



**The Centre  
for Seldom  
Heard Voices**



**RAYS**  
Reconnecting Albanian Youth and Society

Working Paper #2  
**Music Elicitation Research,  
 Training, and Intervention  
 Pilot 2021-2023  
 Summary**





Working Paper #2

# Music Elicitation Research, Training, and Intervention Pilot 2021-2023 Summary

Music Elicitation research with men in conflict with the law in prison and under probation supervision; in training with social/youth work professionals; and in interventions with at-risk young people

Bournemouth - Tirana, March 2023

## Editorial matters

RAYS is a UK-government funded pilot programme led by Palladium International, which supports young Albanian people who are at risk of, or already involved in, serious organized crime (SOC), to divert their life choices away from SOC towards pathways resilient to exploitation. The partners, including Bournemouth University (research), the Centre for Sustainable Criminal Justice (institutional collaborations), and the Child Rights Centre Albania, work together with young people in Albania, their communities, and relevant institutions, to build equitable and constructive partnerships.

The overarching aim is to generate a better understanding of the drivers of youth engagement in SOC, boost alternative pathways, contribute to building a more inclusive society in Albania, and ultimately disrupt SOC groups' influence on young people in Albania.

The Centre for Seldom Heard Voices, Bournemouth University, brings together academics in the fields of criminology, social anthropology, and other social sciences as well as social work to engage with marginalized and often stigmatised communities and to amplify often excluded or silenced voices. The research centre holds a strong track record of developing collaborative partnerships with communities and key stakeholders, and for using participatory and co-created approaches. Its aim is to apply scholarly research to real-world challenges to maximize societal impact, both at home and abroad.

This research was conducted and in partnership with The Centre for Gender and Violence Research, University of Bristol.

*Disclaimer: This document was made possible with the support of "Reconnecting Albanian Youth and Society" RAYS Project. Any opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the project and the UK Government.*

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Working Paper #2, March 2023: Music Elicitation Research, Training, and Intervention Pilot 2021-2023 Summary

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Cite as: Levell, J.; Meçe, M.H; Koleka, A. (2023) Music Elicitation Research, Training, and Intervention Pilot 2021-2023 Summary. Working Paper no. 2 (March), Bournemouth – Tirana: Centre for Seldom Heard Voices, Bournemouth University & RAYS Albania.

ISBN: 978-1-85899-340-9

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, we would like to offer our sincere thanks to the participants for taking part and sharing their music and memories with us. This research would not have been possible without the openness of all the men who took part. The fieldwork stage was part of a large international team effort. Thank you to Klodiana Thartori, Youth Engagement Lead (Palladium) for managing the research process in Albania, including negotiating access with institutions, coordination between UK and Albania research teams and coordination with the gatekeepers. Thank you to the Albanian Researchers; Amalia Koleka, Linda Pino and Klaudio Pulaha (CRCA) for conducting the interviews in prison and community. Thanks to Sara Zekaj for translation of the transcripts. From the Institutions in Albania, I would like to thank the General Prison Directorate for giving access for the research in prison; as well as Probation Services and the entire team of Aksion Plus for giving access to participants in the community and acting as gatekeepers and facilitators for the research participants. Thanks to Nan Sheppard for assistance with the ethics process and to the Bournemouth University ethics panel who approved the work.

Thank you to all the training participants who agreed to try something new and different with open minds and hearts. I would like to offer huge thanks to Amalia Koleka who was an excellent co-trainer with me in all regions, co-facilitating, as well as translating all of the training slides. The creation of the music elicitation handbook was a team effort. Lee Colvin from SCJS contributed the safeguarding guidance. Redion Qirjazi and Regina Vathi provided editorial contributions. Thank you to the Albanian design team involved in the translations and production of the handbook. In terms of the training delivery, thanks go to Regina Vathi for coordinating the training attendees, as well as Majlinda Vogli for logistics. Thanks to Merita H. Meçe for the evaluation of the work and to Matilda Duri and Alesia Burnaszi for organising the communication around the training.

Overall, this work is due a large thanks to Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers for the research team collaboration and all the support and collaboration and for sharing extensive expertise on Albania. To all the RAYS team in Albania as noted above, led by Redion Qirjazi. Thank you to the Palladium team including Jenny Hutchinson, Charlotte Blundy, James Sparrow, Ingrida Kerusauskaite, Victoria Toole, and Ed Pauker. Thank you to the UK Government for funding this work.

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**Amalia Koleka**, MA, holds a master's degree in Conflict Studies and Human Rights from Utrecht University and a B.A in Psychology from Maastricht University. She has worked with several national and international NGOs and institutions such as: GLOBSEC, BIIRN, UNMIK and Manifesta Biennial. Amalia was the local research assistant to Dr. Jade Levell during RAYS Music Elicitation program, delivering many music elicitation interviews, transcribing, and translating the data, and co-delivered the training program.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the findings of a music elicitation pilot which was undertaken in Albania between 2021-2023. The pilot had three distinct elements. The first was the use of music elicitation fieldwork in the form of interviews with young men (between 18-25 years) in the Albanian prison estate and in the community under probation supervision. These life-stories were analysed with an attuneness to gender, masculinity, childhood adversity, and the experience of 'mattering'. The findings of this fieldwork were then used to design a bespoke music elicitation intervention handbook and a two-day training course for professionals, including teachers, psychologists, social-workers, and youth-workers. The training focused on the way in which music elicitation can be used as a tool to reach vulnerable and marginalised 'at risk' young people, as well as share findings from the fieldwork to create empathy. The third stage of the pilot was a 6 month monitoring after the training, to understand if the music elicitation was utilised and effective in front-line practice in Albania.

## Stage 1: Research with men in prison and under probation supervision in Albania

Twenty men who have been involved with the criminal justice system in Albania took part in the music elicitation pilot, including participants from three prison sites, community probation services, and substance misuse treatment services. The music elicitation fieldwork occurred in two distinct phases. The first was a pilot study carried out in three different prison sites in Albania (n=11). This was carried out, however significant environmental and logistics challenges occurred during the fieldwork which resulted in group music elicitation interviews in prison. Fieldwork phase two was a music elicitation study in the community (N=9) with men who have been engaged with the criminal justice system, some via probation and some via a local substance misuse treatment service. This second phase was implemented in order to fully test the 1-1 interview method and approach without the physical and gatekeeping limitations of the prison environment. Local Albanian-speaking research assistants were trained and supported to carry out the music elicitation interviews. A one-day training workshop was delivered online (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) prior to the prison interviews, and then face-to-face mentoring was provided for the community interviews. Overall the lengthier and in-person support of the researcher produced a greater experiential understanding of the approach and so this was prioritised in the professional training roll-out.

