CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the study

Emerging from the rationale and the research questions (highlighted in Chapter I: Introduction), the objectives of the present study are:

1. To study the socio-economic, family, education and work background of the male youth arrested in extortion related offences.

2. To examine from the arrested male youth’s viewpoint, the factors that contributed to his entry into the criminal nexus leading to his arrest and re-arrest and his views on family, peer and gender relations, religion and the criminal justice system and processing.

3. To study the social supports available to a male youth prisoner arrested in extortion related offences, to address his imprisonment related and post-release problems.

4. To understand the legal, social and livelihood-related processes that unfold in the life of the male youth arrested in extortion related offences, after his release from police/prison custody.

Key concepts

1. **Arrested Male Youth:** A male youth in the age group of 18 to 30 years with one or more arrest/s relating to extortion registered against him. He may be housed in police custody or in a prison (under trial or convicted), or living in the community released on bail, or discharged/acquitted in his case, or after serving a sentence, at the time of the study.
2. **Property Offences of Serious Nature:** This means serious offences which are committed with the motive of financial gain usually committed by a group or a gang as an organised activity. It includes offences such as extortion or related offences such as threat to kill, attempt to murder, murder, kidnapping or robberies.

3. **Criminal Nexus:** The social and economic relations that develop between persons in crime, as a result of shared life experiences after their arrest and re-arrest by the police, processing by the courts and stay in prison and the networks that develop thereafter, which have stigmatizing effect on their lives.

4. **Social Supports:** The supports available to a youth offender from family, neighbours, members of their community, caste or regional background, the criminal justice system and civil society organizations working with offenders to deal with problems arising from arrest and imprisonment.

5. **Life Chances:** The opportunities presented and threats faced by the youth offender in addressing problems as a result of repeated arrests and imprisonment and the subjective view of the youth offender about his ability to deal with the same.

**The research design**

This study is essentially qualitative in nature but uses a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods. The attempt is to understand the profile of youth arrested in cases of extortion, and analyse the lives of the youth who have a history of arrests in cases related to extortion over time, from the insider’s perspective.

‘**Qualitative research** is a **research strategy** that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data. As a research strategy it is inductivist, **constructionist**, and interpretivist…’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 366). It emphasizes an inductive view of the theory-research relationship, whereby theory emerges from the research (rather than proving or disproving a hypothesis which is a feature of quantitative research); an interpretive approach which stresses on understanding the social world
through an interpretation of that world by its participants; and a constructionist position implying that social properties emerge from social interactions between individuals rather than by objective analysis of phenomena ‘out there’ (ibid). However, qualitative research does not exclude collection or generation of quantitative data (Bryman and Burgess, 1999).

The aim of this study is to understand crimogenic behaviour of youth involved in extortion related crimes and their reasons for entry and possible exit from the criminal nexus, from their viewpoint, so as to get an in-depth understanding of the phenomena being studied. According to Truzzi (1974), qualitative methods are better suited to present in-depth knowledge necessary to portray the perspectives of that population which is being researched through their social worlds as they experience them. They are usually used for identification, description, and generating explanation (Crabtree and Miller, 1999). Maxwell (1996, p. 17) lists five purposes for which qualitative methods are best suited:

1. Understanding meanings based on interpretation of events and actions perceived by the study participants who are involved in them
2. Comprehending the context in which those being studied act, and the degree of influence and effects this context has on their behaviour
3. Generating the continuous process of grounded theory based on unanticipated new social phenomenon
4. Understanding the process through which events and activities occur and observing the processes that lead to particular outcomes
5. Developing explanations for these events and processes (Pogrebin, 2003, pp xii-xiii)

According to Claudfield and Wonders (1994), ethnographic methods reveal parts of the social world that remain hidden by more traditional methodological techniques. It includes investigative techniques such as observations, participant observation and open-ended interviews (ibid, pp xiii)
The universe

The Universe of this study is male youth in the age group of 18 to 30 years in the city of Mumbai and its suburbs, especially those with a history of arrest/s related to cases of extortion against their name. The point to be highlighted here is that the youth were between the ages of 18 to 30 years when their first arrest took place, though they may have crossed 30 years at the time of being interviewed. At the time of the study, they may be housed in police custody or in a prison (under trial or convicted), or living in the community either because they are out on bail, have already serving a sentence, or discharged/acquitted after their trial. Hence there were multiple sites for identification of the respondents.

The site of the study

It was decided that the study would be situated the city of Mumbai and its suburbs. Since the study includes youth in crime, such a group could be found either in pre or post-arrest sites. Pre-arrest sites implied finding the youth offender in the community. This approach would involve mapping of high crime-rate zones of the city in the ‘ecological approach’ tradition and then trying to locate the offender population and studying them as Shaw and Mckay did in their 1931 study (Moyer, 2001). It would mean trying to locate the respondent group through the participant-observation method along the lines of Clifford Shaw (1930), Whyte (1943), Hagan and McCarthy (1997) and Sanders (2005).

As Muncie (2002) points out,

…whilst the Cambridge study is a good example of the degree to which various social and personality factors correlate statistically with ‘known’ offending, it fails to capture the broader context in which such offending takes place. It assumes that legal definitions of crime are shared by all communities. Foster’s analysis (1990) of an ethnographic study spanning generations, shows clearly that this not the case (p. 237).

However, with such an approach, which is very useful in drawing insights into the processes that push a vulnerable youth population into crimogenic behaviour, it would be difficult to narrow down and study the lives of those who are into serious crime. In order
to study career criminals, one would have little choice but to zero in on those who have an official record of arrests against their names.

The post-arrest situation would imply locating the subject of inquiry either at the police lock-up (during the investigation stage) or in prison (as an under trial or a convicted prisoner). He could also be traced after being released on bail, or after his case is discharged/acquitted or after completion of his sentence.

Since the main objective of the study was to understand the factors that influence criminal behaviour of youth involved in serious property crimes by studying their criminal past and their present situation, it was important to study the consequences of arrest, whether as an under trial or a convict. There has been some criticism, and rightly so, of this ‘official approach’ to understand crime whereby there is dependence on State agencies to identify the criminal population. It has been pointed out quite frequently that there are ethical and methodological problems for a science to use data and research subjects produced by other agencies, since the concerns of such agencies would be different from that of science (Coleman and Moynihan, 1996, p. 2).

However Coleman and Moynihan have noted an interesting distinction between two rather different types of information produced by official agencies.

The first is the official statistics on crime and criminals produced by the State and its agencies. The second is the data generated from research on samples derived from official sources such as courts and prisons”. He further adds “…the second clearly has an advantage in that the research itself can collect additional data, and do this in a way that reflects of particular theoretical or other concerns (ibid, pp. 2-3).

This study no doubt depended on official police and prison records to identify youth arrested in extortion related cases, but it did not stop here. It included an attempt to identify the factors, which influence offending behaviour or arrest of these youth by studying their life situation, in an urban and metropolitan milieu.

In order that the study had a clear focus, it was decided that the researcher would study youth in the age group of 18 to 30 years, remaining as close as possible to 18 to 23 years and further, would limit his respondents to youth arrested in cases related to extortion,
since this offence fits well with the object of studying offenders involved in property
offences of a serious nature (refer to Introduction chapter for further details)

Selection and sample size

For arriving at the family, socio-economic, education and work profile of the group, the
structured interview method was used. An interview schedule was developed based on
the research questions, the objectives, a review of literature and the researcher’s
experience of work with youth offenders. Respondents for the interviews were initially
identified from official data (of male youth in the age group of 18 to 30 years arrested
under extortion offences in 2005, 2006 and 2007) supplied by the Anti-Extortion Cell
(AEC) of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police.

