estates. The sense of being left behind by what is seen as the slow progress of the regeneration programme is compounded by the amount of misunderstanding that has grown up around projected progress. For example, in Southill, one member of the elderly focus group, Mara, tells us how another member, Janet, had thought she was moving immediately when the plans were shown to her:

> "*Do you see them [pointing towards the Regeneration offices]? Which was very good they came on to help and we had this promise and that promise, she went home and started packing did you not [indicating another woman, Janet, in the group]? She thought she was getting a house out of it the following week she packed... for three years waiting and that's no word of a lie, she packed because she thought she was going within three weeks the way they were speaking.*
>
> *He had pictures of houses and all showing them to us that we were getting.*
>
> *And nothing has happened, they keep knocking the houses*
>
> *We saw the plans and that was the end of the story.*
>
> *I've all the things packed above in the loft still*
>
> *She has and that's no lie. And it got very quiet since didn't it?*
>
> *Oh Jesus we were [excited] for one night but I've been suffering ever since*" (EGSH).

All of the members of the elderly focus group from Southill own their own houses, having bought them in the 1970s and 1980s when they were younger and the estates were very different:

> "*A pleasure it was to walk up O'Malley Park a few years ago...and to look at the gardens and the lovely homes and people working so hard to keep them together, all that pleasure [is] gone*" (EGSH).

Many feel trapped now and unable to move due to the fact that they own their homes, as opposed to their perception of the apparent ease which comes with leaving a rental property:

> "*And if you're renting a house they'll move you quicker than if you own your house*
>
> *You've no come back at all once you own your house*" (EGSH)

This is also echoed by the parents group in Ballinacurra Weston who, as fellow home owners also feel trapped:

> "*Well I guess for me I don't know about anyone else but this is where I live this is my home, given the choice I wouldn't be here to be quite honest with you.*
>
> *I wouldn't be here either*
>
> *If I could afford to leave, sell my house and go I would be gone*
>
> *I certainly feel if we had a will and a way to get out of here we would be gone. Now I wouldn't have said that 10 or 15 years ago*
>
> *No neither would I definitely not*" (Parents Group Ballinacurra Weston. Hereafter PGBCW).

Residents in both of these groups feel that the financial offers made by the Council to buy their houses are not sufficient, and many of the older residents in particular are unwilling to take on repayments.

> "*When regeneration came in everything was laid out on the table, anybody wanting to leave we gave them a house for a house now its all different now they knock at your door and say we will give you 35K and we will give you another house for €70 a week, what they are technically doing is money lending in my opinion, they are giving you 35K and taking it back at €70 a week, you pay back the money they gave you and they have taken your house for free, you know they have literally taken your house off you and they must think people are very stupid and naïve like that.*" (PGBCW)

The bulk of the respondents in these groups note that they do not want to leave their homes and the places that they grew up in and that they would prefer if the problems were addressed, the regeneration was progressed more rapidly, and some sense of security and stability returned to what were previously very solid, stable working class communities. There are stable areas remaining within many of the estates and residents living in those areas are extremely anxious that they be maintained and protected. However, particularly in Southill there is a sense that the public disorder and low level anti-social behaviour is intensifying and spreading rapidly. One woman home owner who has lived in Southill for 37 years tells us:

> "*I love it here, we never had any trouble up here never.*
>
> **Okay and will you be able to stay or are they going to knock your house?**
>
> *Well we hope to stay, we're not going anywhere, so few years [left] we're not*

going. And although now we'll say, eventually they'll drive us out. Young fellas that's coming down from other parts battering stones at the window. Two weeks ago. That I never had. Two windows broke and they're still throwing because there's plenty stones to throw". (EGSH)

The feeling of being penalised for ownership of their homes is compounded by the transitory nature of many of their neighbours who come and go, with many of our respondents citing houses changing hands without any official knowledge or apparent interest. These short-term residents, often younger people, move in and out reflecting what the elderly residents see as a key issue in the problems of their estates. The high turnover of residents has contributed greatly to the sense that the community which existed previously has been lost because people no longer know who they are living next door to. Further to this is the fact that many of the younger residents feel no sense of attachment to these neighbourhoods and do not seek to put down roots or to invest in relationships with their neighbours. Many of the younger people we spoke with have moved away from the estates they grew up in, often not through choice, but through housing availability and many are hoping to move again to escape anti-social behaviour. This obviously has implications for building community and is manifest most strongly in the sense that very few of the younger people know their neighbours or feel they could call on them for help.

The elderly residents in particular identify the importance of the visibility and openness with regards to residency which was maintained via the role of the rent-man. The rent-man was identified as a visible and official community figure who, because he called regularly to all houses collecting rent, knew who lived where and who he should be collecting rent from. As we will document in subsequent sections of this report, the loss of such figures, which also includes Gardaí on foot patrol, have decreased the feeling of cohesion and security for many of the residents to whom we spoke:

"*The ruination of the whole thing is when the rent men stopped calling to the doors anyone could give their ticket / their card to pay the rent*

No one knew who was living in [which house]

To say who owned the house do you know what I mean? When the rent man was knocking on the door there was none of that and when that stopped everyone, they were going in and out of houses like … We used to be above saying how did she get a house, how did she get a house?

> *They were changing hands without the Corporation even knowing about it.*
>
> *Yeah nobody's checking up on them*" (EGSH)

The elderly residents also clearly identify that while physical regeneration is urgent, there is little point in simply rebuilding houses and putting people back into similar situations. The respondents were especially adamant that the underlying social problems, particularly relating to poor parenting skills, long term unemployment and substance abuse must first be addressed.

> "*Even if they do build new houses ... there's going to be no change in the people that's going to be living up here*". (EGSH)

The Limerick Regeneration Agencies have concentrated considerable resources on social regeneration up until this point in time in order to address such issues. Indeed, the HSE official that we spoke to stated:

> "*I think the regeneration project has benefited probably from the experience of the CEO in previous locations in that from the start he recognised that physical regeneration on its own would not be enough, so actually we probably had more social regeneration projects happening in Limerick than in previous locations in the country helped by the fact we had no money for the physical regeneration anyway until the last 6 months, so I believe that the serious activity has gone on around social regeneration... I think that they have sort of integrated much better over the last while in existing systems and recognising that they can't do it all in one, and I think the whole process of research and evaluation they have helped to fund to be fair, it's going to give them sort of guidance into the future. I think they have something like 40 social regeneration projects*".

However, many of the residents (and indeed some of the key individuals) that we spoke to expressed concern that little has happened on the issue of social regeneration.

> "*As far as we were concerned no social regeneration had happened yet but they were after spending millions and we still cant find out where it went*" (PGBCW)
>
> "*I can see the physical change in the estates but progress in the social side of things is extremely difficult*". (City Council Official)

This is a very serious finding but one which was explained by the respondent from Limerick Regeneration Agencies.

> "*Since we started the regeneration process in 2007 we have put major and ongoing emphasis on community involvement and thus bringing them closer to the decision makers. By far the greatest set of issues that constantly arise at these meetings over all the areas are those relating to the Local Authority*

and that remains the situation. We are regularly 'caught' between the community and the local authority and taking sides is not always an option. While much progress has been made we are absolutely not happy with the level of progress made and more could and should have been done at this stage of the process".

"Certainly a lot of people feel that from a social regeneration point of view it should happen quickly, get it sorted that's what you are there for and when anything happens there, what the hell is regeneration doing, doing nothing up there at all…. I think it's important that we send a signal that it's not you know. We have concentrated on social, it's kind of balancing the whole lot on the basis that we have to keep the community on board"

The findings from this research suggest that the sending of such "signals" is something that is required urgently. The perceptions of residents and some key respondents are at odds with the reality in some instances; for example, we saw earlier that there are a wide range of initiatives that are being funded by the LRA under social regeneration. Many of these initiatives are not known about by the general public and in some instances while the initiatives themselves may be known of, the input / support from the LRA, City Council, or the HSE for example is not. Thus, we would argue that the provision of information about the social regeneration project and the initiatives that are being undertaken / supported needs to be vastly improved. An improvement in the provision of such information has the potential to alter the perceptions of residents and address (in some way) many of the issues raised in this report.

The Physical Environment

Demolition & De-tenanting

It is fair to say that the policy of demolition pursued over the last number of years has improved some areas, while resulting in a rapid deterioration in the quality of life for residents in other areas. Accordingly, it was not surprising that we encountered mixed views on whether demolition and relocation policies are working (the guards for example find it makes their job easier) or adding to the problems of those residents who remain in the estates. In fact disagreement on the issue of demolition was evident even between our City Council interviewees.

The highly visible physical degradation and neglect of areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities, all of whom note the depressing sight of rubbish and graffiti alongside vandalised houses, playgrounds and open areas.

> *"...there isn't much pride there at the moment but there isn't much reason to have pride I suppose because when the houses are boarded up they just look desperate"* (Female parent Weston – Hereafter referred to as FPBCW)

The issue of boarding up houses which are then stripped of anything of value by thieves, and burned out, often by younger teenagers, also has implications beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. There are very real health and safety concerns relating to the abandoned houses. These include the moving of horses into abandoned gardens; the proliferation of rats and mice; utilising the vacant houses for drinking and drug use; and the general vulnerability which comes from being "*the house on the prairie*" or the one inhabited house in a row of boarded up properties.

> *"We have loads of horses up around our place, I have them at my gable end, I was never a gable end until I went in there but the houses got burned and now I have horses in my gable end"*. (EGSH)

The transmission of damp is also a particular problem, as when the houses are boarded up, water tanks and copper pipes are routinely stolen. This is a major concern for residents who report that the water supply is not automatically turned off at the time of the house being vacated. This has led to flooding, to the warping of walls and floors and to the subsequent loss of water pressure to surrounding houses:

> *"The worst problem is when they board up the houses they just go in around then and they'll burn them, they'll take the water tank and everything upstairs to the attic and they'll take the boiler out and anything they can get they'll take and all the water then is flooding into the people next door...*

> *They take the pressure off the water as well as soon as the houses ... there's no pressure like"*. (EGBCW)

> *"I'm living in a block of six now and five of them are boarded up and the smell in my house now is gone terrible...The damp, we haven't concrete floors at all we have timber floors like because the Corporation put in there's about that depth [indicates about six inches] under the timber floors so all the water like...I'd say my house is flooded really underneath"*. (EGSH)

Where residents remain in partly or wholly vacated terraces, a feeling of abandonment and vulnerability is paramount, much of which stems from the obvious visibility of being the only inhabited house in a row.

> *"I have only one neighbour across the road and [name removed] down the block from me and [name removed] and all them but really if they knock down the houses I think I'll go, I really don't want to be the house on the prairie because I think it makes it, you're ... standing out and people are... you're more vulnerable you know and I'd hate to go now because I love O'Malley Park I love it, I never had an ounce of trouble and I would hate to go but I don't want to stay either"*.

The residents feeling of being isolated and alone in a block of empty houses is compounded by a shared fear of fire. Because the empty houses are regularly burned out there is a genuine concern when a house is left idle beside an occupied property. The attics in some of the terraces are not sealed and fire spreads quickly.

> *"She wasn't gone a night when they went in, damaged the whole house and the man next to her is on his own, he had to get the fire brigade and the whole lot could have come down, he was flooded out with water and the whole lot. So it looks unsightly now for to see that house in the middle all boarded up and the rest of the houses look lovely"* (EGBCW)

Many of the residents spoke of this fear of fire as a constant and well founded terror, particularly at night when people are moving freely in and out of the abandoned properties. The elderly residents from Ballinacurra Weston also cite the problem of illegal dumping in empty houses, which once they have been boarded up are neglected and left to be vandalised:

> *"And the rubbish that's getting thrown at the bottom of the road and this part of the road down here you'll see for yourself. Now we have three dumps as well in Weston since they cleared it out, since they broke down the houses they have dumps made in three of them.*

> ***Where the old houses were?***

> *They take mattresses, beds, you name it it's in there and it's all starting up*

again because they're clearing out their houses and they're throwing all the dirt in there.