*I needed this...it's very freeing (Community Interview 3)*

The use of music elicitation was novel in the Albanian context and the findings indicate that it was an effective tool to listen to marginalized young people. The use of music elicitation among ex-gang involved men in the UK found four key benefits of the approach (Levell, 2019a). These four key areas which the method supported were also found to resonate with the participants in the Albanian context. Specifically, these were:

1. Music as an anchor to memories
2. Music as a communication tool
3. Music as a narrative tool
4. Music elicitation creating a bridge of understanding

As described below, these elements were shown to similarly resonate when the method was used in the Albanian context. There were several examples which showed the way in which a music elicitation interview displaced traditional power imbalances.

### Summary of key fieldwork findings

#### ▶▶ Adverse Childhood Experiences

Data analysis suggested that there were a range of adverse childhood experiences that impacted on young people. These ranged from abuse/violence/neglect as well as the loss of a significant supportive figure, such as a key parent, through death, estrangement, or migration. Several participants discussed the impact of such losses on their security and family collective. This may have impacted on their desire to instead identify with an extra-familial peer group in place of the lost family security. The craving of love from both mothers and fathers was discussed vividly at times, aided by the use of emotive song (hip-hop) lyrics.

#### ▶▶ Masculinity Pressures

### *I became a little like the man of the house (Community Interview 3)*

The data was analysed with a focus on masculinities in order to understand the specific gendered experiences of the participants. A predominant theme was the ways in which masculinity pressures were experienced by the participants. These included the ways in which boys felt a pressure to be 'the man of the house', financially support, as well as protect the females in their families. It appears these conventional masculinity pressures were heightened in fractured families, displaced due to death or migration. Arguably this heightened pressure on boys at an age where they had little recourse to enact traditional masculine responsibilities, resulting in the development of 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 2005). Prior research (Levell, 2020, 2021, 2022b) has explored the relationships between the intense vulnerabilities that marginalized young men face and the ways in which this can develop into enactment of a type of street protest masculinity. This is outlined in

the main report in detail and the participants' narratives were analysed using a lens of masculinity.

### ▶▶ **Fractured Families; Migration**

*My parents were not present in my life because when I was 6 years old, they migrated. I felt lonely (Prison Participant)*

Early experiences of migration were discussed in several interviews as having had a significant impact on young men's experiences of childhood. One participant had been trafficked into Germany as a child, given counterfeit papers and a family, in order to reside illegally. He discussed how he stayed for two years and then returned. Another man shared his experience of being sent to live in Italy as a minor without his family but begging to return to be with his mother. We also heard stories where the young men had been left in Albania without their immediate family who had migrated. It appeared the families fractured by migration to Western Europe were common, however in the music elicitation research we heard testimony of the impact that this has on young boys who feel grief at the loss of the key adult supporters. However, there was a sense of wider community solidarity expressed.

### ▶▶ **'Jeta e Rruges: Street Life'**

*The street is better than the house, regardless that its actually the opposite, we grew up there (Community participant 2)*

In the RAYS music elicitation pilot we were able to access information about the way in which 'Jeta e Rruges: Street Life' is experienced by urban young men. A key finding of this element of the narratives was that the young men who could be considered 'at risk' or formerly involved in Serious Organised Crime (SOC) did not label it as such. Many of the descriptions were akin to what is known in the UK as being 'on-road'. It was described as engaging in group solidarity with male peer groups, referred to as 'the boys (Nacut)'. This gendered solidarity operated in a way which had 'neighbourhood rules', akin to a 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999). This code dictates the ways in which youth violence operates in a way to support the pride of young people who are otherwise marginalised. Low level criminality was discussed, and framed more as increasingly getting into trouble in a disorganised way. The sample of young men who participated in the study discussed being engaged in the hustle of street life, including seeking ways to make money. Although there was not extensive discussion around the perception and role of women in this context, there was discussion of sexual harassment of women on the streets.

### ▶▶ **Aspirations and hopes for the future; Becoming Someone**

*The best would be to become somebody in life (Community Participant 1)*

An interesting pattern arose in the research data, which was around the aspirations of the participants. For some there were concrete hopes, such as being able to leave Albania and work abroad (particularly for those in prison who did not see a way forward in Albania with the stigma of criminality). There were also aspirations of university and further study, as well as being financially independent and developing a respectable career, for instance as a teacher or even a judge. A deeper theme that arose however was the concept of 'becoming somebody', both as an individual and as a family. This can be linked into prior research around the importance of 'mattering' to young people involved in youth offending. Billingham and Irwin-Rogers (2021b) explored this concept in the UK among young people involved in serious youth violence. They suggested that using the concept of 'mattering' can be used as a way to understand why some young people engage in serious youth violence, and the ways in which certain state criminalization tactics can result in 'anti-mattering'. Exploring how young people perceive the ways that they do (or do not) 'matter' enables a deeper understanding of how young people's experiences of trauma and marginalization impact on their sense of place in the world.

## Stage 2: Music elicitation professional training

In the second phase of the project, we worked to explore the potentials of music elicitation as an intervention tool through the training of professionals who work with vulnerable and 'at risk' young people. This was supported by the creation of a bespoke handbook in the Albanian language, which serves as a manual and a support tool for professionals to use long after the project closes. In July 2022, 49 professionals from the regions of Shkodër, Kukës, and Elbasan, took part in face-to-face training which focused on music elicitation, gender-equality, and childhood adversity. Reflecting the method, this training was also focused on the professionals sharing their own music choices, which many participants noted as being emotional and meaningful. Through using music to communicate with one another, the method was brought to life. Music as a medium of communication allows individuals from diverse backgrounds understand one another, and this disrupts the hierarchies which otherwise affect us. Indeed, we noticed that there was a rich intergenerational and multi-agency understanding inspired in the training with the use of music. Some participants noted how they opened their hearts and minds to the others in the room.

## Stage 3: Music elicitation as an intervention tool with vulnerable and marginalized children

The professional training was conducted in July 2022 and the plan was to evaluate the use of music elicitation after the training for a period of six months from September 2022 to February 2023. During this time monitoring took place with surveys distributed to training participants in November 2022 and February 2023. Although the take up of music elicitation on the ground was small in numbers what has become clear is that it was being used for outreach with extremely vulnerable and marginalised young people, victims of human trafficking, abuse, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence and abuse.

## Conclusion

### Using music enables young people both **to speak and be heard**

The frame of the development of music elicitation as a professional listening tool, as well as music creation as an engagement tool, is to explore the role music plays in young people feeling that they 'matter'. All of the above suggested activities relate to the concept of being **able both to speak, as well as to be heard**. The music elicitation pilot suggested that for some criminalized young people the method offered a space to open up and develop an environment of trust within which to share very sensitive aspects of their lives, adversity, marginalization, and future aspirations. There is potential that this can be used more widely as a way to develop different relationships with 'at risk' young people in an empowering and sensitive way. There were several key findings in the music elicitation pilot which could be utilised in the development of wider interventions. In particular this data could be used to understand the gendered experiences of growing up as boys and young men in Albania.