Theoretical and convenience sampling was used from the population of the youth
offenders arrested in extortion related crimes. The universe comprised the total number of
persons arrested for extortion related crimes in a year by the Anti-Extortion Cell (AEC)
of Crime Branch, Mumbai Police. A sample size of at least 20% of the universe was
decided for data collection purposes. This 20% was arrived at through the following
steps:

a. The total number of persons arrested for extortion related crimes in a year in the
   18-30 age group was arrived at, from the records of the last three years (2005,
   2006 and 2007), available with the Anti-Extortion Cell (AEC) of the Crime
   Branch of Mumbai Police.

b. It was decided that in order to develop the profile of the group being studied, one
   would select 20% of the total number of arrests made by the AEC of the Crime

Apart from these interviews, legal data pertaining to youth arrested by the AEC of the
Crime Branch, Mumbai Police for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007 was collected and
quantitatively analyzed by using the SPSS package to understand the trends and patterns
of arrests made by the AEC.
A total number of eighty nine arrests were made in the period January 2005 to December 2007, relating to extortion by the AEC of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police, as per the records made available by the AEC to researcher\(^2\). 20 per cent of this figure is eighteen respondents. Based on this sampling frame, it was decided to interview around twenty respondents to arrive at the socio-economic, education and work profile of the respondents of the study.

These eighty nine accused in the age group of 18 to 30 years comprised two broad categories, in terms of membership in known gangs. Fifty five of these eighty nine (roughly 60%) did not belong to any known gang. The remaining thirty four belonged to seven known gangs as per the records of the AEC. It was therefore decided that the attempt would be to interview twelve respondents (60% of 20) who did not have an association with any known gang and the remaining eight respondents would be from those who had an association with known gangs.

However, all these calculations were heavily dependant on the availability of the respondents, their willingness to participate in the study and the rapport developed with them. Therefore, one ended up adopting theoretical and convenience sampling method, by interviewing respondents who the researcher was successful in establishing contact and the rapport with, to obtain the data required for the study.

**The process of sample selection**

The following routes were attempted towards contacting respondents:

- Taking the help of police officers attached to the AEC to get introduced to the respondents
- Taking the help of respondents who had already been interviewed and who happened to know the other possible respondents.

\(^2\) After obtaining permission to access the records of the AEC from the Additional Commissioner of Police, Crime Branch, Mumbai vide letter dated 18/09/08, the researcher approached the Senior Inspector, AEC with request to provide secondary data pertaining youth arrested in cases relating to extortion in the age group of 18-30 years for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007, as per a format submitted to him by the researcher. This data was made available to the researcher, the first installment of which was given to him by the AEC on October 21, 2008.
• Taking the help of lawyers who happened to know the respondent, either in the capacity of his client or in any other capacity.
• Directly approaching the respondent by making a phone call (if that was made available to the researcher by the police in the AEC) or by making a home visit.

It was later felt that the last mentioned option i.e. directly making a home visit would be fraught with ethical and safety dimensions. One must not rule out the possibility that a respondent may now be out of crime, and a visit by a total stranger to his house may ‘unsettle’ him or his family or may raise suspicions about him amongst his neighbours. Alternatively, if he is still in crime, such a visit may pose a threat to the safety of the researcher, since a potential respondent or his gang members may become suspicious of such a visit.

Considering all the above options, it was decided that the researcher would try the first option first i.e. go through a police officer of the AEC, who was familiar with the cases and the respondents tentatively chosen by researcher for his study. Accordingly, the researcher got in touch with an officer whom he had initially approached in the AEC, through another police officer, whom the researcher knew very well.

The researcher contacted this officer after getting the secondary data from the AEC in November 2008 and as promised, he asked the researcher to meet him in his office to identify cases from the records made available by the AEC that would meet the objectives of the study. On the appointed day, the researcher met this officer and identified cases who were ‘ideal candidates’ from the point of view of developing the profile as well as the in-depth interviews. The selection of cases was done based on the following criteria:

• Age of the respondent i.e. the respondent should be below twenty five years of age at the time of his first arrest, as far as possible.
• Offence background i.e. the respondent should have more than one arrest relating to an extortion case against him, as far as possible.
• Type of case i.e. the case against respondent is serious; and he not arrested in a case of technical arrest, or he is not a casual/occasional offender.

At the time of the discussion with the officer, out of the twenty five identified cases, as per the AEC records, eight of them were lodged in prison and the remaining were out on bail. The researcher decided that he would begin the interviews with those who were currently in prison, as it was easier to contact them and they may refer him to their co-accused who were out on bail, once rapport was established with them.

Types of data

The data collected for the study was both quantitative and qualitative in nature. Quantitative data includes legal data about youth arrested in extortion related crimes and data about youth in crime from Mumbai Police sources.

Qualitative data includes the in-depth interviews with the respondents and with key informants (including family members of respondents) and the life histories of respondents that have been developed through the in-depth interviews.

Sources of data

a. Primary sources – The primary source of data are structured interviews with youth respondents who were interviewed to develop the socio-economic profiles and the in-depth interviews to develop the life histories of the respondents. Apart from these interviews, interviews with key informants have been used to enrich and triangulate the data collected. Key informants include two family members, three police officers, one prison officer, one lawyer, one crime reporter, and one social worker.

b. Secondary sources – Legal data obtained about youth in the age group of 18 to 30 years arrested in extortion related cases during the years 2005, 2006 and 2007, from the AEC, Crime Branch, Mumbai Police has been quantitatively analysed to provide trends about the nature of arrests made and the profile of the subjects being studied. Other secondary sources
include books, journals, online sources, newspapers and magazines, government reports, crime data published the official agencies, and unpublished material.

**Methods and tools for data collection**

*The structured interview*

For developing the socio-economic profiles of the respondents, the structured interview method was used. A structured interview, also known as the *standardized interview*, entails the administration of an interview schedule by an interviewer, whereby ‘each respondent receives exactly the same interview stimulus as any other’. The purpose of this method is aggregation of replies for quantitative data analysis; and ‘questions used in this method are very specific and very often offer the interviewee a fixed range of answers’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 193). The tool used for data collection, as mentioned earlier, was an interview schedule, prepared on the basis of the research questions, review of literature and the researcher’s experience of work with youth offenders.

*The in-depth interview*

To understand reasons and the process of entry into the criminal nexus, the social supports available to the respondent youth to deal with arrest and post-arrest problems, his views on family, peer and gender relations, religion and the criminal justice system and processing and to study the processes that unfold in the post-arrest phase, in-depth interviews were used with selected respondents and key informants.

To do the in-depth interviews, the tool used was interview guides developed separately for the respondents and the key informants. The guides were developed on the basis of on research questions, review of literature and past experience of the researcher as a social worker who has worked with youth offenders for nearly eighteen years.

The group being studied here comprises youth involved in serious offences like extortion and related cases and may be associated with criminal gangs with an organised structure, hierarchy and a network designed to fetch illegal gains on a large scale. This is not a well
researched area. There have been a few studies on gangs (Vaidya, R., 1999; Saraf, V.K., 1999; Thilagaraj, R. and Gandhirajan, C.K. 2009) but the focus of these studies have been more on functioning of criminal gangs; different from the objectives of this study. Since there are many gaps in understanding about youth involved in such crimes, an exploratory research design is more suited for this purpose.

According to Gayle Letherby (2003),

> The most informal interview is the unstructured in-depth interview. Here the interviewer may simply have a list of topics which they want the respondent to talk about and each interviewer phrases the questions as they wish and asks them in the order that seems appropriate, or may even negotiate with the respondents about the content and structure of the interview. This approach also gives the respondent scope to be involved in the research design in that, if they raise issues not previously thought of by the researcher and make clear which issues they think are the most important, this is noted by the researcher (p. 84).

‘For the greater part of his information the investigator must find his own witnesses, induce them to talk, and embody the gist of this oral testimony on his sheets of notes. This is the “method of the interview”, or “conversation with a purpose”, a unique instrument of the social investigator’ (Webb and Webb, as cited by Burgess, 1982, p. 107).

Bogdan and Taylor (1984) state that the interview is ‘directed towards understanding the informants’ perspectives on their own lives, experiences or situations as expressed in their own words’. The objective is to learn about ‘events and activities that cannot be observed directly’. It is intended to ‘yield a broad picture of a range of settings, situations or people’ (p. 77).