Okay. And so is that a big problem at the moment in this area then?

It is because it's awful, the depression in the morning when you're facing out it's awful" (EGBCW)

The Southill group were particularly disturbed at the measures taken to deter joyriding which involve the retaining of some empty boarded up terraces and the placement of large boulders across roadways to block the path of stolen cars.

"*Do you see the boulders we're living with? For Christ above you wouldn't see them in flipping Africa*

We're not in Southill at all we're in Rocky

Oh the boulders what an eyesore" (EGSH)

The distress and lack of security that comes from being surrounded by poorly maintained and boarded up homes with no continuity of residence is also echoed by elderly residents in Ballinacurra Weston who feel the sense of community which characterised their neighbourhood in the past is gone now. Indeed, one of the City Council officials that we spoke to saw the demolition process as directly contributing to the residents fear / experience of abandonment and vulnerability. They stated

"*We are trying to manage the process, we are trying to vacate, knock, its affecting people more than it would the reverse way so they haven't really though through what regeneration is, if you think about it if somebody came out to your estate and decided we are going to knock all the houses and rebuild a new estate because there is some underlying issue wrong with your estate, can you imagine the affect that is going to have particular as you knock and move people out, people get left behind they start to panic and there are people out there who see an opportunity to engage in anti-social behaviour and make their life even more miserable so… that process has made the community safety issue a bigger issue than what it was...*"

In contrast, the women in Carew / Kincora Park had fewer issues with the physical appearance of the neighbourhood. Indeed Carew Park looks to be extremely well maintained. They did not echo the elderly residents' concerns about dumping or vandalism. They shared concerns about boarded up houses, again not in terms of appearances but in relation to health and safety and to the drug use that goes on in empty houses. Interestingly, one young woman, a mother of two small children, tells

us

> "...I'd go back to Keyes Park in the morning if they'd house me up there. I only took the house in Carew Park because they gave me no other choice, take the house or you go back to the back of the list simple as like I fought for five years for a house
>
> **So you'd go back to Keyes Park even though I suppose to look at the two places?**
>
> Carew Park looks way nicer...But I'd take Keyes Park in the morning I would". (Young Female Parents Group Carew / Kincora – hereafter referred to as YFPGCK)

However, it is significant that where the regeneration project is progressing visibly, the residents are enthused – in some areas of Southill demolition has been perceived as hugely successful, with derelict houses knocked and rubble removed in the same day:

> "A perfect job, they knock a house in a day and by 5 o'clock it's grass for a lawn
>
> A perfect job they do, perfect job. They start at 8 in the morning and when they finish, they try to do it when the kids are at school and when they finish the place is levelled, grass is down
>
> And they leave it beautiful if we didn't have the boulders to live with" (EGSH)

In addition, one of the City Council officials that we spoke to saw the demolition process as having a positive impact on the physical environment in the estates and on the safety of the communities resident there.

> "I am conscious that as regeneration gets under way, first of all there is an immense physical improvement in the communities and in fairness to the people in those estates that are there they are doing their level best to manage within you know that can be very very difficult conditions. I don't know how I would survive myself, but they do and the estates physically are kept very well, they have improved enormously...I think that the Fitzgerald report brought a lot of Gardaí to limerick, that coupled with the demolitions and removing places for you know, the means of anti-social behaviour, derelict houses and so on [so it] has contributed hugely". (City Council Official)

Moreover, a number of the Gardaí that took part in the research believe that the demolition process has resulted in estates which are easier to police and therefore this process has contributed to the establishment of what are seen as safer communities.

> "Well Southill half the houses are gone. There is not as many people living

there anymore so It's quieter now there are not as many problems but sure half the house are gone there is not as many living up there any more (Garda 1)

Yea again in Weston there are a lot of houses gone so you wouldn't have that many up there as when I first started here in Limerick (Garda 2)

Well you go in there now you can see pretty much all around it, before it was all you know cul-de-sacs and there was lots of places they could hide out, it's a lot more open now like so it has made a difference alright like, so the physical difference has made a big difference (Garda 1)

OK, and what about Weston

Yes well there are less people in the area so there are less people to get to now and less people to keep an eye on really (Garda 2)

So it's easier to do your job as the number of houses came down

Yea it is" (Garda 2)

Finally, it is apparent that for the vast majority of the estates residents the knocking and removal of rubble is key to the sense that something is being done on the regeneration front, as the understanding is that new houses will not be built until the old houses are gone.

The impact of CCTV

There was mixed reaction about the impact / effectiveness of CCTV cameras in the estates. Some residents and key informants see the installation of CCTV cameras as performing an important 'visible' function in relation to residents' perceptions of their own safety.

"*If the Guards are around there is a sense that they will be safe, and its the same with the whole idea of CCTV and we are involved in getting the funding to put CCTV, and again like CCTV is not the answer to crime and anti-social behaviour and the whole lot but people feel secure when they know that there are cameras around*" (Regeneration Agency Official).

"**Would you feel any safer if there were cameras around the place?**

Oh yes I think we would

Oh they'd have to be an advantage" (EGBCW)

Interestingly while a number of the interviewees saw the cameras as providing an

effective deterrent to crime and anti-social behaviour they were also conscious that the installation of CCTV has merely displaced such activity to other locations.

> "*They put in the camera to act as a deterrent its fine but based on the knowledge that I have and my understanding of the cameras, it does deter but it also displaces. The people will go to the places that they cannot be seen…*" (City Council Official)

> "*We've seen a major increase in the last few months and the reason behind that is the amount of cameras that were installed in and around particularly O'Malley Park area and Keyes Park. It has shifted the trouble down to our area, they know that they're being caught on CCTV … they know our area isn't covered as much by CCTV so they're picking here to bring all their stolen cars down*" (Estate Worker)

> "*In Ballinacurra Weston you have only a hand full of cameras there and they know the areas that are not covered by cameras so they will spend longer in the area with a car or whatever, where as in Southill you have lots of cameras very little areas that are not covered so they have to get in and get going again because they can't stay too long in the area*" (Guard 1)

> "*I would say in the last year/year and a half what you had was how quiet it became in O'Malley/Keyes they started to shift their focus and if I'm to be honest we always knew that was going to happen*" (Estate Worker)

There were other interviewees who were very dismissive of the impact of CCTV; or rather they were dismissive of the (non) use of the cameras when minor crimes or anti-social behaviour had occurred. They were very critical of the claim that the "cameras were not working". This also fed into the residents' perceptions that the Gardaí did not take crime in their areas seriously (this is discussed fully later in the report).

> "*I'm not so sure that the cameras are very…, they're not because what you have is when a crime happens you have the Guards going down telling the resident do you have access to those cameras? They ask the resident or they tell a resident that the camera isn't working in their area or that, so it causes more problems ...*" (Estate Worker)

> "*You know it's like a lot of the activity going on with the other cameras above in Kincora why was none of that activity picked up?*" (PGBCW)

Finally, the effectiveness of the CCTV cameras was discussed in relation to live monitoring. Almost all interviewees believed that cameras which were monitored live by the police would prove to be much more effective than the current situation where the Gardaí had to request recordingss after an event had happened. Such proactive

monitoring was seen as being the most effective option for any future installation of cameras in the estates.

> *"They have been useful, they helped solve crime and so on. But where those cameras are recording and so on should be in a police station, should be in a Garda station full stop. That is the job of the Gardaí Siochána, very simple".*
> (City Council Official)

> *"There useless. One of them has been pointing for the last 9 days at a door, not even a front door, actually a tree, the tree in front of my house, now maybe it picks up our door cause I have never seen what it looks like on their screen but if you follow it it's hitting my tree*
>
> *Those cameras are a joke.*
>
> *And the last night a car was been burnt on the other side of it.*
>
> *They are not being manned*
>
> ***Will the ones with the live feed make a difference do you think?***
>
> *Oh it will, it will move it will be monitored it will be looked at, this thing is just pointing at the moment and just recording but what's the point in it like?*
>
> *I suppose the good thing about the live feed going back to Moyross again like, when we went to Moyross the live feed is working fairly well out there now.*
>
> *The live feed made a massive difference out there, people are a bit more weary and don't do half as much like cause they know they are being watched and it's a live feed going back to the barracks"* (PGBCW).

> *"If the cameras are pointing in the wrong direction and the trouble is happening behind you, your limited to the vision of the camera like, but if someone is manning those cameras and you can ring ahead and say look there is a fella here can you turn the camera and record it, then obviously its going to benefit your investigation"* (Guard 4)

The Behaviour of Minors & Poor Parenting

The issue of parenting arose spontaneously in all of the residents groups as well as in all of the interviews with non-residents. Although parenting and problems with young people are obviously very closely linked, it is important to separate them, as while we had anticipated a lot of concern relating to the behaviour of young people and children, we had not anticipated the strength of feeling related to the role of parents in the community.

The issue of poor parenting united the residents across all of the estates. These concerns centre around the growth in the numbers of young parents who are disengaged from the community, disengaged from work, and who are seen as either unable or unwilling to discipline and educate their children. The majority of the women we spoke to, with the exception of the two elderly groups, are single mothers and are aware of how difficult it is to raise children alone. Their condemnation of poor parenting is not the knee-jerk reaction of the media coverage of 'sink estates', but is based on their lived experience observing the effects of long term unemployment and substance abuse. They see clearly the cyclical process of neglect and the impact this is having, not only on their communities, but on their own children who are "tarred with the same brush".

> *"Like I'm a single parent and I'm very strict you'd have to be like. So I've two teenagers and... to me anyway I'm doing well with them so far because they're good ... I talk to them about drugs you see, I talk to them about everything that goes on, I talk to them about fellas... So they're kind of good thank God but like that there's other parents there and all they want is drink, smoking weed, their kids are out of control..."* (YFPGCK)

All groups linked the decline in community safety and community spirit to a rise in the granting of accommodation to very young, often single parents, most usually young mothers. A major problem associated with this was the perception that while housing was provided for them there was no support for parenting or household management.

> *"The greatest social problems seem to present either from the inability of people to parent or parents lacking the resources or skills to manage problematic children"* (City Council Official).

Some residents expanded on this theme, noting their concern for the future of these

young parents and their children, who as the next generation of parents are likely to continue the cycle of poor parenting, unemployment, substance abuse and social dislocation.

> "*It's a way of life to them, their fathers and their mothers did it before them, their grandmothers done it before them and now they're doing it and their children will do it after them*" (EGSH)

These children and their parents are what Hourigan (2011) refers to as the "disadvantaged of the disadvantaged". The residents that we spoke to have strong family structures and ties, and in many cases a history of work and / or community engagement and learning. They value education for their children and grandchildren and are concerned about the possibility of them drifting into anti-social and possibly even criminal behaviours. Concerns that a large and growing number of parents are abdicating responsibility for their own children's behaviour were also voiced very strongly, in this instance by a member of the mixed youth focus group, herself a young, single mother:

> "*My mother and father is married right and now loads of people like years ago there would have been more people that would have had their mother and their father but now it's a lot of single parents bringing up their kids and they can't control them…that's what's happening…*
>
> **Okay so it's a difficulty with parents not keeping the kids under control…?**
>
> *…its' not even that, it's just not teaching them proper morals or nothing like….*" (Mixed Group Young People hereafter referred to as MGYP)

The members of this mixed youth group see a distinct difference in the behaviour of children from what they remember of their (very recent) childhood. They explain this difference in terms of a combination of changing attitudes, most fundamentally among parents.