# 1. OVERVIEW OF THE MUSIC ELICITATION RESEARCH, TRAINING, AND INTERVENTION PILOT

## INTRODUCTION

This report outlines the findings of a music elicitation pilot which was undertaken in Albania between 2021-2023. The pilot had three distinct elements. The first was the use of music elicitation fieldwork in the form of interviews with young men (between 18-25 years) in the Albanian prison estate and in the community under probation supervision.

Music fosters feelings and heals the soul -Shkodër training participant

These life-stories were analysed with an attunement to gender, masculinity, childhood adversity, and the experience of 'mattering'. The findings of this fieldwork were then used to design a bespoke music elicitation intervention handbook and a two-day training course for professionals, including teachers, psychologists, social-workers, and youth-workers. The training focused on the way in which music elicitation can be used as a tool to reach vulnerable and marginalised 'at risk' young people, as well as share findings from the fieldwork to create empathy. The third stage of the pilot was a 6 month monitoring after the training, to understand if the music elicitation was utilised and effective in front-line practice in Albania.

This was the first time that music elicitation had been trialled in Albania. It was also one of the first criminological studies to focus on men 'in conflict with the law' in Albania. A further uniqueness of this study was that it was led by an academic in the United Kingdom who designed and delivered training which was then conducted by local

researchers in Albania. This was an additional learning process and this experience was fruitful in developing music elicitation as an intervention tool for Albanian youth and social workers.

I don't know how the words are coming. For me also, they are coming out without my intention, they are slipping out. That is something that shouldn't happen - Probation interview participant 2

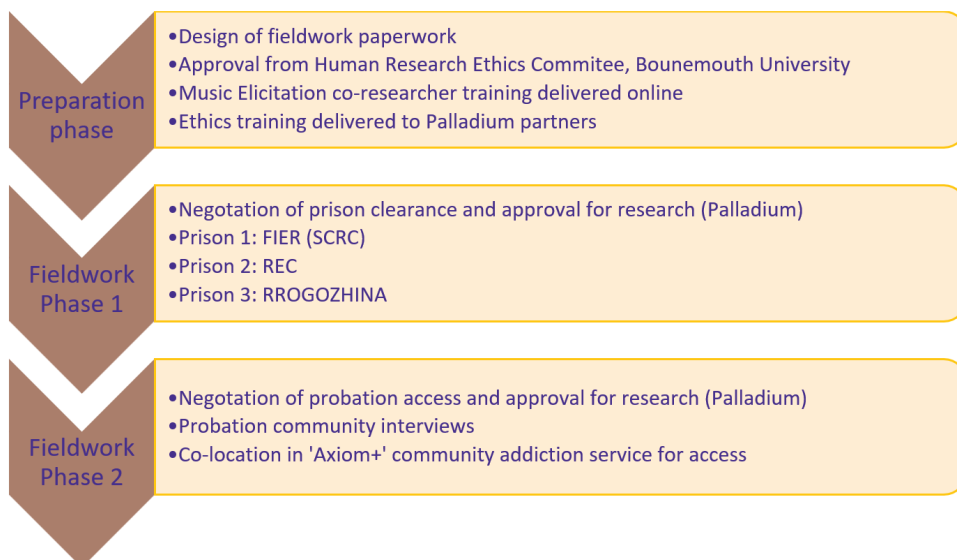
Music elicitation as a method

is designed to elicit full narratives of individuals who have lived experiences of the criminal justice system (Levell, 2019a, 2022a). This is of utmost importance, particularly among a group of young people who are most often negatively labelled as being involved in 'gangs' or 'organised crime' from an external position. Music elicitation is designed to disrupt the traditional power imbalances in interviews by positioning the participant as expert. Music elicitation in the format used was developed from the UK based study using this approach in research on childhood adversity with ex-gang-involved men (Levell,

2019; 2022). Music elicitation in this prior research was shown to be a powerful narrative tool which enabled the participants to be empowered through the research process and share their story using the music tracks that aided the articulation of their life-stories.

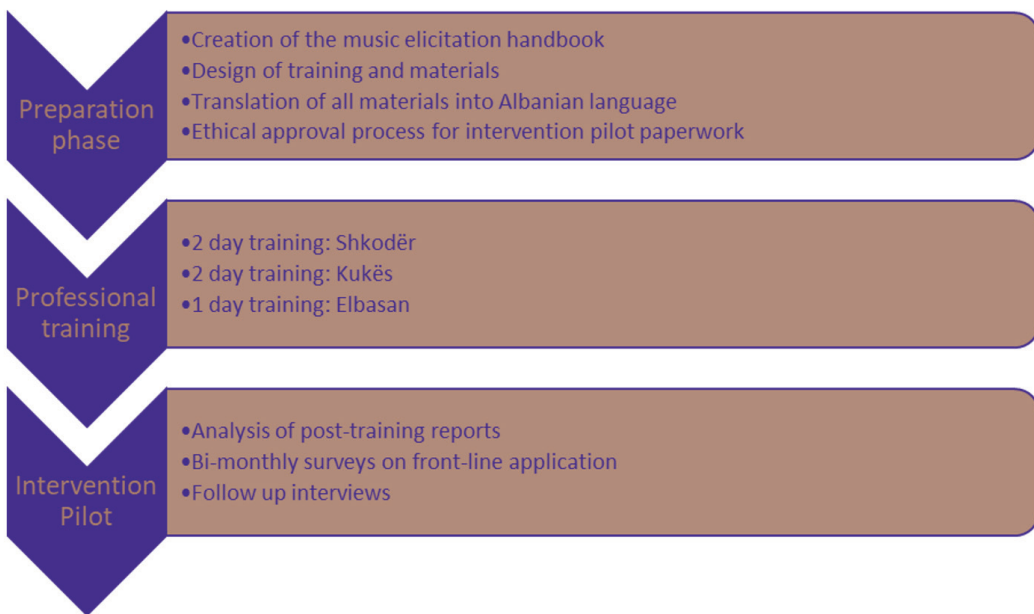
By using music as a tool for listening we are aiming to: Create a collaborative space, offer space for young people to be listened to, actively hearing what young people want to share, enabling them to decide how much or how little to say, listening to their music choices and engaging with music they enjoy, displaces the usual power imbalances between the interviewer/worker and young person. We are aiming to give young people the sense that they matter. Mattering is about both feeling valued and being of value to others in your community (Prilleltensky, 2020). It is centred on the 'the perception that (...) we are a significant part of the world around us' (Elliott et al. 2004, p. 339). 'We have a deep-seated need to matter to other people, and to matter in the physical world – to be a consequential causal force in both a social and material sense ... we all want to be 'someone' – a person seen as significant by others – and we all want to be 'something' – an entity with some force or power in the world' (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2021b, p. 5). Exploring how young people perceive the ways that they do (or do not) 'matter' enables a deeper understanding how young people's experiences of trauma and marginalization impact on their sense of place in the world. Creation and production of music as a way that young people organically develop a space in which to 'matter'. 'Mattering is not just about **feeling valued**. We have a profound need to have influence in the world. Unless you are pathologically self-centred, or highly influenced by the dominant Me Culture, you will feel a need to connect with others and make a difference in their lives. We want to **add value** to ourselves, others, work, and community.' (Prilleltensky, 2020, p. 21). Exploring how young people perceive the ways that they do (or do not) 'matter' enables a deeper understanding how young people's experiences of trauma and marginalization impact on their sense of place in the world. Creation and production of music as a way that young people organically develop a space in which to 'matter'. We tested this concept not only in the fieldwork but also in the professional training and intervention pilot.