Burgess (1982, p. 108) talks of four types of questions which the researcher used in his interviews as per the requirements of the situation:

1. Devil’s advocate question – Informant is presented with an opposing point of view so as to discover the informant’s position through responses that are given. These types of questions were generally used by the researcher when asking
questions which had conflicting perspectives e.g. questions relating to experiences of respondents with criminal justice functionaries.

2. Posing hypothetical questions – To find out what the informant might do in a particular situation. Such questions were asked by the researcher to find out about ideology and value systems of the respondents.

3. To assert an ideal position – To discover how the respondent perceives ideal persons, situations and conditions. These type of questions were used to find out their views on gender, criminal justice system and role of the State.

4. To offer interpretations of situations – To confirm findings or respond with counter information which may set them on another line of inquiry. This was done either to confirm an emerging finding with a new respondent or to take a nascent finding forward with another respondent.

There is some controversy about whether the use of open-ended interviews alone in the absence of participant observation method or the researcher not having spent a long time with the respondent group in observing them, can be called as part of the ethnographic approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). On the other hand, the researcher would tend to agree with the viewpoint of Kleinman, Stenross and McMahon (1994) who argued that the capacity of the interviewer to elicit discussion of desired subjects, when rapport has been established, has advantages over participant observation for the exploration of study participants’ feelings and perceptions. (ibid, p. xiv).

There is an added and important dimension to why it may not be possible to use the methods of observation, semi-participant or participant observation in this study, which arises from the nature of the study and respondent group chosen for the study. Most studies in crime and deviance have used participant observation as a tool when they have selected a particular geographical area or a community as the site for the study.

This study is a study of individuals involved in criminal acts either in the past or present and the attempt is to understand from their perspective, how and why events happened in their lives as they did and their views about factors responsible for entry and exit in the
criminal world. In view of this, it was decided that in-depth interview as a tool would be best suited to achieve the objectives of the research.

**Life histories**

In using life history as a method, the respondent enjoys complete freedom to decide the canvas and the range of experiences and reflections he/she wants to describe. The interviewer does not try to rein him/her in. It is generally used where the person involved in phenomenon being studied has a longish history of experiences to relate or in case of longitudinal studies. The starting point is usually from childhood experiences and includes his personal life, daily experiences, views and perceptions about things other than his ‘own life’.

Fisher (1991) defines the life history method as the recording and documenting of an individual’s life experiences. ‘They provide an in-depth look into the personal history of those being studied and often reveal a link between biography and social forces (Mehaffy, Sitton and Davis, 1979)’. According to Mills (1959), ‘no social study that does not come back to the problems of biography, of history, and of their intersections within a society has completed its intellectual journey’ (p. 6).

Life histories act as a ‘means of providing illustrations of human biography as the intersection between history and society. …The usefulness of collecting life histories as a method of social research rests on the basic premise that the behaviour and attitudes of people in later life are often rooted in earlier phases of the life cycle’ (p. 21).

According to Becker, life history is a

faithful rendering of the subject’s experience and interpretation of the world he lives in. The sociologist who gathers a life history takes steps to ensure that it covers everything we want to know, that no important fact or even is slighted, that what purports to be factual squares with other available evidence and that the subject’s interpretations are honestly given…He keeps the game honest for us.

In so doing, he pursues the job from his own perspective, a perspective which emphasizes the value of the person’s “own story”…To understand why someone behaves as he does, you must understand how it looked to him, what he thought he had to contend with, what alternatives he saw
open to him; you can understand the effects of opportunity structures, delinquent subcultures, social norms and other commonly invoked explanations of behavior only by seeing them from the actor’s point of view (Darin, W., ed., 2002, pp. 79-80).

He further adds that,

a life history also helps us in areas of research that touch on it only tangentially. Every piece of research crosses frontiers into new terrain that it does not explore thoroughly, areas important to its main concern in which it proceeds more by assumption than by investigation…A study of a mental hospital or prison will make similarly unchecked assumptions about the character of the families whose members end up in the institution. A life history – although it is not the only kind of information that can do this – provides a basis on which those assumptions can be realistically made, a rough approximation of the direction in which the truth lies (ibid, p. 82).

But developing life histories with the help of in-depth interviews is no easy task. It is not as simple as asking an interviewee to tell his life story, as there may be stories within a story (Crites, 1971; cited in Schlosser, 2008). The layers embedded in an ordinary story have to be pulled apart to reveal multiple depths in order to create the narrative. In the final analysis, ‘what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 9; cited in Schlosser, 2008).

Through the in-depth interviews conducted with nineteen respondents, life histories were constructed about these youth who had a history of arrest/s relating to extortion crimes. Some of them had a lot to share in terms of their family background, early childhood experiences, description of the area where they lived during their child and adult hoods, events leading to their arrest and entry into the world of crime, current situation, experiences with and their perceptions of the CJS, views on gender, State and crime and punishment and reasons for entry into and exit from crime.

These interviews have helped in building rich life histories. A few of them did not have enough to share or did not want to share either because their life experiences in the world of crime were not as rich or because rapport with the researcher was not close enough to allow for such sharing. These interviews have led to creation of rather superficial level
life histories. The researcher is fortunate that the former are more in number, thus allowing for data analysis to proceed well.

Attempts were made by the researcher to follow-up cases and study the processes as they unfold from a phenomenological point of view. The retracing of lives could be done in a few cases, where rapport was built as the researcher interacted with the respondents either in prison or in the community.

**Constructing the tools**

*a. Proforma for secondary data on youth offenders* - In order to get an idea about prevalence of extortion crimes in the city of Mumbai and their processing by the criminal justice system, the researcher approached the AEC of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police to obtain data about male youth arrested in extortion crimes (describes earlier). This data was also helpful in understanding the magnitude of the problem being studied and in the sampling process, required for developing the profiles of the youth being studied.

Based on his understanding of the data maintained by the police of arrested persons, the researcher developed a proforma (Annexure I) and submitted it to the AEC for their consideration. This included items such as name of the person, date of arrest, age as on date of arrest, address, court name and number, section under which arrested, Criminal Register Number (C.R. Number)\(^3\), Court Case Number (CC Number)\(^4\), whether the charge sheet has been filed and date of filing, status of the case, whether bail granted and amount, whether the accused has been released from custody and how (released on bail, case discharged, acquitted, or served the sentence), previous record of arrest/conviction, if any, etc.

On sharing this proforma with the AEC staff, the researcher was informed that they do not maintain previous arrest/conviction record of the accused with them. If an accused is arrested by the police, his/her name and fingerprints are sent to the Finger Print Bureau

\(^3\) C.R. Number is a number allotted to every criminal case registered by a police station against any alleged offender. All details about a case are maintained under the C.R. Number. It is very difficult to get any information about the case details in a police station without this number.

\(^4\) CC Number is a number allotted to a case after charges are framed against the accused in a court. All records lying with the court about the case can be traced only with the help of this number.
(FPB) in the Crime Branch (CB) Office to find out if he/she has any previous conviction against him/her. However, the FPB only maintains records of those who are convicted of an offence by a court.

There is no centralized data bank on arrested persons who are undergoing trial or who have been discharged or acquitted in their offence by the court. If the police wants to find out whether an accused has been arrested in the past, they usually send a wireless message to all police stations in the city or the state (depending on the seriousness of the offence for which the alleged offender has been arrested), giving details about the name, type of offence and any other information they may have about the accused in order to find out about the previous arrest history of the person, if any.

This meant that if the researcher wanted to know the previous arrest or conviction history of persons in the AEC list, he would have to approach the FPB and individual police stations in each case or the Office of the Commissioner of Police for fresh permission to be given this information. Considering the months already spent in obtaining permission from the Office of the Commissioner of Police to get data from the AEC, the researcher decided to drop the idea. Accordingly, this item was dropped from the proforma submitted to the AEC. The researcher decided that from the list provided by the AEC, he would find out about the previous arrest/conviction record of the accused persons whom he interviews for the profiles and/or with whom he does the in-depth interviews.