> "*You know the young children about eight or nine… their parents don't care what they do, they just leave them run wild out there …*
>
> *Nine year olds…yeah…and they are very cheeky…they are the most cheekiest I have ever seen…*
>
> **So is it different from when ye were that age…?**
>
> *Yeah, I would never have given other people cheek when I was eight or nine years old, my mother and father would have killed me like, I wouldn't have dreamed of doing something like that…*" (MGYP)

The young female parents, all single mothers themselves, also expressed similar views:

> "...younger kids now has no respect for the older you know the elderly or anything like that, yeah definitely I'd say changed, the younger kids nowadays think they're 20 and they could only be 11 like, do you know .. half the kids I think are allowed to do what... they're like drinking and do you know what it is as well drugs is after getting more common" (YFPGCK)

The understanding that young children are no longer respectful of adults, no longer viewing them as figures of authority is widespread, with multiple references made to the changes in attitudes and demeanour among very young children. The consensus is that this is coming from their parents who fail to discipline them or teach them how to behave. Additionally all the residents we spoke to mentioned fear of these children. There are a number of reasons for this; people are afraid of retaliation and of becoming a target for these children, however, they are also afraid of their parents. Previously, reflecting both the stronger community ties which existed when people knew their neighbours well and the associated informal way in which anti-social behaviour amongst young children was dealt with, the threat of 'I'll tell your mother' was enough to informally sanction the behaviour of such children. This could have been followed by telling a child's parents of their misbehaviour secure in the knowledge that they would then discipline the child. Currently however, threatening to tell a child's mother results in counter threats and very few of the residents we spoke to would in such circumstances actually complain to a parent about the behaviour of their children.

> "…you can't, you don't know the kids whereas everybody used to know all the kids before
>
> And you could threaten them I'm telling your mother... But now 'I'll tell your mother' and they're saying you do and I'll break your window.
>
> Or they'll just tell you to fuck off do you know what I mean.
>
> Yeah that's a big change isn't it
>
> The attitudes have changed is all, if I answered someone when I was growing up my mother would stand on my forehead". (MGYP)

While fear of retaliation or becoming a target for children is linked to common anti-social behaviour such as having windows broken, excessive noise outside of the

home, and having bins set on fire, there is a also a deeper fear of more serious repercussions related to their parents.

> *"If you're my neighbour my child does something to upset you and you come to my door and I threaten you with some kind of a weapon and you're afraid of me, my child need never do anything to you again but you will live in fear in that scene, and I think a lot of that has occurred within the community".* (Outreach Worker)

> *"I am aware of an issue where her child had her bicycle stolen and the parents were afraid to go to the family about that issue because they were afraid they were going to get burnt out...the parents weren't going to take issue with the kid that stole the bike, they were taking issue with the person who were making the complaint, so there is a massive disconnect of what the child is doing and what the parents are being held responsible for and that is a gap that has to be filled"* (Community worker).

Moreover, because the majority of residents no longer know all of their neighbours they don't know always who they may be dealing with. As the elderly residents in Southill put it:

> *"...you're only talking about a few families up here*
>
> *A few families*
>
> *About three*
>
> *Very few families and their children and their grandchildren*
>
> *And they're extended and extended and extended*
>
> *Their children and grandchildren*
>
> *If you argue with one you argue with a hundred. Very simple"* (EGSH).

Likewise, residents in Ballinacurra Weston expressed similar concerns.

> *"It's the extent of people, we'll say the younger generation who have got involved in crime and it's the connection that they have that you are in fear of all the time. You know your neighbour could be the nicest person going but you don't know what they are involved in, well you know any wrong word and you don't know, it's the fear element that's there. You know there is a young generation there and they can actually do what they like. It's intimidating now you know.*
>
> *They are totally out of control. You know even the children of these criminals you know they can do what they like, you're talking about 5 or 6 year-olds that will come and belt stones at your window, break your car window or whatever you know.*

If you say anything to them they will go home and get their parents"
(PGBCW)

The fear that if you argue with one child you may unwittingly be arguing with serious criminals is well founded and has arisen in a number of studies focused on these estates (Griffin and Kelleher 2010, p.32):

The disconnect between neighbours is also mirrored in the growing disconnect between older and younger residents, which again has huge implications for community safety. The process by which the street becomes lost as a publicly owned and shared space is a circular one – people know their neighbours less well, they are afraid to challenge misbehaviour among children, the behaviour continues unchallenged and may escalate to the point whereby people are afraid to look out onto the street when they hear a disturbance. As public street life is lost there are fewer chances to interact with and to engage with neighbours and get to know children, and thus the cycle continues.

All residents are aware that children under 12 cannot be arrested however confusion remains about the role of the HSE in relation to out-of-control young children below the age of criminal responsibility. Some residents feel very strongly that the HSE and the council should be held responsible in the absence of parental responsibility, however, this is not something that falls within the remit of either organisation, unless in the case of the HSE the children are already in care, or with regard to the council, there is an official move to have a family evicted because of anti-social behaviour. These issues are dealt with in the section 'Compromised Safety? Responses to Community Safety'.

Finally, a clear distinction is also made between 'good children' and 'bad children' – ours and theirs. Residents feel strongly about the outsider perceptions of children and young people from the regeneration areas, noting that their children and grandchildren – 'good children' – are regarded in the same way as badly-parented or out-of-control children. The gradations of class and status within the estates are much more nuanced from the perspectives of those who live there, than from broad and often indistinct understandings on the part of outsiders (Robertson et al. 2008, p.ix). There is a sense

of resignation about the behaviour of 'those children', as discussed above. It is understood that unless parents can be encouraged, enabled or even forced, through fines etc, to take control of them that the situation will not improve.

> "*If I'm being paid for my 15 year old by the state to feed him, clothe him, look after him but I actually don't see him from one end of the week to the other. He's not coming in for something to eat, he's up in Nana's. Nana's feeding him. Well I shouldn't be given that money for that child. If that child at 11 years of age is out at 2 or 3 in the morning, I shouldn't be paid for that child. That is neglect at the end of the day, so the HSE have to be involved*" (Estate worker).

> "*The only way in my view that you can get the parents to listen to what we are saying and take notice of what is going on and to engage in a parenting program and be hands on with parenting is to actually hurt the parent themselves, the answer is not to put the parent in jail because the kids aren't going to school the answer is to hurt the parent in the pocket, if she is getting money for the child their should be an issue whether that should be withheld until she engages in a parenting program and is more hands on with their kids, they need to look at that… there is a complete disconnect of what the child does and what the parent is taking a responsibility for, there is a huge gap there and until that gap is filled we are going to have problems in this country with kids forever...*" (City Council Official).

Youth and Gender

Many of the parents we spoke to have huge fears for their teens and for their pre-teens. Some don't let their kids outside as they afraid of who they will hang around with or who they may encounter.

> *"For my kids I would be very wary of where they are, what's there, who they are with, you know. You're trying to monitor and keep track and it's kind of hard with a 22 year old, you can't kind of say well you cant go out, but I would be very conscious if he was in the community who he'd be with and even for a lot of young people I work with like I can just see a lot of the kids most of the kids out there are good but they are getting roped in slowly to bigger things that are happening and bigger people are getting hold of them and they are getting dragged more and more into crime but its higher levels of crime"* (Female Parent Weston)

> *"I've a brother now he's 11 and my mother is frightened to let him outside of door cause he could be outside the door kicking a ball around, a group of young fellas that could be 15 or 16 come up then, give him a slap or give him a kick do you know what I mean like"* (MGYP)

There is an assertion that girls are 'as bad as boys' and parental fears etc do not vary widely according to gender.

> *"Two girls slashed my daughter's face last year.*
>
> ***What age is your daughter?***
>
> *She's 16 now but she was 15 when it happened like I mean she was devastated over that they just, they wanted to fight her and she wouldn't fight them so when she went to walk away then they just done that with a Stanley blade and just sliced her whole face and do you know she's very quiet now like.*
>
> *Girls are vicious though aren't they*
>
> *Yeah girls are worse. Girls are the main cause of half of the boys arguing and things as well aren't they? Girls are bitches.*

> *"I think with girls like they just crave a bit of drama do you know*
>
> *Like I have this behind me and that behind me and my cousin is a drug dealer and my cousin here is a hard man.*
>
> ***Okay well that's really interesting though that like so girls are kind of would use like my cousin is or my brother is to threaten***
>
> *Yes that's what happens, that's what happens and then they all form gangs that's what, it's gangs"* (YFPGCK)

> "*Some girls are worse than men…some girls 8 or 9 are pure cheeky….so they are bold, cheeky and they'd be going around with the young fellas….*
>
> **Okay is it in terms of gangs, gangs of young ones and young fellas and stuff, would they be separated by gender like would all the girls hang around together….**
>
> *No mixed…*
>
> **And do you think as they get a bit older they kind of separate out….**
>
> *No depends like*" (MYGP)

Rather than traditional fears for girls, many of the parents feared more for their young boys and men seeing greater dangers for them.

> "*I think do you know if he's not around them like he wouldn't because he was acting like them and everything else*
>
> *But it doesn't matter where you live at the end of the day because it's going to be everywhere that's what with the boys as he gets older you're going to be more concerned that he's going to be involved in drugs or. My biggest fear would be that now with the boys to be honest.*
>
> *So it would be weekends and it would be drugs and you know and keeping them in school and those kinds of worries. My thing is the longer you can keep them in school the better off you'll be and you know, and getting them in early and keeping kind of some handle over where they are and who they're with*"(YFPGCK)

The general feeling expressed by those residents that we spoke to is that teen girls are so tough now that there is not the same vulnerability gap. However there were some important clarifications made to these assertions, in terms of the potential for sexual violence.

> "*You're telling me so that a girl walks down the road on her own and there is a bunch of lads at the corner, sure god only knows what's going to happen to her, that depends if you are a women so if there is a bunch of boys at the corner and there is a boy walking down obviously a boy is going to defend himself, Ya so there is a difference….there is….*
>
> *An awful lot of them young fellas are only perverts anyway I swear to god like…dirty talk out of their mouths when you are walking past them….*" (MGYP)

> **"Would you have particular concerns living in the area as a woman?**
>
> *I would … unfortunately there has been a couple of incidents unreported in the area, sexual assaults and different things like that, now I have been told about them being a female worker in the area … but for the first time in my life I don't feel safe …I'm always more conscious and more aware now of where I'm walking if there are people behind me and that wouldn't have bothered me before you know but I'm all the time more aware of it now and its not a nice way to be either*" (Female Parent Weston)

It is highly significant that the young people talk about their fears for their younger siblings, perceiving that the problems among young people are getting worse, even within the small age gap between them and their siblings.

> "Y*our brother?*
>
> *He'd be fragile like, if someone came up to him he wouldn't defend himself, he'd be just standing there, he wouldn't know what to do like, he's fragile, but then like I've a sister and she's 14 and she is as quiet as a mouse but if you start on her like she'd rip your head off do you know that sort of way…I mean I wouldn't even get smart with her like, she's so quiet but if you said something to her she'd rip your head off but he doesn't have that bottle like, he wouldn't be able to go out on the road and defend himself if someone came up to him like…*" (MGYP)
>
> "*If you even go up to another part of Weston and you'd be told like its Ballinacurra against like Garryglass in Soccer, now its like fighting between them, do you get me, the young fellas I mean…its totally different now…*" (MGYP)

The loss of volunteering in the communities is noted. In particular the residents that we spoke to perceive that there are no parents involved in the running of scouts or guides or bands etc. These are all activities that any one could join but now there is arguably a professionalization and even a criminalisation of youth activities. The predominant perception is that any youth services must be official and must be in response to behaviour rather than being about proactively preventing bad behaviour / rewarding good behaviour. There is also an important understanding that young people and particularly troublesome young people (mostly young men) are over represented and over catered for in terms of programmes, projects and public concern. The dominant perception is that there is nothing provided for younger kids and nothing provided for the 'good kids' in the estates.