## Year 1: Preparation and Research Process (2021-22)



The following forms were created by the academic team and were approved by the ethics team at Bournemouth University; **Participant Information sheet; Consent form and demographic questions; Researcher Guide for interviews; Interview topic crib; Field note template for interviews.** In the first stage of dissemination of the music elicitation technique a 1 day training session was organised. This happened online due to the COVID-19 pandemic and was an overall success. In advance of the community pilot there was a face-to-face mentoring style training with the research assistant and this was more effective in terms of preparing them to carry out the method themselves.

## Year 2: Music Elicitation Specialist Training (2022)



## Year 2.5: Music Elicitation intervention pilot (2023)

Data was collected on the use of music elicitation as an intervention tool for a period of six months after the training. This was through a combination of surveys and interviews with those who had used the handbook and technique. We aimed to record the adaptation of the training tools in the local contexts.



## 2. MUSIC ELICITATION AS A LISTENING TOOL; RESEARCH FINDINGS

The music elicitation fieldwork occurred in two distinct phases. The first was a pilot study carried out in three different prison sites in Albania (n=11). This was carried out, however significant environmental and logistics challenges occurred during the fieldwork which resulted in group consultations carried out with the use of music. Fieldwork phase two was a music elicitation study in the community with men who have been engaged with criminal justice system, some via probation and some via a local substance misuse service (n=5). This second phase was implemented in order to fully test the 1-1 interview method and approach, without the physical limitations of the prison environment.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

Twenty men who have been involved with the criminal justice system in Albania took part in the music elicitation pilot, including participants from three prison sites, community Probation Services, and Substance misuse treatment services. The music elicitation fieldwork occurred in two distinct phases. The first was a pilot study carried out in three different prison sites in Albania (n=11). This was carried out, however significant environmental and logistics challenges occurred during the fieldwork which resulted in group consultations carried out with the use of music. Fieldwork phase two was a music elicitation study in the community (N=9) with men who have been engaged with criminal justice system, some via probation and some via a local substance misuse treatment service. This second phase was implemented in order to fully test the 1-1 interview method and approach without the physical and gatekeeping limitations of the prison environment. Local Albanian-speaking research assistants were trained and supported to carry out the music elicitation interviews. A one-day training was delivered online (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) prior to the prison interviews, and then face-to-face mentoring was provided for the community interviews. Overall the lengthier and in person support of the researcher produced a greater understanding of the approach and so going forward we would prioritise in-person training delivery.

Twenty men who have been involved with the criminal justice system in Albania took part in the music elicitation pilot, including participants from three prison sites, community Probation Services, and Substance misuse treatment services.

The research participants were aged from 18 years old and 39 years old and all had a criminal record and were under the current supervision of the criminal justice system,

either within prison or community probation service. The decision not to take any additional systematic information about criminality was a deliberate choice in order to humanize the participants and enable them to share whatever they chose in the interview without any sense of pre-judgement. It is also practical as there have been widely acknowledged risks to researchers to explicitly focus on the experience of SOC in families (Holt, 2021). The lack of specificity about SOC was also because it left scope to understand whether the participants viewed their own experiences using this term (which is in the most part a term preferred by criminal justice and governmental agencies). This openness worked to our advantage, as participants referred much more specifically to their experiences with the neighbourhood groups and with 'the boys'. This was akin to the conceptualisation of 'on-road' in the UK, which is a phrase which is used by young people who may be labelled as gang-involved by outsiders. Putting the onus onto participants to tell their stories was also an important aspect of trust building. This was noticed by some participants and assisted in trust building, as they were able to share their stories in their own way;

*T2: yes... I will be honest... I don't know if you know the reason why I have been arrested...*

*I: No, I just know your name and phone number...*

*(Community Interview 2)*

Following the interaction the participant explained the moment of his arrest in his own way. The unstructured interview space gave an opportunity for the participants to discuss the details of their offence and arrest process in their own way, when they felt comfortable in doing so.

Underpinning the fieldwork were the following research questions;

1. What are the life-stories of criminalised young men in Albania?
2. What experiences in childhood or adolescence do they identify as significant and how does this help us understand those 'at risk' of involvement in Serious and Organised Crime (SOC)?
3. Is music elicitation an effective method to engage with criminalised men in Albania?

## METHODOLOGY

Participants were invited to select three music tracks which help them share parts of their life story.

Local Albanian youth-work professionals were trained by Dr Levell in both online and later in-person sessions in order to communicate the method. This resulted in local skills sharing. Employing Albanian co-researchers enabled the fieldwork interviews to be conducted in the Albanian language, negating the need for in-person translation. Dr Levell sat in and observed three music elicitation interviews at the discretion of the participants.

### *I needed this...it's very freeing (Community Interview 3)*

The use of music elicitation is novel in the Albanian context. This has been groundbreaking and the emerging findings show that it was an effective tool to listen to marginalized young people. The use of music elicitation among ex-gang involved men in the UK found four key benefits of the approach (Levell, 2019). These four key areas which the method supported were also found to resonate with the participants in the Albanian context. Specifically, these were;

1. Music as an anchor to memories
2. Music as a communication tool
3. Music as a narrative tool
4. Music elicitation creating a bridge of understanding

As described below, these elements were shown to similarly resonate when the method was used in the Albanian context. There were several examples which showed the way in which a music elicitation interview displaced traditional power imbalances. Music elicitation as a method is designed to elicit full narratives of individuals who have lived experiences of the criminal justice system (Levell, 2019a, 2022a). Music elicitation in the format used was developed by the report author from the UK based study using this approach in research on childhood adversity with ex-gang-involved men. Music elicitation in this prior research was shown to be a powerful narrative tool which enabled the participants to be empowered through the research process and share their story using the music tracks that aided the articulation of their life-stories.

The application of music elicitation in international research has been gradually increasing. One notable example was in Luke de Noronha's (2020) 'Deportation Discs' study. Although this was not referred to explicitly as music elicitation, it was a study which used the principle of the radio show 'Desert Island Discs' and used the technique of music enabled interviews with people who had been deported from the UK to Jamaica. De Noronha discussed the way in which the use of music in this context was conducted

as a way to 'bear witness' to the impact of state violence on deported individuals. The use of music elicitation in the development sector is an emerging application of the method. One notable example is the recent research that used the technique of music elicitation to carry out music-enhanced interviews with people displaced by violence in Colombia (Marsh et al., 2020). Music was utilised as an interview tool as a non-invasive technique that was suitable due to the traumatic histories of the research participants. Marsh and colleagues found that music interviews as opposed to more traditional formats were an antidote to the high levels of distrust that participants felt in their prior experiences with the authorities. Participants reported high levels of previous distrust, discrimination, and disbelief of their experiences, resulting in a sense of powerlessness. Music opened up a de-territorialized space in which the participants were able to freely articulate their experiences and memories in a way which they chose (Marsh et al., 2020, p. 153). The authors noted that 'song lyrics offered resources for understanding and articulating their own identity' (Marsh et al., 2020, p. 151).