Another issue which came up while discussing the proforma with one of the officers from the AEC was that one could get data about the occupation of the complainant from the AEC records. This would be helpful in understanding the type of persons who were being victimized by extortionists and could lead to a broad categorization of victims who fall prey to extortion. The researcher found this input extremely interesting and useful and decided to add this to the proforma.

b. Interview schedule for developing the profile – In order to develop a profile of the youth being studied, it was decided to use an interview schedule with the sample
population from the list obtained from the AEC. Based on his understanding about the group being studied, the researcher first prepared a checklist which he called ‘Processes from Arrest to Release’ (Annexure II). This was helpful in getting a conceptual understanding of the issues that a person may face from the time and arising out of his/her arrest to those that may come up after he/she gets released from custody. This checklist was helpful in developing both the interview schedule for the profiles (Annexure III) and for developing the interview guide for the in-depth interviews of respondents (Annexure IV).

The interview schedule was tested in the field by interviewing an ex-offender who happened to be a client of the researcher (in his previous role of a social worker). The researcher knows this person for more than fifteen years and he often comes to meet the researcher to discuss his life problems. The researcher had told him about his doctoral work, and with his consent, used the tool to see if it worked in the field. Based on this field test, he modified the interview schedule.

This process of refining the tool continued through the first five or six interviews. As the interviews proceeded, a few of the original questions had to be deleted and a few added. For example, legal details about the arrest and re-arrest of respondents were not forthcoming, either because of some of these events had happened very long back and the respondent did not remember the details or because they were not comfortable talking about such details. Similarly, the researcher realized that questions about alcohol or drug intake or addictions did not elicit honest responses because it was too early days as far as the researcher-respondent relationship was concerned. It so happened that many of the questions in the interview schedule became easier to fill when the same person also became a participant for the in-depth interviews.

Towards the later half of the data collection process, the interview schedule for the profile and the in-depth interviews were not undertaken in a linear fashion. Some of the areas in the interview schedule such as name, age, address, family details, work background, etc. would elicit responses easily, but issues such as friendships, family

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5 As described earlier, the researcher had to go beyond the list provided by the AEC and find respondents through snowballing and from the prison records, as it was difficult to find people in the list.
conflict, addictions, life after release, etc. would only emerge from the in-depth interviews.

c. Interview guide for in-depth interviews – Interview guides were developed based on the objectives of the study, review of literature, the checklist on processes related to arrest and release and experience and understanding of the field gained by the researcher from his work background. Separate interview guides were prepared for the male youth being studied (Annexure IV); and key informants such as police and prison officers, lawyers, social workers, family members and journalists (see Annexures V, VI, VII, VII and IX).

Needless to add that these guides were not used in a linear or restrictive manner, but in a way that facilitated free flow of thought and information. By the time the researcher was half way through the process, he knew what he wanted to focus on with each respondent, depending on the emerging patterns in the data collection process. Interviews with every respondent helped the researcher in either probing an issue or a new area further with the next respondent, in closing a line of thought or in reaching saturation point in the data collection process.

Data analysis

The quantitative data collected in this study was of two types – legal data obtained from the AEC, Crime Branch, Mumbai Police (for the years 2005, 2006 and 2007); and structured interviews with nineteen respondents which have led to developing the profile of the respondents. Both sets of quantitative data - the legal data and the interview schedules were analysed through the SPSS and the frequency and cross-tables emerging from this analysis have been interpreted to suggest findings.

The in-depth interviews with the nineteen respondents (the same people who initially participated in the structured interviews towards developing the profile) led to the construction of nineteen life histories. The narrative analysis approach has been used to analyse these life histories. Within narrative analysis, the researcher has used thematic and structural analysis.
It needs to be highlighted here that all names of individuals and places have been changed in the text of the chapters, to maintain confidentiality and ensure that true identities of the respondents and key informants are not revealed. This has been done as per the terms of the oral consent given by the respondents and key informants while agreeing to be interviewed by the researcher.

Narrative analysis, in the words of Bryman (2008),

entails a sensitivity to: the connections in people’s accounts of past, present, and future events and states of affairs; people’s sense of their place within those events and states of affairs; the stories they generate about them; and the significance of context for the unfolding of events and people’s sense of their role within them. It is the ways that people organise and forge connections between events and the sense they make of those connections that provides the raw material of narrative analysis (p. 553).

According to Riessman (2004b), there are four models of narrative analysis: thematic, structural, interactional and proformative (cited in Bryman, 2008, p. 553).

The researcher has used thematic and structural analysis to analyse the life histories and identify factors leading to crimogenic behaviour among the youth involved in extortion crimes.

In thematic analysis, the emphasis is on the content of a text, ‘what’ is said more than ‘how’ it is said, the ‘told’ rather than the ‘telling’. Because interest lies in the content of speech, analysis revolves around what is said by focusing on the meaning of what is said.

In structural analysis, the emphasis is on telling, to the way a story is told. The focus is equally on form – how a teller by selecting particular narrative devices makes a story persuasive. But unlike the thematic approach, language is treated seriously – an object for close investigation, over and beyond its referential content. Strict application of the structural approach can de-contextualize narratives by ignoring historical, interactional and institutional factors. Research settings and relationships constrain what can be narrated, and shape the way a particular story develops (Sinha, 2009)⁶.

⁶ Sinha, R., Draft Ph.D. thesis submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, excerpts sent to researcher via email, Mumbai, November 6, 2009
Unraveling the methodology for the study: The data collection process

The journey of arriving at the sample frame and selection of respondents for the study has seen many twists and turns, and ups and downs. The following section tries to capture these as they unfolded before the researcher in the course of fieldwork. Each time the researcher arrived at a rationally thought out plan, it had to be changed due to unforeseen factors or circumstances. Presented below are the details of these plans as they were originally thought of and the reason why a new plan had to be put in its place:

Plan A

The researcher first approached the Commissioner of Police, Mumbai, to gain access to records of male youth in the age group of 18 to 30 (the issue of age has been discussed in a separate section) who have more than one arrest against their name. Permission to gain access to police records of this group was granted in April 2007, based on an application made to the Commissioner for the purpose.

The researcher then made visits to the Crime Branch Office of the Mumbai Police Commissionerate and met the officials of the Statistics and Computer Section of the Crime Branch to explain the objectives and design of the study. He requested for the following data pertaining to 2004, 2005 and 2006 from them:

1. Total number of arrests made during the year.
2. Total number of arrests made during the year pertaining to property offences.
3. Total number of arrests made during the year in the age group of 18 to 30 years.
4. Total number of arrests made during the year in the age group of 18 to 30 years, pertaining to property offences.
5. Police Station with the highest number of FIRs lodged during the year.
6. Police Station with the lowest number of FIRs lodged during the year.

The data was provided to the researcher around a month after the request was made (June, 2007). Based on this data, the sample size for collecting data to understand the profile of the respondents was decided. The data provided to the researcher based on his request showed that property crimes were defined under the following categories –
kidnapping and abduction, dacoity, preparation of dacoity, robbery, burglary, auto thefts, other thefts, cheating and counterfeiting.

Arrest figures obtained from the Statistics Division of Crime Branch, Mumbai (Annexure X) reveal the following:

**Extract of Annexure X**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18 to 30 yrs</td>
<td>Total arrests</td>
<td>18 to 30 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All crimes</td>
<td>17,297</td>
<td>28,883</td>
<td>15,477</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table, it emerges that the average number of persons arrested in a year is 28,940. Out of this, the average population of persons arrested in the 18-30 age groups comes to 16,671. From these figures, the percentage of youth in the 18-30 age group arrested for various crimes in Mumbai city comes to 57.6 per cent.