> "*Nothing, for the children there's nothing.*
>
> *Yeah there's nothing available for small kids,*

> *But for teenagers there's a good few bits and pieces for teenagers a good few different clubs and sports and the new area centre*
>
> *Yeah they're kind of doing a lot for them aren't they*
>
> *That park you're talking about down in Carew is that the place in front of Sunnyside there?*
>
> *Yeah that is … That little square*
>
> *That's all it is a square*" (YFPGCK)

Many of the facilities and trips are perceived as being available to kids who have already been in trouble.

> "*The nice little kids that's up around here beautiful children are not allowed because you have the thugs coming in beating them, telling them get out of it. As simple as that.*
>
> *Or they're not part of a youth group or service, I mean it's the groups that get to use the facilities because I mean if I was walking up here at half six this evening and that football pitch out there it's never used, you can't use it because it's locked and it's padlocked.*
>
> *That's right…*
>
> *If you want to get access to that then you have to be in an outreach or a youth group or community group whereas the children who aren't in the system?*
>
> *But it's the outreach that's using everything and who's the outreach helping?*
>
> *The Thugs*"

There is a related fear that some kids may actually get into or seek trouble in order to get access to these things but this has not been supported by any evidence beyond the anecdotal.

There is a strong concern amongst residents that girls are left out of community projects. The neglect of girls at community level is interesting given that the vast majority of older teens and adults engaged in community activity are women. Men are totally underrepresented at community engagement level, in residents groups, parenting, and youth groups etc. Male involvement in community engagement is essential and needs to be targeted as men are regarded as being at the root of many community problems – they are seen as being both the cause of anti social / criminal

behaviour and also as being most at risk from it.

Finally, the issue of territory and young people is interesting. There is a lot of movement between the two areas which may not have been anticipated, though this movement is often accompanied by fear.

> "***That's really interesting you say you haven't been in Weston in ages and you wouldn't go in there…***
>
> *I would if I had to go there for something like, I wouldn't go there if I had choice, it's a kip.. No offence [name removed]….*
>
> *I know like, I'm the same, I'm from there like and I haven't been up around Clarina since I was about 14,15 I wouldn't go up there like…I'd be frightened I'd get a beating if I went up there….*
>
> *I live in Prospect now and if I'm going to town I won't go through Weston on my own I'd go all the way around…*
>
> ***Why won't you go through it….***
>
> *In case my bag would be robbed or get attacked…they'd start on you for nothing….*
>
> *I'm from there and they would start you there for nothing…even walking to the local shop*" (MGYP)

The Stigmatised / Pathologised Identity of the Estates

The Limerick Regeneration Agencies (2008, p.35) state that the "attention given to the disadvantaged estates of Limerick particularly in relation to criminality has resulted in an intensely negative external image of the estates and of Limerick generally as well as under-mining the functioning of and service delivery" in these communities. Residents feel that particularly negative public and official perceptions of the communities in which they live remain. These outsider views do not distinguish between what they identify as 'decent people' who have lived in these areas for generations and have watched them deteriorate through a combination of social and demographic change, entrenchment of unemployment, drug abuse, the unfettered rise of powerful criminal factions and the mismanagement of their estates. All of the residents feel that outsiders are not concerned at the plight of the majority of residents in these areas and that all are 'tarred with the same brush'. This phrase was used repeatedly:

> "*Oh they're all tarred with the one brush they're only from Southill everyone's the same up here*
>
> *Same tarred with the same brush*
>
> *Tarred with the same brush as simple as that, no matter how you try.*
>
> *Southill and Moyross is the same*". (EGSH)

> "*It's like you're living in this community and thinking why can't we have the same response and I do feel and people have often said they are used to it and it's their way of living and we are all kind of tarred with the one brush which I feel is very unfair you know because we deserve the same as the next person and everyone has the right to feel safe in their homes and not have to put up with what happens outside their home you know*". (FPBCW)

> "*They have preconceived notions about you know we are all tarred with the one brush*" (PGBWC)

However while residents are acutely aware of the pathologised / stigmatised image of their estate, only the mixed youth group identified a possible source of this stigmatised identity. They perceive that the media has played a prominent role in the negative / stereotypical / stigmatised construction of their localities.

> "*They only make up there own lines cause they get money off it…so the Limerick Leader or the Limerick Post or any of the national media…The news*

of the world, he did it on Limerick a few months ago....Paul Williams...he'd want to go away and get.....that Donal McIntyre...what he said about Southill is all lies...there were pictures in that that weren't even Limerick, there were in Dublin like, that will just show you. Trying to build the publicity up.

I think they love seeing things happening like, you'd notice if nothing happens for a few weeks aright, they'd re-run a story that happened two or three months ago, they have the same pictures but the words different about people, that's exactly it" (MGYP)

Additionally, it is significant that these teenagers (and some of the key individual interviewees) saw the media as playing a role in the empowerment of criminals.

"And half of them scumbags only love seeing their name in the paper....it glorifies them like, they feel like hard men when they see it....like if they were getting out in six months time they'd say it in the paper and they'd show a picture where they live, oh he is out in six months time and where he is from, oh limerick gang is getting out and stuff" (MGYP)

"we have complained about this for ages that even if your name is mentioned in the post you know it's a kind of almost like a badge of honour and you know it doesn't serve anybody well you know its not for the greater good" (Outreach Worker)

In contrast to the residents, almost all of our non-resident interviewees cite the media as having a major role to play in the negative portrayal of these estates. Firstly, they perceive that the media is constructing a negative stigmatised image of the estates through unbalanced / sensationalised stories about the estates and their residents.

"It's the media, they don't ever research their stories enough, they never get the truth in the situation, they are only looking for headlines, and we all know that is partly the reason why we are where we are in Limerick with the media, the media isn't helping the situation" (City Council Official)

"It really is portrayed an awful lot by the media, like you have murders more frequently in Dublin I mean whatever it is about Limerick they just seem to love the coverage of I don't know the gangs and stuff down here like, ...and they are selective in what they are showing as well" (Garda 4)

"It wouldn't be news worthy for them to pick it up and do articles on the certain groups that are doing work in the area, that would be a small column in the corner of the paper" (Garda 1)

This negative / unbalanced reporting of the estates is perceived as heightening the sense of fear experienced by residents <u>in</u> the estate.

"I suppose if you don't reside in the area then you are relying on the media to

inform you what's happening and if they are concentrating on the negatives and the big news stories and the sensationalisation of items and incidents and the whole lot that's going to be what's happening like isn't it you know" (Garda 1)

"*If you're looking at the paper and you seen where you live on the news as the main headline your going to be more cautious*" (Garda 3)

"*The thing about media coverage as well serves the heightening the sense of fear in those areas...it's not helping the situation, its making it worse, it panics people*" (Outreach Worker)

Moreover, most of the non-resident interviewees perceived that the media coverage was playing an active part in heightening the sense of fear <u>of</u> the estate.

"*When the Primetime programme came on, my own wife ... she wouldn't have worked in Southill, she'd know what south hill was but I remember her saying are you safe going up there, she saw the programme with those boys at night with the drugs and guns and she was saying are you safe going up there....she never, I worked in Southill and lived in Southill for a period of time and I lived in Moyross, and the issue is she had never ever asked me that question for a period of four and half years that I was coming over here every single day, are you safe working over there, because that programme to her.....and I was saying to her that that wasn't reality for most people, most people are law abiding citizens who want to get on with the community, who want to work with their community*" (Community Worker)

"*There is a huge media focus on it and it will blow the whole thing out of proportion in relation to what's going on in the estate, you know my concern when I came down first to Southill was, I had heard so much about it I was afraid to walk into it afraid to walk through it, like you were going to be shot the minute you moved into the estate and that was never the case*" (Regeneration Agency Official)

The failure to challenge each and every (mis)representation was identified as being as big a problem as the stories themselves. One of the community workers that we spoke to was adamant that while there was an organisation in the City which monitors media coverage of the city, it did not challenge the unrepresentativeness of the stories about these estates.

"*The Limerick co-ordination office, I think they should be ashamed of themselves...I don't see anything from the limerick co-ordination office about Southill, ... and I think that is the issue that we have, ... where the particular areas in the city are being down trodden on all the time then that to me is the responsibility of the people to say lets show them what's going on, lets highlight...*" (Community Worker)

Such perceptions are significant, as if people perceive that nothing is being done to

counter the (mis)representations of their estate then it has the potential to further erode confidence is the various agencies. In essence it is perceived as another sign that they have been abandoned. Challenging these (mis)representations is not the responsibility of the Limerick Communications office in isolation (in addition, given the scale of the negative coverage of these areas it is highly doubtful that the Limerick Communications office have sufficient resources at their disposal to enable them to do this); we believe that organisations such as the Limerick Regeneration Agencies, Limerick City Council, Paul Partnership etc also have a significant role to play in this regard.

Finally, a number of the key respondents saw the media as having an active role in the provision of (mis)information about which of the statutory agencies has responsibility for addressing which issues.

> "*It has never dawned on the media that the landlord of a house in Carew Park or Crecora park is responsible for the anti-social behaviour that is imitating from that house, it would never dawn on them to point in that direction, they would immediately point to the local authority because the media haven't done enough research, they haven't done their homework and they are making an assumption and that assumption gets printed on the first page of the leader and then everyone that reads the paper says its true*" (City Council Official)

Such views are extremely important given the lack of knowledge evident amongst almost all of the residents that we spoke to concerning which statutory agency was responsible for addressing particular issues (which we examine later).

(In)visibility

Those that we spoke to from the statutory agencies are adamant that good communication is now taking place between them and residents. They also state that the views and opinions of residents are taken into consideration on a range of different issues. This 'bottom up' approach to the regeneration of the estates is seen as being of vital importance if the project is ultimately to succeed. Such relationships are not without their difficulties though as illustrated by the excerpt below.

> "*The most important aspect of any of the areas is the whole sort of power around residents and residents' forums and I think from a regeneration point of view our relationship with the residents' forum blows hot and cold. We have had our ups and downs, and we had our rows and rackets that you would normally get but there is a huge amount of trust in us to deliver and I suppose prior to that the community would have felt that there is nobody listening to them... but our relations with the communities have been good*" (Regeneration Agency Official)

One of the key respondents believed very strongly in the 'bottom up approach' and the benefits that the involvement of the community can bring when policy decisions are being debated, although they question just how often this approach occurs in practice.

> "*I think that the real expertise where I have learnt the most on my work is from my clients and from the communities which they come, the level of knowledge and understanding and expertise that's there is truly remarkable and I don't see that reflected on any of the tables where policy decision are made*" (Probation officer).

Similarly, there is a very strong perception among the elderly residents that City Council officials and Regeneration Agency officials are unwilling to listen to residents who may be able tell them what will happen in a variety of situations. The perception that official bodies are unwilling to come out and to listen to voices on the ground is very strongly felt. This is particularly evident in relation to the knowledge of what will happen when houses become vacant and are left to stand empty:

> "*You see you know yourself what's going to happen and they won't listen to you*" (EGSH)

> "*And when they board them up you see they're drawing the vandals in, it's an advertisement.*

> *Now [name removed] house was boarded up today and that has been idle for ages, the curtains and everything left there, I guarantee to you now that house will be damaged tonight*

And it hasn't been damaged before it was boarded up?