## **RAPID TRUST BUILDING**

Something that was noted in some interviews was the way in which the participants found themselves opening up when they ordinarily wouldn't. Music elicitation as a technique somehow supports a rapid trust building between participants and the interviewer. This is significant in both the current research as well as my prior context (Levell, 2019) which were both studying the life stories of marginalised, criminalized men. It was also not what had been expected by members of the wider community who I had consulted with prior to the fieldwork, some of whom noted that in Albania men in this position will not speak alone, especially meeting someone for the first time. In the following example you can see the way in which the openness of the interviewer helped build the trust with the participant. Instead of badgering him with questions, she was open that he could leave at any time;

Probation Participant: What else can I say?

Interviewer: Whatever you want, you are free. Also if you say for example, I don't want to speak anymore.

Probation Participant: No I don't know how the words are coming...for me also, they are coming out without my intention, they are slipping out. That's something that shouldn't happen.

## **MUSIC AS AN ANCHOR TO MEMORIES**

Music provided an anchor for the past where participants remembered listening to songs. What stood out during the selection of songs in the prison was the kind of music that was chosen during reflection from one stage of their lives to the other. After the music track selection above, the participant opened up;

I grew up also without a dad most of the time, he died when I was 5 years old. And so I will open the... Hopefully...i don't know... Because we are boys but sometimes we don't hold ourselves back ... I mean even if there is a tear dropping ... This song by Stresi reminds me of ... you know... Because it's a super memory... (Probation Interview)

In another interview the participant selected the track which was his wedding slow dance song. As you can see in the below excerpt prior to putting on the music track the participant had noted that it was difficult to open up. During the time of this music track playing he started crying. After the track he spoke very little about his wife and family, however it has been a powerful moment to share which I would argue, built trust, as he opened up much more as the interview went on. He noted that this track brought him, "many memories with this song, also now the kids are growing... There we are finding warmth... life is long... Hopefully...' (Probation interview).

**Stresi (2011)**

**Mka Marr Malli**

...Yo, I saw a bad dream, a very bad dream

Like one day I fell in the abyss

And I asked for help, help, no one was giving me help

I called for my mom; she didn't answer.

I called for my brother he didn't answer

I called my father and again he didn't answer...

...How many memories I have for you, how much I miss you dad...

...Better to be dead than without you

(Track selected in a Prison Interview)

## MUSIC AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

Music is often considered by all as a means to calm the mind and soul, to remember certain moments from life, but also to express a current emotional state. And for young people who were involved in these interviews, using music with them to talk about their childhood, exploring the reasons for their involvement in criminal groups was a tool, which according to young people in prison, was new to them.

But anyways we hope, like it says there (in the song), we want everything, a little bit of everything, even better if it's a lot but more for the family, because I have not been the boy, they wanted me to be (Probation Interview)

As can be seen in the above passage at times the lyrics were used in the interviews as a tool to help the participants articulate the stories they wished to share. In the example above you can see the way in which the music track discusses regret and pain, which opened up a space for the participant to explore his own feelings of regret about the path his life has taken.

### **Bon Jovi (2000)**

#### **Thank you for loving me**

You pick me up when I fall down...  
... If I was drowning you would part the sea  
And risk your own life to rescue me...

.... Thank you for loving me

(Track selected in a Probation Interview)

The use of music as an interview tool had an added advantage in the prison environment as it was such a novelty for the prisoners to be able to select music. Music selected by young people was an additional factor in facilitating communication with us, and certainly among each other. Music influenced improving their mood and emotional state. If previously in prison they were allowed to have MP3, they already no longer have this opportunity and listen only to that music that can be shown on television. The opportunity to hear the favourite music was noticed in their eyes, a joy that often seemed like that of children happy with a small gift. (Observation from Prison Research Assistants)

In some cases the track lyrics were used to articulate very difficult to share experiences, as outlined in the following track which was brought by a community participant who wanted to discuss his experiences of fatherhood. The music video that accompanied this track is powerful. It features the rapped, Eminem, narrating the story whilst looking back at home-made family videos of his wife and children, telling his life story. The participant was quite taken aback after this song had played he made the connection of the track with both his past and present listening of that track;

This is a beautiful song... This is beautiful. All his life he make in one song, All his life, he made in this song ... I listened so much to Eminem... As a kid and now. (Probation Interview)

Music selected by young people facilitated communication with us, it was noted that they felt more calm and safe towards us in conversation, as memories of childhood and more of adolescence arose, meetings with friends outside when they were freer, their lives before returning to Albania (this after 2 of the interviewees had previously lived in Greece and returned to the country to have a life with family members)

## *I don't want music... (Probation Interview)*

An interesting finding that arose in some of the interviews was the choice not to use music, or in other cases not to draw on three tracks but instead just use one or two. As music is an elicitation tool rather than the primary focus of the interviews this was not a methodological issue per se, however it was interesting to see how the choice not to use music also elicited a response in the interviews. This was conveyed to us (Myself and the research assistant) in one of the interviews at the outset. At this point it was clear that the traditional music elicitation format would not be how the space would be run, however we dealt with it by still respecting the principles of the music elicitation interview; unstructured, based on listening with as few interjections or questions as possible. In this particular interview the participant spoke uninterrupted for a lengthy period and at the end of the interview they noted;

Thank you for this conversation. It's like I'm freed a little. Like I got off some weight.  
(Probation Interview)

What this shows is that actually the principles of placing the power in the hands of the participants does not necessarily need music in itself, but rather, it requires the interviewer to release the reins on the space, putting the participant in the lead with what they want to share, when, and how. The lack of pre-determined questions, as well as the tolerance of awkward silences opened up the space without the researcher needing to fill it. For example, when the interviewer asked what music the participant likes to listen to, they responded with the text to the left. This is a good example of the ways in which the participant is starting to talk about the lack of music and then goes it leads them into a narrative description of their personality and what they enjoy doing. This functions as trust building, but also starts to give an insight to how they see themselves and their relationships and hobbies. In research by Marsh and colleagues (2020) they also found that some interviews did not include music at all, however they also found it opened up a narrative about the role of music in their life. Thus it brings us to consider whether the lack of still has a functional role in an unstructured music elicitation interview. It is important to remember that the music's role is to promote open and lengthy narratives.

### **Alldoz (2018)**

#### **I du tana**

...Man, it ain't safe the place I come from

Be careful what you do with that gun

Because one will fall into depression

He doesn't even want his own life

Causes a lot of pain

When you don't think for a long time

You get 30 years then you reflect

Maybe you learn the lesson

And you regret it

But now it's too late,

Your life in prison is done.