If one narrows down to property offences or crimes where the motive is property gain (kidnapping and abduction, dacoity, preparation of dacoity, robbery, burglary, auto thefts, other thefts, cheating and counterfeiting), the following picture emerges:

**Extract of Annexure X**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>2004</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>18 to 30 yrs</td>
<td>Total arrests</td>
<td>18 to 30 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property crimes</td>
<td>5474</td>
<td>8265</td>
<td>5218</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above table reveals that the average number of persons arrested in a year for property crimes comes to 8631 and the average number persons arrested in a year for property crimes in the 18-30 age group comes to 5471. From these figures, the percentage of youth in the 18-30 age group arrested for property crimes in Mumbai city comes to 63.4 per cent.
The All India recidivism rate for all crimes as per Crime in India (India, 2007) is 8.6 per cent where as the recidivism rate for Maharashtra is 2.4 per cent. Since the Mumbai recidivism rate was not available, and the crime and recidivism rates of Mumbai are likely to be higher than the Maharashtra rate of 2.4 per cent, it was decided to apply the national recidivism rate to arrive at the 20 per cent sample size, to be on the safe side of error. The average number of persons arrested per annum in Mumbai (for property crimes in the age group of 18-30 years) is 5471. If one applied the national recidivism rate of 8.6 per cent to 5471, the figure arrived at was 464.64. By calculating twenty per cent of this figure, the researcher arrived at a sample size of 92.89 (i.e. 20% of 464.4). Therefore, the sample size arrived at to understand the profile of the group (as per objective one of the study) was fixed at approximately 100.

In order to ensure that data was collected uniformly from across the city and to maintain statistical consistency in the data, the researcher had a very useful discussion with one of the officers in the Statistics Section, regarding how to choose the police stations from where data could be collected.

Based on the discussions with the officer, around twenty five police stations were identified from where data could be collected based on criteria such as: commercial/business area, busy area, market area, port area, residential area, communally sensitive area, area with high migrant population, posh area, working class area, etc. It was therefore decided that in order to understand the profile of the respondents, data would be collected as per the above plan, so that the sample is representative of the categories mentioned above (interview with a police officer, Statistics Division, Crime Branch, Mumbai Police in June 2007).

The process of data collection planned was as follows:

1. The researcher goes to a Police Station as per the list of police stations provided by the Officer from the Statistics Division of Crime Branch, Mumbai Police, and

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5 The recidivism rate has been arrived at on the basis of recorded data collected by the NCRB. These figures may not reflect the true picture since it is dependent on many factors such as correct recording of data, rate of conviction and whether convicted offenders remain or move out of a district or state jurisdiction.
meets the Police Inspector (Crime) or (Preventive), depending on who is available and accessible.

2. The researcher explains the objectives of the study and shows him/her the permission letter from the Police Commissioner to establish his credentials. After this, the researcher requests the officer concerned to give him a list of youth with their contact addresses, who have been arrested in property crimes and have more than one arrest against their name.

3. Such persons may either be in police custody, prison custody or released from custody. If in police custody, they could be interviewed at the police station itself (with their consent).

4. If in prison custody, they may either be an under trial or a convict. They could be interviewed by getting the permission of the prison and court authorities.

5. If released from custody, they could be out on bail, discharged or acquitted in their case/s or released after completion of their sentence. In case of persons with a history of cases against them, it could well be a combination of all the above.

As the interviews proceed, significant categories would be identified for in-depth and unstructured interviews for the case studies. The selection of cases for the in-depth interviews would also depend on the ability to form rapport with the respondents during the first interview with them and whether these persons are willing to give access to the researcher into their lives.

As per this plan, the researcher approached the Police Inspector (Crime) in one of the police stations identified, requesting him to give a list of youth involved in serious property crimes with a repeat arrest history. After some discussion, the officer showed the researcher a small printed booklet which had names of repeat offenders in his jurisdiction. The researcher thought his job was now done. He took down names and addresses (along with case details) of youth in the specified age group who had a history of serious property offences from this booklet.

The researcher decided to try and trace at least one of the accused mentioned in the list as a test case. Very soon, he realized that it was not going to be an easy task. The area which
the police station covers is one of the largest slum communities in Mumbai, largely inhabited by people who do not have the means to afford slum housing in more ‘habitable’ areas of the city. It is close to one of the largest dumping grounds in the city and has a high percentage of migrants to the city. The area is full of lanes and by lanes which meet and crisscross each other at regular and irregular junctions.

It took the researcher almost two to three hours to trace one address, only to realize that the house was locked. On asking a shopkeeper, he was informed that the youth concerned had shifted from the area. The next day, the researcher made another attempt to trace another address and met with a worse result; this time the house mentioned could not be traced at all, despite getting sympathetic looks from bystanders and onlookers.

The researcher realized that given his limitations of time8, this was not going to be a very fruitful way of finding respondents. He therefore decided to discuss this issue of the choice of respondents with his Doctoral Advisory Committee (DAC). Discussions with the DAC led to a new plan.

**Plan B**

A *new plan* emerged: to focus on a single category of property offences of serious nature and interviewing youth involved in such offences. Based on discussions with the DAC members and his research guide, it was decided to choose extortion as a category since it fulfilled the requirements of the study well. In choosing this category, one could then access the records from the Anti Extortion Cell (AEC) of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police. Data on youth involved in extortion cases could be centrally accessed through this Cell and by establishing rapport with the staff of the AEC, it may become possible to get their help in accessing respondents.

Based on this plan, the researcher first approached a police officer of the AEC, Crime Branch, Mumbai Police9 to discuss the possibility of getting the type of data that he was looking for. It emerged from this discussion that AEC maintains records of all extortion

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8 The researcher had concurrent teaching and field responsibilities as a faculty member with the Centre for Criminology and Justice, School of Social Work, TISS.
9 This process has been described in the earlier section of the chapter.
related cases arrested and investigated by the AEC. The officer said that some of his colleagues posted in the AEC at present and in the past, could be key informants in the study and he assured his cooperation to the researcher in doing the study. He suggested that the researcher first get official permission from the Commissioner of Police to collect data from the AEC.

The researcher applied for permission to collect data from the AEC of the Crime Branch, Mumbai Police, vide a letter dated May 13, 2008 and submitted it to the Additional Commissioner of Police (Crime), Mumbai Police. Subsequently he met the Additional Commissioner (Crime) to explain the objectives of his research and assured him that data collected by him would be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. The permission letter was issued to the researcher after a rigorous follow-up process, on September 18, 2008.

The researcher now approached the Senior Inspector’s Office of the AEC with a copy of the letter and met an Assistant Police Inspector who asked him to come back after a week. The following week, the researcher met the officer and gave him a format in which he needed the data pertaining to youth (in the age group 18 to 30 years) arrested by the AEC. The format included the categories of information that was required under each case arrested by the AEC in the 18-30 age group. The officer perused the format and called the writer\textsuperscript{10} and instructed him to supply the data that was asked for. It took two months for the writer to give the data asked for.

In the meanwhile, since May 2008, the researcher had been ‘looking out’ for respondents whom he could interview. He knew two of the youth who had been / are clients of Prayas and who fitted the objectives of the study. He decided to approach them and they agreed to be interviewed by him. He also approached the officer from Crime Branch whom he knew well and requested him to help him meet possible respondents This officer in turn referred the researcher to a colleague of his. The colleague asked him straightaway if he was ready to interview a boy just then. The researcher was totally unprepared for this but agreed to take up the challenge.

\textsuperscript{10} Every police station has a post of a writer whose job is to maintain records pertaining to cases filed in the police station.
The officer made a phone call and asked someone to come to the police station immediately. Within fifteen minutes, a tall lean young man wearing a track pant and a t-shirt arrived. The officer introduced the youth to the researcher and asked the youth to speak to the researcher without any fear. He told the youth that the researcher was known to him (*apna aadmi hai*). This is how the researcher’s first foray into data collection began.

He also started meeting the two other respondents from Prayas and had several sessions with them. By the time the permission letter came in September and the data asked for from the AEC was given in November 2008, the researcher had already had approximately twenty hours of interviewing with these respondents. These interviews helped the researcher to sharpen his tools and get more focused about the type of data that he should be looking for to fulfill the objectives of his research.