No just because the curtains and everything was intact" (EGBCW)

"*Every house that has been burnt the young fellas are just going to take out the copper tanks to sell them, the kitchen and the doors are gone but it's been said so many times at meetings you would wonder how is it practical for the council not to take notice of people when they can be told by the residents that this is going to happen if you don't turn off the water do this, this and this.... There are houses there that have been boarded up which could have been allocated. There are thousands on the housing list there are loads of people in this area looking for houses and they have been told the houses are boarded up because so much has to be done and its been said at the meetings instead now you have the case where there is thousands of pounds worth of damage been done to every single house and the minute they are boarded up. As I said 4 hours last Friday that resident was barely moved out like and her house is now gutted*". (FPBCW)

The feeling that no one in power is willing to listen to their voices also impacts on the residents' attitudes towards meetings between resident committees and the various statutory agencies. There is a strong sense of disillusionment surrounding events of this kind where it is felt that nothing of practical value is achieved. Such meetings are viewed by many of the individuals we spoke with as mere 'talking shops' where misunderstandings multiply and voices on the ground are routinely discounted. Interestingly, one of the key individuals also highlights that sometimes the problems in relation to poor communication can lie with those involved in the residents' organisations.

"*I think that some of the community organisations can actually block access to the community as apposed to facilitate it and they have become the voice for the community, which they are not the voice of the community ... its about power its about maintaining power*" (Probation Officer).

Finally, the reluctance of the young women taking part in this research to get involved in residents' associations or committees suggests to us that a community safety forum would not be supported by them, and that indeed they may even regard it as a community safety issue in and of itself. When asked who they would report any problems to, the young women discounted the estate managers stating that they can't do anything for them in relation to problems with housing and anti-social behaviour. They noted that they would report serious criminal activity to the Gardai.

Compromised Safety? Responses to Community Safety

There is a very strong perception among the residents of both estates that problems in these areas are not taken as seriously as they would be were they to occur in more middle-class communities in the city. There is a sense that the issues of anti-social behaviour, arson, joyriding, etc are seen as 'natural' and regular occurrences in these communities so there is not the same sense of urgency related to addressing them. The sense that issues and problems are responded to differently was strongly echoed in an interview with a female parent in Ballinacurra Weston. She notes that there are very different levels of tolerance and understandings of what constitutes anti-social behaviour which required an official response.

> *"...the biggest issues for residents living here are seen as just small scale issues by the agencies I feel and I have heard them saying it like you know, they often say at meetings that's a small issue that needs to be dealt with somewhere outside, but for the resident or the person that has to deal with that anti-social behaviour it's the biggest part of their life at that time or moment and I do feel that enough has never been done to combat anti-social behaviour and from a personal point of view I think it's because of the area we live in that some of the anti-social behaviour that happens here would not be put up with in different areas because I think the Guards and the City Council would have different view points on that and I always say to them at the meetings if you come and live here and experience what the neighbours go through you might have a different view point on it..."* (FPBCW)

The response of the Gardaí

A strong contributor to the sense of vulnerability felt by the parents groups and the older residents is their perception that the Gardaí very often do not respond as needed. This is a particularly complex issue however, with several of the residents praising the Gardaí and indeed reminding us that more often than not their "*hands are tied just like ours are*" (EGSH) and that they are

> *"... only human beings. They're frightened as well because there's only two of them to maybe a dozen in a gang so you can understand their plight as well"* (EGSH)

This awareness of the difficulties faced by the Gardaí is balanced however by the very strong and widely shared sense that the Gardaí treat people from the regeneration areas differently. In order to unpack this very complex relationship a number of key issues need to be identified and outlined. Firstly, all of the elderly participants agree that there is a reduced Garda presence on the estates.

"I don't know if the guards go around enough on the beat either sure they don't? Before you had, you know you don't, I know we have a community guard there's a new one but I don't think they walk around at all

No you don't see the guards.

So when you're talking about the guards, you're on about the community guards, would you see community guards in or around the area very often?

They'd call here to the [community] centre now

But you never see them in and around the estates

No, no and I never see them up around our place either

You'll see the cars alright, the cars

Yeah but it's the community guards are on bicycles you don't see them at all". (EGBCW)

There is awareness on the part of the residents that this may be due to a reduction in resources, but they also link it to a more serious claim that problems in the regeneration areas are not regarded by the Gardaí as problematic so long as they remain within the boundaries of these estates. Interestingly, such views were also held by a number of the non-resident interviewees as illustrated below.

"I had an argument with the Gardaí recently that they do treat the different areas differently... there was an incident ... where there was quad biking going on and the immediate reaction of the Gardaí was that was a matter for the Limerick City Council because its a social housing estate but ... it didn't matter where it was, it was a public open space, quad biking going on so they told the residents of the community that this was a matter for themselves so I did my research with the public order act, ... I get back on to the Gardaí and I said its a public order offence if they are riding a quad bike on a green area, it doesn't matter if its in Southill or the North Circular Road. What would you do if it was the North Circular Road, you 'd go out and arrest that person but because it's in what they perceive to be a social housing estate, that's a matter for the Council...when you talk about perceptions, people need to understand that people have rights whether they are in a social housing estate or private estates and they all need to be treated the same, quad biking in Carew Park is the same as quad biking in the North Circular Road, its not allowed under the public order act and they have to be dealt with accordingly" (City Council Official)

"We had an incident here about five years ago on the estate where a known criminal family who would be part of the stuff that's going on and there was a fight between themselves but one of them took out a machete, actually I'd call it a scythe you know those big things, And he took it out and he actually tried

three times to decapitate his father's head in the middle of broad daylight in the middle of a green, he swung it, almost took his sister's arm off, ... not a single Guard arrived... In the end two cars came down and they walked down, picked up the guy involved, put him into the car, had a chat with him, got him back out of the car and took him in home. Ten minutes later he started again and they came back down, his girlfriend arrived in a car they put him into the car with her and sent them off and they walked from that scene like it had been a very small domestic little thing that had happened. To the Guards that was nothing, what they left on the estate was if they can do that in broad daylight we will never pick up the phone because we will never get justice for anything that happens to us if this is the worse thing to happen and they get away with it. And that is a shockwave throughout the community when things like that happen" (Estate Worker).

"I think with the Guards too they don't look at certain crimes up here as crimes at all. I mean if someone clatters off somebody's window or loitering around they're causing intimidation is not a crime up there, burning down a house is not a crime but if you go to Castletroy they'll have the technical unit in straight away to examine it. Now it's not the Council's job to come up and examine burned down houses the Guards have to but if they don't view it as a crime then and that's the problem they're not seeing things. They're not seeing certain behaviours in this community as crimes so if somebody was shot up there you have sixteen cameras that are all of a sudden working but if [name removed] window is being battered ...That's not a crime you know her window it's after costing her €200, she's terrified in her own house, the cameras aren't working then because they don't view it as a crime, it's acceptable. So there are certain behaviours from the Guards perspective if it happens within this community it's acceptable, if you take it outside of it then we're going to hassle ye so they're more inclined to stay within the community and these people then are experiencing the problems like you know and that's, that's a major problem with the Guards I think you know...They don't view certain behaviours as crime because it's happening here" (Community Worker)

There is also a perception that although sufficient laws exist to address the bulk of the problem behaviour in the regeneration neighbourhoods, these laws are seldom enforced.

"if they had summonsed the first person that burned a house all the houses would be still standing and there would be no one had left after it but there's so many after leaving it now half the houses isn't above in O'Malley Park"

"Like we all said from the very first, the one day that the first house in Southill was burned in O'Malley Park there was nothing done about it, absolutely nothing". (EGSH)

"I do think if the Guards would act when you report something that you see that might not be major I suppose to one person but if you see a gang of youth hanging around say for example and they are out there and they are drinking and they are lighting fires you know and the wheelie bins are going to be

burnt and if you're constantly reporting that and nothing is happening then they are going to up the ante and then it gets into bigger scale and then you have them involved in like all the feuds and stuff that's going on" (FPBCW)

There was also disagreement among residents from both areas as to whether or not the Gardaí respond to calls in a timely manner with some reporting positive assistance and quick responses and others reporting the complete opposite:

"Well I found any time you'd ring they were here pretty quickly". (EGSH)

"The average waiting time could be two hours regardless of what your situation is it could be a two hour wait for anything. They said they are strapped they don't have the man power" (PGBCW)

"You could ring the Garda station and you could ring them seven times in a night you know it's not that that happens every night and you get no response and you ring back again and they are nearly annoyed that you ring" (FPBCW)

The delay in response time is explained by the Gardaí in terms of the level of calls that they have to address.

"I just see one 24 hour period that we were dealing with last week there was in excess of 80 calls, we have a morning briefing where we go through all the incidents and there was literally 80 incidents in the previous 24 hour period and your talking about 2 car crews dealing with the majority of those so you can understand them hopping from one thing to another. You don't have the time, you get there you take the details you have a look at it and your gone to the next one you know, and if your at the scene of an accident you could have 5 or 6 calls 7, 8 or maybe 10 calls backing up and people are wondering why it takes half an hour or an hour for the Guards to arrive" (Community Garda)

The young people that we spoke to diverged from the parents groups and from the elderly in terms of their relationship to the Gardai. While the other two groups complained about the lack of response from the Gardaí they did not rule out contacting them or engaging with them in relation to criminal behaviour where possible. The young people however identified the actions of the (regular) Gardaí (in the form of what they perceive as harassment) as one of the worst things about living where they live:

"The guards are a big one…the guards would be at all the young people, the guards do nothing up there…

They're afraid of their own shadow that's the problem… I was there one time watching two robbed cars flying around the place and they parked a good bit down and they were watching what they were all doing, … and they were

doing all this and the guards were parked behind them like they wouldn't even go up

Where I'm from now in Weston, after a night out I would be going in home and they'd pull up beside me and they'd stop me and they'd be quizzing me and searching me, but then there could be a young fella walking down the road then, scumbag, he could be breaking windows and could have a knife in his pocket and they'd say nothing to him but yet they'd pull me in to the car and take me up the barracks for nothing like…that happened to me once or twice now…just been going in home….

Yeah the power goes to their heads big time…" (MGYP)

These teenagers note slightly better relations with the community Gardaí but still comment that they would never tell them anything or make any complaints about anti-social behaviour or criminal activity to them. This also extends to a fear of talking to the estate management. They explain this refusal to co-operate in terms of the familiar fear of retaliation and significantly state that it is as a result of previous official insensitivities in response.

"How can you go up and complain them when the guards could easily run back to them and say, I know what she said blah blah blah…you're fucked….

No one you can call or nothing cause all you get is you ratted on us, what did you do that for, I'll come back and get you, watch your back and all this….so you couldn't talk to the estate management or anything like that…no stay at home and mind your own business or they'll knock on your front door and your back door and all your windows…" (MGYP)

The loss of a visible Garda presence (on foot) in the neighbourhoods has led to the widely held belief that if Gardaí are present in one of the estates, then someone must have called them. Therefore to be seen talking to a Guard, even simply on a social level, is to risk being identified as a "rat". Residents are therefore reluctant to call the Gardaí for fear they will be identified and targeted further themselves. This has led to a sense of dislocation from local law enforcement, despite the best efforts of community Gardaí, who note that visiting residents to follow up on complaints can take an extremely long time as you cannot simply call to one house, but must visit all nearby houses in order to avoid singling out one family or resident as a 'snitch'.

The residents acknowledge the problems facing the Gardaí, accepting that there are difficulties in following up complaints when people are unwilling or feel unable to

give information or names. Again, however this raises the issue of stopgap measures. For people to feel safe in making complaints or passing on information about criminal and anti-social activity there needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused – i.e. that the presence of Gardaí be decoupled from a responsive presence and associated with a preventative presence.