(Track selected in a Probation Interview)

## MUSIC AS A NARRATIVE TOOL

In my prior research I found that the use of music elicitation promoted a different balance of power to that usually seen in a traditional interview. In using the participants choice of music and offering them the opportunity to curate the space flips the traditional power imbalances in a traditional interview. There were several examples which showed the way in which a music elicitation interview displaced traditional power imbalances. In the below excerpt the way in which it was the participant who decided when the interview ought to end, rather than the traditional role of the interviewer.

Probation Participant: Shall we close it for today?

Interviewer: Why do you say for today?

Probation Participant: because that's what I say to my teachers (laughs)

This shows the way in which power was shifted and the participant made the decision to end. It was also an interesting role switch to speak to the interviewer in the way he spoke to his teachers. For one participant in particular the lack of traditional research questions was a point of interest and it took him a while to get used to the open-ness of the interview format. It would be fair to say however that for some participants the openness of the unstructured interview was daunting at times. There were several interviews in which the participants asked the researcher to ask them a question to get them started in telling their story.

### Europe (1986)

#### The Final Countdown

We're leaving' together  
But still it's farewell  
And maybe we'll come back  
To Earth, who can tell?  
I guess there is no one to blame  
We're leaving ground (leaving ground)  
Will things ever be the same again?

(Prison Interview)

## MUSIC ELICITATION CREATING A TRANS-NATIONAL BRIDGE OF UNDERSTANDING

The theme of migration came up in all of the interviews, in some cases due to the commonality of the participants speaking about their childhood migration and/or migration within their families when they were young. For many participants this was a source of distress as they spoke about feelings of abandonment in childhood. What was interesting from a methodological point of view was the way in which their music choices, at times in lyrics and others in the music videos, were used to illustrate literally or metaphorically these trans-national aspects that the participants wanted to speak about. In one case the participant brought an Albanian language hip-hop track by the popular



artists 'Stresi'. The music video featured him rapping with clips of London; Victorian terraces and parks. In one of the prison interviews the use of different genres of music to convey different viewpoints was particularly noted by the researchers. In one prison group interview they noted that adolescence was linked to songs where songs that were selected in most cases were of the Albanian-language rap genre. However when discussing the desire to travel abroad upon leaving prison, they broke out in the following track, all singing along. The above music track was selected in a prison interview. The research assistants noted that this was used as an expression of the desire to get out of the situation in which they were polluted or and the hope that their release from prison would be as close as possible. The researchers conveyed that the language switch felt significant at this point; that by selecting an English language song they were reinforcing the code-switching of foreign travel and migration. In another interview though, again in prison, the participants expressed that their favourite songs were traditional folk songs from the areas which they came from (Dukagjin, The Great Highland). The use of traditional music which represented a version of 'home' is poignant, particularly in the case of incarcerated men who do not have the ability to travel. The researchers noted that, 'The use of traditional folk music was not what we expected, but conveyed a sense of the traditional loyalties'.

# 3. MUSIC ELICITATION AND LIFE-STORIES OF MEN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

## ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

### **Defining adverse childhood experiences**

*ACE definitions CDC-Kaiser ACE Study  
1998*

#### **Abuse**

Emotional abuse

Physical abuse

Sexual abuse

#### **Household challenges**

Domestic violence and abuse

Household substance abuse

Mental illness in household

Parental separation or divorce

Criminal household member

#### **Neglect**

Emotional Neglect

Physical Neglect

The below hip-hop track was used as a way to open up a discussion of grief and bereavement, after the participants father had died when he was five years old. It opened up wider narratives on gender, the pressures on him as fatherless, and his relationship with his mother. You can see in this excerpt the way in which hip-hop can be a vehicle for very sensitive issues. The emerging analysis of the data suggest that there were a range of adverse childhood experiences that impacted on young people. These ranged from abuse/violence/neglect as well as the loss of a significant supportive figure, such as a key parent, through death, estrangement, or migration. Several participants discussed the impact of such losses on their security and family collective. This may have impacted on their desire to instead identify with a extra-familial peer group in place of the lost family security. The craving of love from both mothers and fathers was discussed vividly at times, aided by the use of emotive song (hip-hop) lyrics.

*Violence has been an undivided part of my childhood (Prison Interview MMR4)*

Direct physical abuse was discussed in several of the interviews. This ranged from physical abuse by fathers, often related to alcohol abuse, to physical violence within schools and children's

homes. The United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child came in during 1989. In May 2010, Albania's Law on the Protection of the Rights of the Child (Law No. 10347, dated 4 November 2010) entered into force in May 2011. Children are legally protected through this law from all forms of corporal punishment in all settings, including the home (Council of Europe, 2014). However despite this legal shift, a report by World Vision found that 70 per cent of children aged between 8 and 18 in Albania have experienced some form of violence (Taylor, 2019). In 2018, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights reported that whilst corporal punishment is illegal under all circumstances, there were high levels of physical and psychological violence against children in educational settings and at home (Mijatovic, 2018). Abuse in children's homes was discussed by one participant in prison.

### **Stresi (2011)**

#### **Mka Marr Mali**

*...Come back to me dad because your boy is now alone*

*Better to be dead than without you...*

*I say dad I miss you so much*

*They say that brave men don't cry*

*But I cry often for you*

(Track selected in a Probation Interview)

My childhood has been difficult, very difficult! My parents abandoned me as a child. I lived in an orphanage for the first eight years of my life ... I mean, in the institutions of the child's house we were very abused. Everything we would do would be imposed with violence, even when we didn't like something! (Prison Interview)

Violent physical chastisement was also mentioned, along with recognition that it was not the physical violence which made him feel 'ashamed.'

## **MASCULINITY PRESSURES AND POVERTY**

Several participants spoke about the financial pressures that they experienced in childhood and adolescence. This ranged from poverty to pressures to keep up with their peers in terms of activities. Overall it is unsurprising that poverty was an issue, with an estimated 39% of Albanians living in poverty (World Bank, 2020). One participant noted that him and his single parent mother had received help from an 'organisation' who had provided them with clothes and food, which helped him enormously growing up. Another related poverty to the start of his criminality, noting, 'lack of money. What can you do with 50,000 leke in your pocket for the whole month?'. When analysing the participants narratives however it was notable that the lack of money was also linked to masculinity pressures, with one man commenting that after the collapse of his father's business he had to become 'the man of the house' and go to work from the age of twelve. The pressures on young men to act as breadwinners and as a push factor for criminality has been explored in previous research with ex-gang involved men in the UK (Levell, 2022b).

This research highlights the importance of a gendered understanding of poverty to see the pressures that his puts on marginalised youths.