**Profiling**

As mentioned above, the original purpose of doing profiles of the respondents was to get an understanding of the socio-economic, educational, work, personal and familial and criminal world. Towards this end, the researcher had planned to do a 20 per cent sample of the average arrived at of persons arrested by the AEC over a three year period.

On receiving the data from the AEC records, the researcher realized that majority of persons arrested during the period 2005-2007 were already out on bail at the time of starting fieldwork. This posed methodological and ethical challenges. The question that arose was about how was he to meet these people and where. It was not as if they all lived in a specific geographic community. There have been many ethnographic studies of youth in crime through the area based approach (Whyte, 1955; Sanders 2005; Venkatesh, 2008). However, these studies have not necessarily only focused on those with criminal records or a specific category. These have been studies of youth facing a range of criminal cases and/or proceedings, and the findings have therefore focused on deviant or criminal youth rather than youth involved in a specific offence.
Contrary to the above, this study attempts to understand the youth, their life situation, world views and problems faced by those who are specifically involved in extortion cases. The emerging possibilities of meeting these youth in the given situation were at their residence, at the arresting police station, or in the court. The question that also arose was how to get introduced to the person. The options were of getting introduced through the police, lawyer or court officials. All these were fraught with the danger of being viewed by the respondents with a bias, especially since these persons have had a hand in their being processed by the CJS.

The researcher decided to select cases (from the list provided by the AEC) which would meet the objectives of the study – age of the person, repeat offence, number of co-accused, involvement in gangs and type of extortion. He had a detailed discussion about each case from the list with one of the police officers attached to AEC (for the last eight years) keeping these factors in mind. Based on this, a list of around 25 cases was drawn up whom one could interview to develop the profiles or for the purpose of in-depth interviews (interview with a police officer from AEC, dated November 11, 2007). Since most of them were out on bail, and tracing and interviewing them was not going to be easy (given the issues mentioned above), the researcher decided to start this process with those inside prison and currently facing trial.

The original interview schedule developed by the researcher for profiling had to undergo two to three rounds of changes based on the initial interviews with respondents. Certain questions (such as family support and place of stay immediately after release) were deleted or clubbed into one question.

**Interviewing**

As already mentioned, the plan was to select cases for the in-depth interviews from the pool of cases who had been interviewed for the profile purposes. It was felt that while interviewing the youth for the profile purposes, information would emerge about who from among them came from a background of repeat arrest history, serious crime and/or gang involvement i.e. belonged to the category that was an ‘ideal fit’ from the point of view of the objectives of the study.
However, by now, it had become evident to the researcher that getting data in the proposed area of study was not going to be an easy exercise. He therefore decided that he would attempt to do in-depth interviews with the same persons who had initially agreed to be interviewed for developing the profiles. As the interviews proceeded, the researcher realized that administering the interview schedule (developed for the profile) first and then asking the person to participate in the in-depth interviews seemed rather artificial. Rather, it might be a better idea to start in-depth interviews with whoever agreed to be interviewed and depending on the background of the person and his experiences of the crime world, the quality of data would vary.

Doing in-depth interviews of prisoners is fraught with methodological and ethical challenges. In fact, one may question the idea of using qualitative, ethnographic methods of enquiry in such settings. Schlosser (2008) admits the limitations of using ethnography or participant observation in institutional settings. He points out however that the data emerging from a brief encounter in prison, through the medium of the narrative, can be as rich as what can be obtained from any other method. According to Clarke (1975) cited in Schlosser (2008), the interaction between the researcher and the prisoner decides the outcome of the research.

The construction of the researcher’s role in prison becomes crucial in this context. He must also become aware and understand how identity is shaped for (and by) the inmates within the total institution of the prison (Goffman, 1961; cited in Schlosser, 2008). Schlosser (2008) emphasizes that it is important to first get familiar with the prison setting in which data collection is to proceed.

This researcher had the advantage of complete familiarity of the setting in which data collection was to proceed. He had worked as a social worker in the same prison between 1990 and 1993 and later had regular interactions with the prison authorities and the social workers working in prison on behalf of the project with which he has been associated since the last nineteen years or so. However, the earlier role of a social worker was very different from the new role of a researcher. This role had to be clarified with the prison staff and the inmates at regular intervals. The insights gained by the researcher from his
earlier work experience, about the prison environment and lives of prisoners, released prisoners and male youth offenders proved very useful at all stages of the research – during the in-depth interviews, while constructing the life histories based on these interviews and during data analysis.

Entering prison with official permission and getting introduced to the prisoner sought to be interviewed through the officials has advantages and disadvantages. While access to prison authorities can be an advantage to the researcher, it can be of detriment to the research itself. The prisoner tends to view the researcher as an outsider with power (Marzano, 2007; cited in Schlosser, 2008), and this perception may colour his decision to give his consent to be interviewed as well as the content of his interview. It is very important to explain to the interviewee that the researcher has no connection with the powers that be and that any information given to the researcher will be kept confidential. How the initial interviews proceed and how comfortable the interviewees feel speaking to and interacting with the researcher may have a bearing on the interviews that follow these initial interviews, since news travels very fast through informal channels inside (Schlosser, 2008).

As a result of processes of ‘prisonisation’ of the prisoner, there may be a tendency to internalize the institutional rhetoric rather than their ‘lived’ experience. The official ideology may force the prisoner towards an understanding of crime based on self-recrimination which excludes other social or institutional factors leading to criminal behaviour (Sykes, 1958; cited in Schlosser, 2008). Sometimes prisoners may comply with the official ideology out of self-interest or as a result of Foucauldian “docile bodies” to reproduce the structures of power that govern them (Foucault, 1979).

The amount of time spent interviewing the respondent and therefore the quality of the data depended on factors such as rapport built with him, and his ability and/or willingness to speak to the researcher (depending on richness or otherwise of his life experiences and how ‘connected’ he felt with the researcher in order to speak freely about these experiences).
The researcher obtained permission to visit and interview prisoners and prison staff in the two prisons in Mumbai and Thane districts from the D.I.G. Prisons (Southern Region) and then approached the superintendent of the prison in Mumbai, where most of the respondents were lodged, from the list finalized with the help of the officer from AEC. He requested the superintendent to help find out if the prisoners in the list were still in prison. From the list of twelve prisoners, the jailor (who was assigned the task of finding out their status by the superintendent) informed the researcher on his next visit to the prison that only three were still in the prison; the remaining had either been released on bail or transferred to other prisons of the state. He decided to start with these three youth.

The first interview with the first respondent in prison happened on April 27, 2009. During the period that the first three interviews were going on (stretching over three weeks), the researcher requested the prison staff to refer cases of youth arrested in extortion cases as well as used the snowballing technique to meet more respondents. The researcher was able to get in touch with and interview a few respondents through this method. However, when this too was exhausted, he pored over the Under Trial Registers maintained in the prison and went through case details of over 2000 to identify respondents. The last session with a new respondent was held on July 9, 2009.

**Prison as a setting for interviews**

The researcher started the data collection process by requesting the jailor to allow him to meet the first person on the list. The officer took him inside the main prison building complex which houses the barracks. Each barrack is surrounded by a compound wall and there are open spaces between the enclosed barracks.

In the main open space (after one passes through the second door) of the prison complex, there is a raised area (with a tin-roof and open sides) on top of the underground water tank known as the *pani taaki*. This area is earmarked for the jailors to sit around during their duty hours. A table and a couple of chairs are kept here. There

\[\text{11} \text{ Every prison in India has large main door followed by a second main door, which lets one into the main prison complex. Between these two main doors, is housed the office of the superintendent, other senior prison officials and the records or the judicial section of the prison.}\]

\[\text{12} \text{ Pani taaki means water tank in Hindi.}\]
is a bench on the side made of black cuddappa\textsuperscript{13} stone adjoining a wall which is a part of a room used for producing under trial prisoners in court through the video-conferencing facility. There is a small garden outside the video-conferencing room next to the pani taaki. The jailor asked the researcher to sit on the cuddappa stone bench and then ordered one of the guards to bring the prisoner he had requested to be interviewed from his barrack.