Sensitivity is thus particularly needed in relation to the very real and very well founded fear involved in contacting the Gardaí and the possibility of being identified as a 'snitch', something that has been compounded by stories of Gardaí turning up at doorsteps with individuals for identification by complainants, which has obvious consequences, both in terms of retaliation against individuals and in terms of escalation of crime, as if crime is not reported, it is not recorded or followed up on and a sense of impunity prevails on the part of the perpetrators.

> "*There was a girl living up here before and she was having hassle and she told the guard the young fella you know … and next they knocked at the door it was a guard is this him? She nearly died and she said I never saw him before no and it was him.. She ate the guard after*" (EGSH)

> "*There has been incidents where residents have rang and Gardaí have come down and said [to groups of youths] we don't want to be coming down stopping ye from drinking or lighting fires but your neighbours keep ringing and then you get retaliation from that so now you're gone to the stage now in the community where people I think are very afraid to report any crime and there lies a problem again because if the crime is not getting reported you know it just escalates*" (FPBCW)

One of the community workers also highlighted that some residents have been advised by the Gardaí to 'let things go':

> "*And if your window is broken you'll ring them, they want to know who done it? Give the name then and then they'll go to their house, sure you'd have no windows at all left then.*
>
> *Even if you were prepared to tell 'em who done it they'd say well I'd advise you to leave it, I mean that was the case when our windows were broken my father was, I'll bring you around to the house he said and he [Garda] said well if I were you now I'd leave it and he was like so where do you go from there like? So it's like they [Gardaí] know you won't give them [vandals] in but even if you're prepared to give it it's like oh well I wouldn't do that now if I was you.*

Or else you'll have no windows next week

They'll [Gardaí] tell you straight out you won't have a window, you might have the loss of one now but you'll have the loss of them all next week [if they pursue the complaint]".

The sense of fear that exists as a consequence has also impacted on things like residents associations and suggests that membership of residents forums may have particular difficulties for residents in some of the communities.

"***Would anybody join a Residents' Association?***

I don't think anybody would join anything now because you're afraid now to be in anything and if you're only seen on the road saying hello to a guard or ask the time of the day you might as well not go out anymore, you know they think you're talking about them or they're out at the door looking over then to say oh we see you talking you know". (EGSH)

In conclusion, the apparent acceptance by some Gardaí that there is nothing they can do about the threat of reprisals, often by very young children and teenagers are extremely problematic and are again indicative of deeply rooted problems in relation to how residents perceive their community is being managed and policed. Accordingly, the residents are adamant that a more visible community Garda presence is needed, along with quicker response times and increased sensitivity to the particular situation in which residents find themselves.

The response of City Council

One of the key responses from City Council has been the demolition and de-tenanting policy which we have discussed earlier. In addition to that policy Limerick City Council has taken a number of steps to improve community safety in their estates. We will examine two of those here.

Our discussions with Limerick City Council officials revealed that a large number of interventions had made against unruly tenants in the previous year. The range of these interventions is illustrated in the following quote.

"During 2010 there were 245 cases of anti-social behaviour in the Courts of Justice. We interviewed 266 persons as a result of that. We issued letters to 694 people, we gave verbal warnings to 51 persons, we gave written warnings to 39, we gave what's called a notice to quit to 9 households. A notice to quit has a legal effect of ceasing with your tenancy with the council. If you are

issued, you no longer have tenancy. We got court orders in relation to 5 families. 19 families surrendered their houses and disappeared into the ether and we repossessed 4 properties. So roughly every year that's a rough picture; that is a good annual average. We get about 250 complaints each day" (City Council Official).

Furthermore the City Council have an anti-social behaviour policy document, although there are some important limitations to the effectiveness of the document.

"*The anti-social behaviour strategy as far as the community are concerned because I have heard it loads of times, that document is not as comprehensive as it could be mainly because they are concerned about two things that are not dealt with and one of them is private rented tenants and the other is children under the 12... The strategy can only contain policies that we can implement or have the power to implement; it can not contain policies that come within somebody else's remit*" (City Council Official).

Additionally City Council has introduced a dedicated anti-social behaviour number which people can call to complain about behaviour in the local authority estates in the city.

"W*e are trying to be proactive in encouraging, for example recently the anti-social behaviour number, in the last month particularly from our last meeting with City Call I had being giving that everywhere, saying please ring, please ring, that's what it's about, they can take calls..*" (City Council Official).

This interviewee was cogniscent of the frustrations of the community but was also concerned about the lack of complaints that were being received through the dedicated anti-social behaviour number.

 "*We do the best we can but the communities would be frustrated... there is a great deal of frustration,...We put an anti-social behaviour free phone line in place last May and we have received a total of 100 complaints since it was installed last May which is very little compared with the level of anti-social behaviour that is being reported at various meetings that you attend but in the Southill area in question I said last night that there were ten complaints but I think in fact the number of complaints for the Southill area is 8 since last May so it begs the question*" (City Council Official).

This failure to report has obvious implications for the City Council's ability to address issues in relation to anti-social behaviour on their estates. However, some residents express disquiet about this system and suggest that it has resulted in a less pro active approach from the City Council on the issue of Anti-social behaviour. They also say that a much more targeted approach is required using information from the Gardaí and others, rather than relying on residents (who are obviously afraid to get caught up in any situation that might result in retribution) to report incidents.

An interesting development which is supported by Limerick City Council in other parts of the city and which could have an impact in the estates that we are concerned with is the Community Safety Partnership (see http://communitysafety.limerick.ie/).

The Community Safety Partnership

> "*is a partnership set up between the HSE, the Garda Siochána and ourselves to improve local environment, community spirit. So they are there now for the last three and a half years and what they do is apply to this book* [the Community Safety Partnership manual] *and in particular there is a page here which deals with community safety and issues they have undertaken. Controls, they are a group of people that took after control, they had a safety chain scheme where they get safety chains out to houses for free, they have a whole visiting services for people who are more vulnerable and need more support, they have a road safety initiative that look after street lighting and had a big initiative last year which covers aspect of it...*" (City Council Official).

The Partnership project would appear to be having a good deal of success in the areas where it is established. Indeed, some of the community workers that we spoke to remarked that they would see the introduction of the partnership in their areas having a significant impact on community safety.

> "*I thought it was a fantastic project, I've seen some of the work that they have done, I'd love to see the particular areas, particularly I'm am conscious of, I'm very aware of the smaller areas in Our Lady of Lourdes, Southill, like for example pockets of certain areas that there could be great work done with that Community Safety Partnership...*" (Community worker).

However, in spite of the measures introduced by Limerick City Council we received a negative response from the majority of the residents to the Councils' initiatives. They report having no confidence in the City Council and report being sent around different departments, which leads to enormous frustration. The following series of extracts capture this sense of frustration.

> "*The City Council never looked after anyone in Keyes Park*
>
> *In O'Malley either*" (EGSH)
>
> "*They promise you everything and they'll say oh we'll be up to you and we'll call up but you won't ever see them*
>
> **Okay so you do contact them but they just won't respond?**
>
> *I'm waiting 12 months for someone to call to me*
>
> **How long?**

Honestly 12 months that he'd call up to me and I haven't seen him since and I met him the night of the Garda party I said to him do you remember me? I do he said, I said you were up in my place with your camera and everything and you promised me you'd be back the next day I haven't seen you since I said to him now

As far as I'm concerned they don't hear or listen to you.

Okay. Would everybody feel that about the City Council?

The Town Hall is useless" (EGBCW)

"*It's not like the residents here haven't done anything about it I mean letters have gone to the council and its all about when its at the smaller level scale we'll say that people go looking for a response like before it got bigger but that response never came … the city council need to be more accountable to residents and have never been accountable before and I do think they need to be pulled up on it*" (Female Parent Weston)

How do you think city council see anti social behaviour or the sort of threats and intimidation that you are talking about in the community?

I think they just ignore it

Yea they just ignore it

Yea they choose to ignore it and the pretence is that things have gotten better as well but it's still pretence.

Which is a fancy word for a total lie its nonsense

And if you go straight to the city council for example as an ordinary resident would you have any sort of links into them

No, it's difficult to get to speak to someone

Nobody answers you, everywhere you get through to is an answer machine to pass you on to someone else where there is another answer machine everything is automated there is no person at the end of the phone when you want them they are not there, they are non existent they are just voices you never see the faces" (PGBCW)

The response of the HSE

In our discussions with the HSE official a number of important strategies which that agency is pursuing in the city became apparent. Approximately €5.5 million worth of family support is funded in some part by that agency. Two particular developments were spoken of at length by our interviewee from the HSE. The first was the Limerick Assessment of Needs system which was designed to develop a common assessment frame work for lower levels of need. The logic behind this development was explained as

> "*recognising that if we let children develop to the extent that their high level need, understand that that level of need is often expensive to deal with because your talking about care, control, treatment and custody as issues, its expensive to deal with and the outcomes are poor so logic is get in early. Now if you get in early you might have more chance of impacting on the family, so we invest in things like strengthening families, incredible years programme etc*". (HSE Official).

Additionally, we were informed of the Limerick Children Services Committee which has been in place for the last 3 years. Its agenda has been action orientated around establishing processing systems.

> "*At this point it developed the family support plan sub group it has now a LANS steering group which is developing the LANS process and all that that means it has a research sub group which is looking at the various pieces of research so for instance the base line research we hope will be finished ..., the service mapping should be finished ... so we then begin analysing in terms of needs and services available have we gaps? Have we duplication strategically?*" (HSE Official).

It is envisaged that these initiatives will have a significant impact in the future delivery of services.

The question of resources was raised particularly given the extra responsibilities that the HSE now has as a result of the changes to age of criminal responsibility. The difficulties resource shortfall cause for the HSE and the subsequent route that they have chosen to take are illustrated in the following quote.

> "*When the age of criminal responsibility went from 7 which was ridiculous anyways in terms of age to 12, but between 12 and 14 you have got to knowingly commit an offence so really its down to 14. Now what happens in terms of resource capacity you know its public knowledge the Gardaí under regeneration received 100 additional Gardaí. We've just received 7 posts under the Ryan report. 7 versus 100, we received no additional capacity to deal with the group who suddenly who are not going to be prosecuted, so*

when they moved it up to 12 and in reality 14 in terms of the age of criminal responsibility significant resource shortfall happened. So we have had to say unless it's a protection and welfare issue… we cant deal as a solo agency and it shouldn't happen anyway with an out of control child, we don't bring children in because they are out of control it cant happen, we are not police …its not going to happen that's not the answer. This is long term, its getting in early its knowing the indicators, knowing the flags, its knowing that an older sibling has gone down the same road and it is getting in early and we have to talk about quality pre-school care we have to talk about the right parenting support that parents will engage with" (HSE Official)

The HSE have a policy which seeks to work with children in their communities. Additionally the focus is now on earlier intervention because late interventions in the past have allowed issues to escalate. However, both of these policies can cause conflict with the communities, conflict which the HSE is aware of.

"*We're continually challenged to deal with the symptoms, and the symptoms really are often just seen as the child in front of ya the presenting child, but the reality is that child probably in terms of causation if we had of intervened much earlier, much younger in a different way we might not have the 10 year old in front of us that we have now. Now that is an analysis that some residents I have no doubt will struggle to accept, but in terms of long term change its something we have to move towards I believe*"

"*Most of those children are in foster care they don't walk around with uniforms on saying I'm in care they are actually part of the community, and even part of our thinking now we have increasing numbers of children in relative foster care, which means they are actually kept usually in their own community when they come into care they don't have to move, friends, school, social contacts so even our thinking is that way and I think its out there that our sort of mission is to keep families together from childcare point of view.*

Excellent that's very positive and that would be very positive from the community's perspective.