Then I was ten [years old]... My dad's economy fell, and the bar could not be kept anymore, we left it, we sold it that is. He continued to gamble, to drink, he cursed when he came home. Then that happened that I finished elementary school there and then I went to [city name] high school and, I have something in my type that I cannot stand people who want to put down others ... I know what is good and what is bad. And for the bad, I stayed with friends, we sold drugs, we did drugs, I was a user from 11 to 12 years old, not a regular user, but like once a week I smoked a cigarette of hashish, but I didn't become addicted. From 12 years old, my dad's economy fell completely, I was forced to... Dad once came back from Italy, he had an accident there, and he didn't have the means to work anymore... I became a little like the man of the house, I went to work... I did that for four consecutive years. That means that for four consecutive years, I was exploited to the maximum, until I was fifteen [years old]. (Probation Interview)

Other accounts of childhood poverty could also be viewed through the lens of masculinity, as one participant noted that a motivating factor to engage in crime was as him and his male peers did not have 'businessman fathers, who wasted dad's money' so instead he felt he had 'no other choice' but to engage in criminal activities with his peers. The association with financial prowess and masculinity was alluded to by one participant who mentioned that money is equated to strength in Albanian society. He noted,

We had more boys that had nothing, and we tried for example to do something, do decide on money, or I don't know, to go out or we stole, we sold, we did frauds, but still we came back strong in life... that came like that. We were not boys that had businessman fathers and wasted dad's money. We grew up with no money in our pockets... The moment came that it was necessary to do that. There was no other choice... A hard life... brings you to do many many bad things that you might not have wanted to do. I regret doing them a lot, but still, that was more what it was.

(Probation Interview)

We live in a society of 'the strongest' and that when you see in the neighbourhood how someone has earned the leke (money), you say: oh, it is so simple to make money, just act like strong and that's it. (Prison Interview)

The concept of strength and financial power can be linked back to the concept of hegemonic masculinity, whereby in patriarchal societies financial independence is related to masculine power and success. Thus, for boys and young men who are unable to create

wealth through getting education and a high-earning job, alternative means are used to achieve this goal.

### *I became a little like the man of the house (Probation Interview)*

The data was analysed with a focus on masculinities in order to understand the specific gendered experiences of the participants. A predominant theme was the ways in which masculinity pressures were experienced by the participants. These included the ways in which boys felt a pressure to be 'the man of the house', financially support, as well as protect the females in their families. It appears these conventional masculinity pressures were heightened in fractured families, displaced due to death or migration. Arguably this heightened pressure on boys at an age where they had little recourse to enact traditional masculine responsibilities resulted in the development of 'protest masculinity' (Connell, 2005). Prior research (Levell, 2020, 2021, 2022b) has explored the relationships between the intense vulnerabilities that marginalized young men face and the ways in which this can develop into enactment of a type of street protest masculinity. This is outlined in the main report in detail and the participants narratives were analysed using a lens of masculinity.

## **FRACTURED FAMILIES: PARENTAL SEPARATION, LOSS, REJECTION, GRIEF**

### *My parents were not present in my life because when I was 6 years old, they migrated. I felt lonely. (Prison Interview)*

Early experiences of migration were discussed in several interviews as having had a significant impact on young men's experiences of childhood. One participant had been trafficked into Germany as a child, given counterfeit papers and a family, in order to reside illegally. He discussed how he stayed for two years and then returned. Another man shared his experience of being sent to live in Italy as a minor without his family but begging to return to be with his mother. We also heard stories where the young men had been left in Albania without their immediate family who had migrated. It appeared the families fractured by migration to Western Europe were common, however in the music elicitation research we

**Stresi (2018)**

**Te du mom**

Do you know that life begins waking up

And loving mother's face

Every love starts and ends there

Never forget the face of your mother.

It's the only person in the world

That loves you without seeing you first

It's the hand that rocks the cradle

The whole world is on her hands.

(Track selected in a Probation Interview)

heard testimony of the impact that this has on young boys who feel grief at the loss of the key adult supporters. Although there was a sense of wider community solidarity expressed, and it is clear that in Albania the nuclear family is not the primary unit of social organization as it is in the UK.

### *When parents are separated, children became bullying victims, and it is a little difficult. (Prison Interview)*

The impact of parental separation is recognised as a significant adverse childhood experience and arose a lot in our research data. The impact of parental loss can be far reaching. It can include a sense of loss, fear of being left alone, anger, guilt, and insecurity (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2022). There has been research which suggests that there is a connection between the experience of loss and an increased risk of involvement in crime. In one study by the Youth Justice Trust, which reviewed the case files of 1,027 children and young people under the supervision of youth offending teams in the UK (YOTs) identified that more than 90 per cent of the young people had experienced 'significant experience' of loss or rejection (Yates, 2010, p. 14). This usually meant they had lost contact with a parent because of family breakdown, bereavement, or the onset of parental mental illness or physical disability (Yates, 2010, p. 14). Research suggests that children growing up in families with organised crime connections experience more trauma than children in other families; 'research has found that 35% of the 44 children growing up in a sample of organised crime families had experienced the death of their father at a relatively young age (Holt, 2021). Family survival going forward as a single parent unit brings additional financial and logistical challenges.

### *'Jeta e Rrugës: (Street Life)'*

*The street is better than the house, regardless that its actually the opposite, we grew up there (Probation Interview)*

In the RAYS music elicitation pilot we were able to access information about the way in which 'Jeta e Rrugës': Street Life' is experienced by urban young men. A key finding of this element of the narratives was that the young men who could be considered 'at risk' or formerly involved in Serious Organised Crime (SOC) did not label it as such. Much of the descriptions

#### **New Blood (2021)**

##### **Nga 0**

...All these good things

Bad conditions

We come from the streets

Red eyes, bloodshot like a vampire

Take my chances and buy my freedom

It left me alone, it gave me power

They left the pain, now I don't feel...

(Track selected in Probation interview)

were akin to what is known in the UK as being 'on-road'. It was described as engaging in group solidarity with male peer groups, referred to as 'the boys (Nacut)'. This gendered solidarity operated in a way which had 'neighbourhood rules', akin to a 'code of the street' (Anderson, 1999). This code dictates the ways in which youth violence operates in a way to support the pride of young people who are otherwise marginalised. Low level criminality was discussed, and framed more as increasingly getting into trouble in a disorganised way. From the sample of young men who participated in the study they were engaged in the hustle of street life, including seeking ways to make money. Although there was not extensive discussion around the perception and role of women in this context, there was discussion of the sexual harassment of women on the streets.

[Neighbourhood name] you know, many hate us as a hood, as a unit. But this is how people are, when you have one conflict all the good stuff that came before is forgotten... you can curse me, you can bring people, we are not a gangster hood, just, with a lot of people, you know, my circle, I just know older guys, I also hang out with people who have businesses, who are not bad at all. (Probation Interview)

There was a strong theme of identification with the urban local neighbourhood which the participants lived in adolescence. An equivalent term to 'gang' was not used in our dataset, but instead the concept of neighbourhood solidarity, akin to Rod Earle's (2011) concept of postcode pride. The participants framed their collective of 'boys' who hung out in their neighbourhood and enacted solidarity, which included protecting their peers and backing them up if required in fights or disputes. Testimonies about the neighbourhood also showed a range of interchangeable terms which were used to describe the group organisation which included the 'street', 'hood', 'unit' or as 'running in circles' (vijmë vërdallë). As can be seen in the above passage, there was a resistance to claim that they were in a 'gangster hood', but were rather a close peer circle, some of whom have 'businesses'. It is interesting that this participant brought in the concept of being viewed in a negative way was brought up; that the participant was rejecting the negative viewpoint yet framing it through that assertion.