After about fifteen minutes, a thin young man who looked to be in his late twenties with a flowing beard approached the pani taaki along with the guard. The jailor introduced the prisoner to the researcher and signaled to both to sit on the bench and get started.

The researcher did his first three or four interviews at this place. It was a comfortable place; airy and spacious, something which could not be said about most spaces in the prison, famous for its overcrowding. He had taken permission from the Senior Jailor of the prison to interview the prisoners here even during bandi time\textsuperscript{14}. One of the jailors who would often observe the researcher interact with the prisoners, one day asked him why he was interviewing the prisoners. The researcher explained the research objectives and the methodology being used for the study.

The jailor said that he had observed that the researcher was interviewing prisoners during bandi time too and that was against the rules. The researcher replied that he had taken permission from the Senior Jailor to interview prisoners during bandi time. He did not look satisfied and told the researcher to strictly follow the prison timings, i.e. 10.00 am to 12.00 noon and 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm. The researcher replied that following these timings would break the flow of thought of the respondents and make data collection a difficult exercise. The jailor responded by saying that rules were rules! The researcher decided not to aggravate the issue and nodded his head. His experience told him that this officer would take some time to ‘soften up’.

\textsuperscript{13} Black tiles made of stone available in certain parts of India; probably named after Cuddapah district in Andhra Pradesh, from where it may have originated.

\textsuperscript{14} Bandi time is the time when prisoners are supposed to be locked up inside their barracks/cells. The prison routine alternates between khulla and bandi time. Khulla time starts at 6.30 am in the morning and ends at 12.00 noon, and then again between 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm. Bandi time is between 12.00 noon to 3.00 pm and again between 5.00 pm to 6.30 am.
The researcher decided to use a strategy which usually works in such situations. He asked the jailor for a suggestion to solve his problem. He became a bit thoughtful and then replied that he could sit in Guruji’s room and conduct his interviews. Though it was a bit cramped and used as a resting and/or chatting space by prisoners and prison staff, the researcher agreed to this idea. The rest of the interviews were conducted in this room.

Over time, Guruji’s room became a comfortable space for the researcher. Guruji himself was very warm and supportive. One corner of the room was used to click photographs (through a web camera attached to the computer) to make identity cards for the new entrants to the prison. A prisoner who knew how to use the computer was given the job of clicking photographs and issuing I-Cards and another prisoner was designated to help him with the job.

The researcher became friends with them and they would chat about a variety of issues related to crime, criminal justice system, rehabilitation and politics. He also met at least four of his respondents in this room by accident. Two of them were ex-clients of the researcher, who accidentally spotted him in the room. The other two approached the researcher out of curiosity; it was revealed that they had a background in extortion, were less than 30 years of age and were quite ready to be interviewed.

By the time this phase of data collection was getting over, he had made friends with everyone in prison – the guards at the entrance gate (where he had to sign his name and deposit his mobile phone, wallet and bag), the staff in the judicial section, the jailors, prison guards, convict warders and under trial prisoners who are assigned special duties (such as calling out prisoners from the barrack to attend their court dates, assisting the staff in the judicial section with clerical duties, etc.). Guruji’s room had become like his second home during this phase which lasted approximately three months.

**About the respondents and the challenges of interviewing**

The researcher met the respondents via three routes – through the list provided by AEC, chance meeting with respondents in prison and identifying respondents by scouring

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15 The literacy teacher’s room in prison
through the records maintained in the judicial section of the prison. The first session with every respondent would typically follow what became a pattern. The prisoner would be ‘sent for’ by the jailor or Guruji at the researcher’s request. In about fifteen minutes to half an hour, the prisoner would arrive.

Initially, every respondent looked very apprehensive. This is because if a prisoner has been sent for by the prison staff, the chances are there is some complaint against him which needs to be looked into. The researcher would request the prisoner to sit next to him and speak to him very gently. He would explain who he was, why he wanted to meet the prisoner, what was the purpose of his study and its objectives and that any data or information he collected through the interviews would be kept confidential and used only for research purposes. He would also clarify that the prisoner was under no compulsion to speak to him or be interviewed by him; in fact he was free to refuse to participate in the process.

Surprisingly, every prospective respondent the researcher met agreed almost instantly to be interviewed. Some of them were impatient with the long winded details the researcher would provide, almost asking the researcher to get on with it. Some wanted to ensure that the researcher would not share the data with the police or prison authorities, before agreeing to speak. However, not all of them were forthcoming with the details that the researcher was interested in. Sometimes, when the researcher would probe an ‘interesting’ angle, the respondent would look bored. Sometimes, an interview would abruptly end with a message to the respondent from another prisoner that his mulakat had come or with his saying that he wanted to go and have lunch.

There were days when after having fixed an appointment with a respondent, he would not arrive. The researcher has waited for two to three hours for a prisoner who kept sending word that he would reach in fifteen minutes, but never finally arrived. Sometimes, the researcher would be told by the messenger that the respondent was not well, had gone for mulakat or to court, was having lunch or was simply sleeping. At all these times, the researcher had no option but to try meeting another prisoner or to go back and come on another day.
Snowballing as a technique did not work with this group. None of the prisoners were too keen to refer other prisoners arrested under similar offences. They would tell the researcher that they did not know any such prisoner or that their co-accused was staying in another barrack and therefore it was not possible to communicate with him.

An issue faced by the researcher was the mood of the respondent on a given day. On some days, a respondent would be eager to interact and speak volumes about his life or about an incident or an event. On other days, the researcher would get answers in monosyllables. Another issue was the respondents’ ability to express themselves. Some were very articulate while a few were almost cryptic.

There was also the issue of the experience level of the respondent. Some of the respondents had many things to share and knew a lot about the subject area; the maximum hours interviewed in such cases was fourteen hours. There were also those who one could not be interviewed beyond two hours due to the level of knowledge and experience they had about the issue being studied.

Another issue which came up while doing the in-depth interviews was how to record them. The researcher did not consider the option of taping the interviews for a variety of reasons. Firstly, getting permission would not have been easy, since prison authorities are generally suspicious of bringing an audio or video recording device inside the prison, for fear of its ‘misuse’. Since the researcher had already faced many difficulties in obtaining permissions (described earlier), he decided not to complicate things by asking for such permission.

Secondly, even if he had ventured to get the required permission, his earlier experience of work with prisoners had revealed that prisoners are more forthcoming with their ‘stories’ if they interact in a relaxed environment. Using a tape-recorder would have vitiated the environment, given the nature and scope of the study. Instead, he decided to take notes (with the permission of the respondents) in as unobtrusive a manner as possible and write out the interview sessions while they were still fresh in his mind.
Overall, doing the in-depth interviews was a challenging exercise, to say the least; it confirmed many facts known about the qualitative data collection process, exploded a few myths and added to knowledge in some aspects.

**Saturation**

In using qualitative methods, there is always the rather difficult question of when does one stop data collection. The standard answer to this question is when the respondents begin to sound repetitive to the researcher’s questions or when new angles to the subject of study stop emerging. This could be termed as data saturation. The assessment of when this point of saturation is reached is subjective and there cannot be a standard response to this.

During the data collection process for this study, the first ten interviews kept throwing up new data and angles, which helped to sharpen the interview guide being used for the in-depth interviews. It was an iterative process, whereby every new respondent came up with an additional angle which was explored further with the next respondent. These interviews helped the researcher to ‘build a picture’ around the subject of study.

Gradually, an image of the male youth began to emerge, along with broad patterns relating to family and education background, childhood experiences and about the area, work life, events leading to arrest, life in crime, experiences with the CJS and their perceptions about it, reasons for entry into crime and factors leading to exit from the criminal nexus, views about family, gender relations, religion, State, and crime and punishment.

The data collection also led to a serendipitous discovery which was not part of the objectives of the study, an emerging picture of the structure, hierarchy, activities, rules and norms and the changing nature organised crime in the city.