That's our business but they get tension where you have children who are delinquent and the community don't want them to be kept in the communities, so called out of control group, they are always going to be a bone of contention". (HSE Official)

Interestingly there was very little discussion of the role of the HSE in addressing community safety in our residents' focus groups. Most of the areas of responsibility which lie with the HSE were mistakenly attributed by residents to other agencies. Indeed the only discussion of the HSE which emerged in the resident interviews centred around the wish for the HSE to fund parenting programmes which might alleviate some of the difficulties on the estates.

> "*Family support programmes*
>
> *Tis the mothers and the fathers that should be trained not the children*
>
> *If the parents was trained to look after their children the children would be behaved*" (EGSH)

In contrast our discussions with representatives of other agencies and community workers from the estates were by and large much more critical of the role of the HSE in addressing community safety issues on the estates to date.

> "*I suppose when the anti-social behaviour document was discussed…the same big issue came up was this under 12 age issue, and we were calling on the HSE who have responsibility for children under 18 and particular now under 12 to step up to plate and realistically for community people they feel that HSE haven't stepped up to plate*" (Community worker)

However one of the City Council interviewees acknowledged the difficult situation that the HSE found itself in this regard.

> "*Well its difficult for the HSE isn't it, what are they going to do, take the kids away from the parents which is last resort as far as the HSE is concerned*" (City Council Official).

Finally, our study identified major misunderstandings on the part of many residents about which agency had responsibility for addressing various issues. The role of City Council and the HSE are particularly poorly understood and many residents think the Regeneration Agencies are responsible for everything that has to be done on the estates. In that context the Gardaí spoke of how they were being blamed for not acting against the problem behaviour of children when in reality the responsibility lay with the HSE. The provision of such information to residents was seen as bringing about a change in attitude towards the Gardaí.

> "*They [residents] can't understand how we can't deal with these children who are causing problems in the area, I have attended quiet a number of meetings now with the resident forums and the whole lot and I have had to explain the children's act and what we do and how we do it and the whole lot and they find it an archaic system basically that we can't get in and arrest children bring them into court and the like, but I think once we educate them on that and we tell them what we can and can't do they will have a better understanding and they are less critical as well*" (Garda 1)

Such misunderstanding has obvious implications in terms of residents' frustration with the various statutory agencies. If residents perceive that an agency has

responsibility for certain issues and those issues are not being addressed then they are increasingly likely to be dismissive of / lose trust in that agency, irrespective of whether or not the agency has actually got responsibility in that area. This lack of understanding has thus a hugely important influence on maintaining resident 'buy in' to the various initiatives being put in place.

Responsibility for Community Safety

Almost everybody that we spoke to strongly believed that it is everyone's responsibility to keep their community safe. This view was particularly strongly expressed by the residents taking part in the research.

> *"I think they should all go around together the whole lot should do it because it's a big thing for one community to do it"*. (EGBCW)

> *"I think its everyone's* [responsibility] *first of all I think it's the residents that live here second of all I think it's the Guards definitely, the city council definitely have a part to play as well in it, I think all the agencies who work here you know provide services in the area, you know everyone has a part to play in it. I think, parents definitely have a huge part within it they need to be more aware of where their kids are and what they are at and whatever and that's a huge part of it again"* (FPBCW)

It was particularly encouraging to find the non residents groups and key individuals speaking of the necessity for a multi-agency approach (which also involves the communities themselves) to tackling community safety.

> *"I do think it's everybody's responsibility. I think the guard, there was an onus, it's the job of the guards to make sure that when the parents fall down, it's not every parent that's falling down, it's a group of parents, it's the guard's job to make sure those parents tow the line with their kids. I think City Council have a duty to make sure their tenants are towing the line with their kids. The responsibility on the community is it is their community and it's up to them if they want to live there… So it's everybody's responsibility"* (Estate Workers Group)

> *"It has to be multi-agency.. it has to be… because at the end of the day if there's a 14 year old or 15 year old arrested by the guards the HSE have to be involved. Their key worker in Outreach has to be involved. Their key worker in the Garda Diversion has to be involved"*. (Community Worker)

> *"It's planning of an area, it's policing of an area, housing you know mixing with the residents I suppose and everything you know and facilities as well play a big part"* (Garda 1)

> *"It's everyone's, its like the mantra we have for our former CEO of the Midwestern Health Board which is going back a long time now and he said child protection is everyone's business"*. (HSE Official)

However it is very noteworthy that some of the non residents expressed a strong feeling that some are more responsible than others when it comes to ensuring the safety of any given community.

> *"Community Safety, just safety? Garda Siochána beginning middle and end.*

The community can have a role of course it can but one has to be very very careful because if and I go back to another question I posed to you earlier, if my neighbours got together where I live and said we were going to do something in the community and I said fine fine fine. But I would have a clear understanding, no blurring of the lines, what I am responsible for and what the Gardaí are responsible for. It is very very presumptive indeed to ask a civil authority like us or community people to take on board the most difficult. Go back to the characteristics of John Fitzgerald's report. Some of the people living in these estates lads, they don't fear the law… So in what circumstances would you ask communities, to take on this role? "(City Council Official)

"*The bloody parents to be honest about it they should be controlling their children, not letting them out to run riot and annoy people and cause the damage and destruction that they are and that's my view on it. I mean okay while the guards are being blamed and the City Council are being blamed they're not causing it, they're not out there creating it, it's the kids and it's the parents, it's actually the bloody parents, if they had checked the kids in time they wouldn't have them out there at the level that they're out there*" (Estate Workers)

Conclusions

Fear of crime

This research study has found that despite a significant reduction in the crime rate, residents in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston continue to exhibit elevated fears of being a victim of crime and / or anti-social behaviour in their estates. The residents express most concern about the behaviour of children and teenagers. In general, low level anti-social behaviour and low-end criminal acts are causing a massive amount of distress and anxiety for residents and they perceive that very little is being done to address such behaviour. Such perceptions have implications for relationships between residents and statutory agencies and service providers in the future.

In Southill, young female residents are extremely concerned about the impact the highly visible level of substance misuse is having on them and their children. This has had a major impact on community life in Carew Park for example, with residents reporting a fear of using open private or public space due to the high possibility of attracting the attention of drug users. The young people taking part in the research were particularly sensitive to the drug problems in their estates, seeing drugs as the main problem facing them in terms of community safety. Many of the parents we spoke to have huge fears for their teens and for their pre-teens. Even the young people talk about their fears for younger siblings, raising the issue that the problems among young people are getting worse. Residents from Southill in particular noted concerns at being out late in the evening or at night, not necessarily in relation to poor lighting and fear of mugging, which was noted by the elderly, but more in terms of being 'seen to see things'. Some of the elderly residents that we spoke to are so afraid to even be seen looking at groups of young people who may be causing trouble that the bulk of them no longer even open their curtains. The fear of being 'seen to be looking' also transfers to the low involvement of younger people in the various residents associations and committees.

Dislocation from open private and public space is hugely problematic and is playing an essential role in the further demise of parts of these areas. Safer localities are said to be those that have "more active streets; where people use those streets"; and "where there is a substantial number of stores and other public places", which can be / are

used in the evening and at night, in the process ensuring that many different people "often cross paths" (this clearly is not the case in the estates we are concerned with). In essence "busy places reduce risks…while empty public land might create dangerous hang outs" (Ray 2011, pp.73-74).

Problem parenting & poor behaviour

The issue of poor parenting united the residents across all of the estates. These concerns centre around the growth in the numbers of young parents who are disengaged from the community, disengaged from work, and who are seen as either unable or unwilling to discipline and educate their children. Residents clearly see a cyclical process of neglect and the subsequent impact it has on their communities. The understanding that young children are no longer respectful of adults, no longer viewing them as figures of authority is widespread with multiple references made to the changes in attitudes and demeanour among children. The consensus is that this is coming from their parents who fail to discipline them or teach them how to behave. Additionally, all the residents we spoke to mentioned fear of these children. While fear of retaliation from these children is linked to anti-social behaviour, because the majority of residents no longer know all of their neighbours there is also a deeper fear of more serious repercussions related to their parents. This situation clearly impacts on the "ability of local residents to control deviancy" (Eck et al., 2005, p.8) and demonstrates quite significantly reduced levels of collective efficacy in both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston.

We found a really interesting understanding that young people and particularly troublesome young people (mostly young men) are over represented and over catered for in terms of programmes and projects and public concern. There is a perception (and in some locations a reality) that there is nothing for younger kids and nothing for the 'good kids'. Many of the facilities and trips are perceived as being only available to kids who have already been in trouble. Once again, such perceptions have the potential to do serious damage to the (often) fragile relationship between the residents of these estates and the various statutory agencies. The provision of accurate information on these matters, established through targeted research, is urgently required.

Inaudible voices

Those that we spoke to from the statutory agencies are adamant that good communication is now taking place between them and residents on a range of different issues. This 'bottom up' approach to the regeneration of the estates is seen as being of vital importance if the project is ultimately to succeed. The Regeneration Agencies do have a presence in the communities, but we must remain mindful that in many situations they do not have the power / ability to address certain issues or to respond in an adequate or timely fashion because they are reliant on the actions of other stakeholders. As a consequence it was not surprising to find that there is a very strong perception among the elderly residents that City Council officials and in some cases Regeneration Agency officials are unwilling to listen to residents who may be able to tell them what will happen in a variety of situations. The sense that official bodies are unwilling to come out and to listen to voices on the ground is very strongly felt. This in turn is seen to be impacting on the residents' attitudes towards meetings between resident committees and authorities. There is a strong sense of disillusionment surrounding events of this kind where it is felt that nothing of practical value is achieved. It is essential that residents are listened to intently as part of the process of regeneration. In many situations they can see the problems coming along the line faster than any agency officials. While there is certainly evidence that such a bottom up approach is happening there are significant issues around communication which must be improved as a matter of urgency.

Stigmatising the estates and increasing fear

Residents feel that there are particularly negative public and official perceptions of the communities in which they live. All of the residents feel that outsiders are not concerned at the plight of the majority of residents in these areas and that all are 'tarred with the same brush'. However while residents are acutely aware of the pathologised / stigmatised image of their estate, only the mixed youth group identified a possible source of this stigmatised identity. They perceive that the media has played a prominent role in the negative / stereotypical / stigmatised construction of their localities. Additionally, it is significant that these teenagers (and some of the key individual interviewees) saw the media as playing a role in the empowerment of criminals. In contrast to the residents, almost all of the key individuals that we spoke to cite the media as having a major role to play in the negative portrayal of these

estates and playing an active part in heightening the sense of fear among residents.

The impact of state responses

There was a very strong view expressed by almost all participants in this research that a collective approach is the only solution to addressing community safety. A key issue for many of the residents is the visibility of the regeneration project, which has both a symbolic and real value for people living in the communities in question. The symbolic value of physical regeneration for the residents centres on the sense that something is being done and that they, as a community, have not been forgotten. The feeling of being 'left in limbo' was very strong among elderly residents in particular. Symbolically this has a very detrimental impact on people's quality of life. Short-term residents, often younger people, move in and out reflecting what the elderly residents see as a key issue in the problems of their estates. The high turnover of residents has contributed greatly to the sense that the community which existed previously has been lost. Further to this is the fact that many of the younger residents feel no sense of attachment to these neighbourhoods.

The residents also identify clearly the fact that while physical regeneration is urgent, there is little point in simply rebuilding houses and putting people back into similar situations. The respondents were especially adamant that the underlying social problems must first be addressed. The Limerick Regeneration Agencies have concentrated considerable resources on social regeneration. However, many of the residents (and indeed key individuals) that we spoke to expressed concerns that little has happened on the issue of social regeneration. These perceptions are at odds with the reality in many cases. As such this is a very serious finding, which again evidence poor communication of the details by the agencies to the residents.

The highly visible physical degradation and neglect of areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities. The issue of boarding up houses has implications beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. There are very real health and safety concerns relating to the abandoned houses. These health issues are all related to the slowness in dealing properly with empty houses. It is our view that properties should not be left boarded up indefinitely as they are detrimentally

impacting on the quality of life for the residents of both estates.

It is encouraging to see that where the regeneration project is progressing visibly, the residents are enthused and in some areas of Southill for example demolition has been perceived by the residents as hugely successful.

The mixed reaction about the impact / effectiveness of CCTV cameras is the estates is essentially explained by whether people see the cameras as being an extension of An Garda Siochána. While some residents see the installation of CCTV cameras as performing an important 'visible' function in relation to residents' perceptions of their own safety, there is a huge demand that any future cameras should only be installed if they are monitored live by the police as this will prove to be much more effective.

Worryingly, there is a very strong perception among the residents of both Southill and Ballinacurra Weston that problems in these areas are not taken as seriously as they would be were they to occur in more middle class communities in the city. Residents see a reduced Garda presence on their estates, often perceiving that this absence is as a result of the Gardaí not seeing problems in the regeneration areas as being problematic once they are contained within these communities. These perceptions are hugely significant and need to be addressed immediately. There was also disagreement among residents in both groups as to whether or not the Gardaí respond to calls in a timely manner. The loss of a visible Garda presence (on foot) in the neighbourhoods has led to the widely held belief that the Gardaí only have a reactive presence in the estates. Additionally the lack of sensitivity on the part of some police officers is extremely worrying. These issues have led to a sense of dislocation from local law enforcement, despite the efforts of community Gardaí (many of whom were mentioned by name by our resident interviewees). Again, these are hugely significant findings given that the Fitzgerald Report recommended a highly visible Garda presence in these estates. The response of the Gardaí to all incidents is seen as being of crucial importance given that the failure to do so is seen as further 'proof' of the desertion of these locations by "the police and public institutions", which in turn creates fear and insecurity among an estates residents (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p.2742). For residents (and particularly young residents) to feel safe in making complaints or passing on information about criminal and anti social activity there

needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused. Unfortunately, this may prove to be very difficult to achieve given recent budget constraints.

One of the key responses from City Council has been the demolition and de-tenanting policy which we discussed earlier. In spite of the other initiatives that Limerick City council has taken to improve community safety in the estates, we found a seriously negative response from the majority of the residents to the Councils' initiatives. They report enormous frustration when having to deal with City Council. Interestingly there was very little discussion of the role of the HSE in addressing community safety in our residents' focus groups. In spite of this it is clear that the HSE has a major role to play. While they may not wish to take children into care they do have significant powers which they are not currently using in all cases.

Significantly, our study has identified major misunderstandings on the part of many residents about which agency had responsibility for addressing the various issues in the estates. The role of City Council and the HSE are particularly poorly understood and many residents think the Regeneration Agencies are responsible for everything. Such misunderstanding has obvious implications in terms of residents' frustrations with the various statutory agencies. If residents perceive that an agency has responsibility for certain issues and those issues are not being addressed then they are increasingly likely to be dismissive of / lose trust in that agency. This occurs irrespective of the agencies actual responsibilities in a particular area. These misunderstandings must be addressed as a matter of urgency. Again we return to the need for better communication and more interaction between statutory agencies and crucially more input from residents about what is happening on their estates. More talk is needed even though 'talk' is seen as pointless and in some cases as dangerous by many residents. However, it is only through increased dialogue that the problems around understanding can successfully be resolved.

In conclusion we have to move beyond seeing community safety as being simply "a question of order and control, while ignoring the social conditions which produce deviant behaviour" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, pp.2746-2747). We believe that in order to effectively address community (un)safety we must simultaneously implement

policies which visibly demonstrate to the residents that the police and local authorities have not abandoned them (such as increased proactive police presence and the introduction of CCTV which is monitored live by the police) with policies which increase "social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). In essence, it is our belief that only policies which are aimed at "addressing simultaneously the four pillars of economic, social, physical and safety-related problems" will ultimately bring about the social change that everyone desires. Unfortunately, achieving such urban regeneration must be seen and understood as a long-term process.

Recommendations

1. The findings of this research strongly suggest that the process of communication between the Limerick Regeneration Agencies and the residents of the estates concerned must be significantly improved. The voices of the residents need to be sought out and listened to in terms of their local on the ground knowledge. Our study also identified major misunderstandings on the part of many residents about what social regeneration entails and which agency had responsibility for addressing the various issues in the estates. If residents perceive that an agency has responsibility for certain issues and those issues are not being addressed then they are increasingly likely to be dismissive of / lose trust in that agency, whether or not the agency concerned is responsible. These misunderstandings must be addressed as a matter of urgency. It is our view that a multi-faceted approach to these issues may prove to be the most effective strategy. We recommend that information flows are improved through the use of newsletters which are delivered to all households in the estates concerned, in conjunction with public meetings held in the communities. Finally, consideration should be given to the use of a dedicated liaison officer whose job would be to impartially explain the concerns / difficulties of both sides to one another other.

2. It is apparent that for the vast majority of the estates residents the demolition of derelict / damaged properties and removal of rubble is key to the sense that the regeneration project is progressing. Additionally, the Gardaí believe that the demolition process has contributed to the establishment of what are seen as safer communities. However, the highly visible physical degradation and neglect of parts of these areas is deeply problematic for the residents in both communities. The issue of boarding up houses in particular has very real health and safety concerns beyond the symbolic feeling of neglect and marginalisation. Given the scale of the housing waiting lists in Limerick City, it is our view that new tenants should be moved into vacant properties as quickly as possible. In the case of properties which are marked for demolition rather than new tenancies, then these demolitions should occur as quickly as

possible after the property has been vacated. We would recommend that properties should not be left boarded up indefinitely as they are detrimentally impacting on the quality of life for the residents of both estates.

3. A major concern for residents taking part in this research was that the water supply is not automatically turned off at the time of a house being vacated. In many instances this has led to flooding, the subsequent loss of water pressure to surrounding houses etc when these houses are subsequently vandalised. It is our view that this situation is unacceptable. There are no circumstances in which this practice should be allowed to continue. We recommend that the water supply is turned off at the mains prior to any house being boarded up by the Local Authority. This is a very simple / practical measure but it is one which has inexplicably has not been happening to date.

4. The public space in the estates needs to be reclaimed as a public space which can safely be utilised by all residents of the estates at all times. To achieve this outcome we recommend that there should be an increased proactive Garda presence in the estates. If we are to increase the confidence among residents that they can use communal spaces free of fear, then there needs to be a renewed and strengthened community Garda presence across the estates in a way that is highly visible, regular and not solely problem focused, which is largely what occurs at present.

5. Moreover given the perceptions of many residents in these estates that the Gardaí are not overly concerned with the problems in these estates we recommend that measures are put in place which results in quicker response times and increased sensitivity on the part of _some_ Gardaí to the particular situation in which residents find themselves. Consideration should also be given to the establishment of a group which would oversee individual policing plans for particular areas.

6. The installation of CCTV cameras most certainly performs an important 'visible' function in relation to residents' perceptions of their own safety. We would recommend that any future deployment of CCTV cameras should be

monitored live by the police. We believe that this would prove to be much more effective than the current situation where the Gardaí have to request recordings after an event has happened.

7. Our discussions with Limerick City Council officials revealed that a large number of interventions had been made against unruly tenants in the previous year. Residents however perceive that nothing is being done to tackle the behaviour of tenants engaged in anti-social / criminal behaviour, which lead to feelings of unsafety as a consequence. We believe that that dissemination of information to residents about the measures taken by Limerick City Council against unruly tenants could demonstrate that actions are taken against Local Authority tenants who breach the terms of their tenancy. This in turn may increase perceptions of community safety amongst the residents of these estates. Accordingly we recommend that Limerick City Council widely publicise the number and type of interventions that they have made on a six monthly basis.

8. The lack of complaints that are being received through the Council's dedicated anti-social behaviour number is a concern. We have some concerns about how widely publicised this telephone number has been. We recommend that a flier be distributed to every house in the areas concerned with these contact details on them. All estate managers etc, should encourage residents where appropriate to call this number.

9. The Community Safety Partnership project would appear to be having a good deal of success in the areas where it is established. We recommend that consideration be given to establishing the project on a pilot basis in the moat stable areas of the estates concerned.

10. A key issue identified by almost all of our participants was that of parenting, particularly by young parents. In terms of addressing this we would recommend that greater support be provided (particularly by the HSE) for parenting and / or household management. In particular the further support / provision of intensive family support programmes will prove to be beneficial

in this regard.

11. The research identifies a growing disconnect between older and younger residents in the estates, which again has huge implications for community safety. To address this disconnect we recommend that consideration should be given to the introduction (on a pilot basis) of intergenerational projects, which allow older and younger residents to work together.

12. The dominant perception of residents is that there is nothing for younger kids and nothing for the 'good kids' in the estates. Many of the facilities etc are perceived as only being available to kids who have already been in trouble. Such perceptions have the potential to do serious damage to the relationship between the residents and the various statutory agencies. Once again, we recommend that accurate information on these matters is urgently provided. In addition, consideration needs to be given to the deployment of resources that are within the remit of the Regeneration Agencies. We would suggest that the Agencies should evaluate if some parts of the community are oversupplied while others are undersupplied? Resources should be deployed accordingly to address any imbalance.

13. Male involvement in community engagement is essential and needs to be targeted as men are regarded as being at the root of many community problems while also being most at risk from them. We would recommend that appropriate attention is paid to encouraging more males to participate in residents' forums and other community organisations.

14. The media are identified as playing a role in the empowerment of criminals and the creation of fear among residents, together with the provision of (mis)information about which of the statutory agencies has responsibility for addressing which issues within these communities. While there is an organisation in Limerick City which monitors media coverage of the city, it is not seen to be challenging the unrepresentativeness of the stories about these estates in particular. These representations contribute to the stigmatised identity of these neighbourhoods. We would recommend that the media

coverage of the Regeneration estates be intensively monitored on a yearly basis and where inaccuracies / unrepresentativeness are found to be occurring that they are challenged by the Limerick Regeneration Agencies. Moreover, a concentrated effort needs to be made to get alternative (positive) stories and features about these communities into the media (something which has been happening in relation to Moyross for example over the last year). Tackling the stigma associated with these estates should be seen as an integral part of the social regeneration project.

15. Finally, we believe that in order to effectively address community (un)safety we must simultaneously implement policies which visibly demonstrate to the residents that they have not been abandoned by the state, with policies which increase "social cohesion, social networks and employment" (Aalbers and Rancati 2008, p. 2747). Accordingly, we recommend that only policies which simultaneously address the social, economic, and physical regeneration of these estates be pursued. In that context, the fact that achieving such urban regeneration is a long-term process must be better communicated to the residents.

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Feeling Safe in Our Community

This qualitative research report begins the process of auditing experiences and concerns related to community safety in and around Southill and Ballinacurra Weston in Limerick City. The report explores, identifies and documents the most pressing concerns related to community safety as expressed by a diverse group of community residents and stakeholders, and examines residents' experiences and evaluation of the existing community safety frameworks.

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Dámh na nDán, na nDaonnachtaí agus na nEolaíochtaí Sóisialta

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