However, as the researcher interviewed more respondents, the data emerging from the in-depth interviews seemed to have an element of predictability. There was nothing ‘new’ emerging from them. By the time he was doing his nineteenth interview, it seemed as if
he knew what the respondent was going to say in response to questions that he was asking. This is the point at which the researcher stopped his first round of data collection.

**Triangulation**

The issue of reliability of data gathered, in view of the fact that the main source is primarily based on interviews with the respondents, who have narrated their ‘life stories’ to the researcher, is a real one. There is danger of dramatization of facts by respondents and the need to filter the data. This may be particularly true of people who see themselves and their lives as radically ‘different’ from that of the mainstream. There may be an inherent need in such persons to justify their lives and to ‘explain’ their actions. They may also be prone to make tall claims about others (e.g. criminal justice functionaries, gang members, rivals, etc.). In fact, not only can persons in such situations dramatize their lives, there may even be a tendency to be audacious about their claims.

There is also the danger that prisoners may hide information or try to ‘cover up’ facts due to the perception that they may be ‘judged’ if they reveal facts that may be contrary to existing moral or legal codes of behaviour (Garfinkel, 1956; Goffman, 1963; quoted in Schlosser, 2008).

It needs to be re-emphasized here that the aim in a study of this nature is not to obtain objective facts but to get an objective understanding of the subjective worlds of the respondents of the study. As researchers trying to understand the realities in which prisoners live and how they have constructed themselves, ‘we listen to their words, and try to reconstruct their meaning in our minds, but we can never be sure about the accuracy of these transformations’ (Gudmundsdottir, 1996, p. 303-304; quoted in Schlosser, 2008).

Schlosser (2008) suggests that the full narratives constructed from the in-depth interviews should be reproduced as part of the data analysis process for a more complete and honest representation of the subject’s story, even though it may be space consuming. This would help in tying the stories and realities of the interviewee more closely with an innovative theoretical finding. While it may be true that reproducing the life histories of the nineteen
respondents (which have formed the basis for narrative analysis) could help the reader get a holistic picture about their lives and the context, it would add too much volume and could affect readability. It was therefore decided that short life sketches of these nineteen respondents could be added as an annexure (Annexure XII).

However, no researcher can get away from the rigour of scientific research by stating that he/she has attempted to understand the subjective realities of the researched. In order to ‘temper’ the data, it is necessary for the researcher, in such circumstances, especially since very little is known about the subject area and it could therefore be susceptible to exaggeration, to attempt to ‘filter’ the data with other sources. In other words, triangulation was achieved through a process whereby other possible sources of data were explored by interviewing ‘key informants’ relevant to the study.

According to Denzin (1978), four types of triangulation are possible: data triangulation involving time, space and persons; investigator triangulation involving multiple researchers in investigation; theory triangulation involving more than one theoretical scheme in the interpretation of the phenomenon; and methodological triangulation involving more than one method to gather data, such as interviews, observations, questionnaires and documents

The researcher has used data, theory and methodological triangulations in this study. The data collection was done over a period of one and half to two years, carried out in prison and in the community and interviews were carried out with a range of persons and data sources. Several theoretical constructs relating to the study of crime and youth involvement in gangs have been used to interpret gang behaviour and youth involvement in crimes relating to extortion; and interviews, in-depth interviews, observations and documents have been used to gather data for the research.

The filters or multiple sources of data used in the study to achieve triangulation were family members of the respondents, police officers who had experience in investigation of extortion and gang-related cases, prison staff who had handled cases of prisoners arrested or convicted in extortion or gang-related offences and lawyers who had
experience of handling extortion cases, crime reporters and social workers who had experience of working with persons with a history of extortion or gang-related offences.

According to this plan, the researcher interviewed two family members (a mother-in-law, a wife, three police officers, one prison officer, one lawyer one crime reporter with a national daily and one social worker who has worked with youth involved in extortion crimes.

A word or two about the researcher

The fact that the researcher has worked with youth offenders as a social worker for several years was factored into the research design. The researcher has been actively involved with a field action project of the Centre for Criminology and Justice in the School of Social Work at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, which works with persons vulnerable to crime or commercial sexual exploitation towards their rehabilitation. He was the first social worker appointed in the project and was based in the male youth section of Mumbai Central Prison as the prison social worker for three years (1990-1993). He has since been involved in the project with issues such as legal aid, custodial care, rehabilitation, networking with voluntary organisations and government departments, and administration of and coordination within the project. Currently, he is the Faculty-in-Charge of the project.

It is presumed that his experience of working with youth offenders and having longitudinal relationships with some of them for over nineteen years, would add a richer dimension to the process of data collection and his ability to draw insights from the field. Due to his familiarity with the field, essential elements of fieldwork such as establishing rapport with the respondents, asking the right questions and identifying key informants for the study was easier for him.

Though participant observation was not used as tool in this study, it is a fact that the researcher has been a participant observer in the field relevant to the study for more than nineteen years. However, he had to remain cautious and alert to the possibility of projecting from his earlier experiences rather than drawing from the data being collected.
Analysis of qualitative data

By the time the researcher had completed the in-depth interviews with three to four persons using the interview guide, certain broad themes began to emerge in terms of areas for investigation. The researcher subsequently began using these themes for interviewing the new respondents. He realised soon that these themes were flowing well in terms of the interviewing process as well as eliciting responses which were rich in detail and experience. As the interviews proceeded, more themes began to emerge and in some cases, a few of the earlier themes had to be dropped for want of ‘qualitative’ responses.

The researcher would take notes while interviewing the respondents. Later, within a day or two, he would expand the field notes and type them in the form of interviews. While writing out the life histories, the researcher organised the data / interviews around the themes that had been identified during the interviewing process. These themes served as the codes or the themes for the thematic analysis of the life histories. Sub-themes were identified within the themes. Structural analysis was done within the analysis of each theme.

Scope and limitations

A study of this nature would fill gaps in understanding about youth offenders involved in crimes of a serious nature. There are hardly any studies done in India on the subject area of this study. Some studies on criminal gangs (Singh D.R., 1999; Vaidya R.B., 1999; Saraf, V.K., 1999, Thilagaraj, R., and Gandhirajan, C.K., 2009) have focussed on the nature, type and range of activities of criminal and organised gangs. However these studies have not been able to throw much light on the recruits to these gangs i.e. those who constitute the rank and file of gangs involved in criminal activities such as extortion, supari killings, kidnappings, their socio-economic profile, their world views, their experiences with the CJS and their perceptions about the same, the reasons for their entry into crime and the possibility of getting out of the criminal nexus.
As far as limitations of the study are concerned, there are a few, both methodological and theoretical. The issue of getting the requisite permissions from criminal justice agencies was an uphill task and took almost a year, leading to delay in the data collection. Data relating to crime and specifically relating to extortion was not easily available and therefore may have impinged on the findings of the study. The data collection process necessarily involved developing a rapport with the respondents, which was difficult given the floating nature of the population and the fact that they may be in a stress situation, and therefore unwilling to cooperate with the researcher.

Tracing individuals after their release was very difficult, especially in the case of those who do not live with their families. The issue of the time period over which the data collection process should be spread, was a contentious one, as it involved tracing lives of individual respondents to understand processes as they unfold after their release from custody. There were numerous difficulties faced in data collection (described in the earlier sections), from identifying respondents, to tracing them, to keeping track of them and following up on them.

Lack of grounded research and literature on the phenomenon being studied in the Indian context was another limitation faced. Most of the studies and theories reviewed for this research are located in the western context. Though the researcher has tried to link these theories with the findings emerging from the study, the question about whether and how they apply in the Indian context could come up.

The findings from this research span a range of issues and areas of focus. Each theme that has emerged through the analysis of data and is written out in the chapters and its sections could be teased further towards a better delineation of ideas and concepts. For want of time, it has not been possible to undertake this exercise. However, the researcher feels that the ground has been laid for future research to work around issues delineated in this study.