Some of the discussions around the 'code of the street' explicitly evoked *kanun* or *besa* in rhetorical recourse to a cultural script which permits, firstly, an identification with both local and national traditions, thereby generating a sense of collective pride and solidarity; secondly, explaining street-life expectations and necessities of trustworthiness and reliability among peers through a rhetoric of old; and, finally, highlighting violent local conflicts, its threats and demands, in reference to blood feuding traditions which may or may not indicate socio-cultural continuities or its post-communist transformations.

You would go out with a knife, with a bat, or a lot of friends...with cousins, of course, with *besa* ['trustworthiness', honour-based reliability], also my friends did not let me down, I always had them behind me (Probation Interview 6)

Finally, also the overt concern with the honour of sisters as well as women's exclusion from on-road subculture, as repeatedly articulated in the research data and explained in

terms of kanun traditions. Independent of whether this suggests a genuine socio-cultural tradition, social norm continuation, or a new form of kanun as a contemporary code of the street (as suggested above in light of contextual changes in Albania), the reference to this cultural script both explained and added to pressures on masculinity as both an expectation and performance. Interestingly, one participant who did not have wider family support noted that he felt alone when getting into conflicts, as those who he got found himself getting into conflict with had extended family behind them.

## *'Kam marre rruget:(I took the roads)': Migration*

*I don't know any childhood because I have grown in the streets of foreign countries, from one country to another (Prison Interview 3)*

Albanian international migration has increased since the end of the Communist regime in 1991. Out of the approximate eight million Albanians in the world, only 3.2 million reside in Albania (Arsovska, 2015). One strategy for migration with responsibilities for children is to leave the children in Albania whilst the parents migrate (Xhaho et al., 2022). Stories of migration emerged in all of the narratives from the community participants. This sometimes took the form of featuring in participants early lives, often with the migration of their parents or close family members. Sometimes without the children. This was discussed by some of the participants who dealt with growing up with extended family kinship carers.

## *Aspirations and hopes for the future; Becoming Someone*

*The best would be to become somebody in life (Probation Interview 1)*

An interesting pattern arose in the research data, which was around the aspirations of the participants. For some there were concrete hopes, such as being able to leave Albania and work abroad (particularly for those in prison who did not see a way forward in Albania with the stigma of criminality). There were also aspirations of university and further study, as well as being financially independent and developing a respectable career, for instance as a teacher or even a judge. A deeper theme that arose however was the concept of 'becoming somebody', both as an individual and as a family. This can be linked into prior research around the importance of 'mattering' to young people involved in youth offending. Billingham and Irwin-Rogers (2021b) explored this concept in the UK among young people involved in serious youth violence. They suggested that using the concept of 'mattering' can be used as a way to understand why some young people engage in serious youth violence, and the ways in which certain state criminalization tactics can result in 'anti-mattering'. Exploring how young people perceive the ways that they do (or do not) 'matter' enables a deeper understanding how young people's experiences of trauma and marginalization impact on their sense of place in the world.



The best would be to become somebody in life and help the house. I said it, you know even though I am young, I will still do what I want. A little more, just finishing school, and I want to buy a house, myself. Because you know paying rent for 16 years. You know. I was also young. You know I didn't also have the burden of paying rent at the end of the month. (Community Participant 1)

Billingham and Irwin-Rogers explored the ways in which, if young people do not believe that they 'matter' to schools, family, and community, they may engage in criminal activities to 'seek alternative means of mattering (Billingham & Irwin-Rogers, 2021a, p. 1243). Creation and production of music as a way that young people organically develop a space in which to 'matter'. This can be seen in the widespread trend to engage in the creation of various forms of hip-hop in youth subcultures across the world. Indeed, in our RAYS music elicitation pilot grass-roots music creation was discussed by several participants who shared the music they had created. The power of music as a tool for youth expression and empowerment is important, partly because it engages with a sub-culture in which they already appreciate. If we can frame our subsequent music interventions around the concept of mattering, or in the words of our participants, of 'being/becoming somebody' then we can use music as a tool through which youth empowerment can occur. In the hip-hop literature review that was carried out as part of the RAYS project, we found that there were some dominant themes which could be effectively used as a way to construct youth counter-narratives, such as the 'heroes journey' (Schwander-Sievers and Levell, 2022). The heroes journey was a story format which discusses overcoming adversity and difficult obstacles in life in order to rise above and beyond to a successful future. For some men, forging a new masculinity intertwined with an idea of mattering was centred around the prioritisation of their role as fathers, brothers, and sons. In this way they decentred the victim role for their past behaviour from themselves, and instead looked to the wider impact that their behaviour had on those around them. The role of family as a positive tool to support desistance has been explored in prior research; Self-characterization as a 'family man' was linked to new identity ('I see things differently now that I am a father');' (LeBel et al., 2008, p. 154). Seeing oneself as a 'family man' was a positive way to imagine a future masculine role which brings self-esteem. In a study of the impact of parental imprisonment on children in Albania, Ajdini (2013) found that having children impacted on the way in which prisoners view their sentence. They found that having children was a motivating factor for change upon release.

# 4. MUSIC ELICITATION SPECIALIST TRAINING

It's very awkward, but automatically you see how music puts down barriers. Because when you explain a song, you must also explain why this matters, all those barriers come down when you need to explain everything through just one track. (Shkodër training participant)

In the second phase of the project, we worked to explore the potentials of music elicitation as an intervention tool through the training of professionals who work with vulnerable and 'at risk' young people. This was supported by the creation of a bespoke handbook in the Albanian language, which serves as a manual and a support tool for professionals to use long after the project closes. In July 2022, 49 professionals from the regions of Shkodër, Kukës, and Elbasan, took part in face-to-face training which focused on music elicitation, gender-equality, and childhood adversity. Reflecting the method this training was also focused on the professionals sharing their own music choices, which many participants noted as being emotional and meaningful. Through using music to communicate with one another, the method was brought to life. Music as a medium of communication allows individuals from diverse backgrounds understand one-another, and this disrupts the hierarchies which otherwise affect us. Indeed, we noticed that there was a rich intergenerational and multi-agency understanding inspired in the training with the use of music. Some participants noted how they opened their hearts and minds to the others in the room. The training days were observed by external evaluators who noted that that this activity created a friendly and collaborative environment, encouraged a fruitful atmosphere of learning and sharing, and showed the power of this method as a communication bridge to understand someone's past and explain someone's present. Music paved the road of constructive communication about gender roles, gender equality, motherhood, and mattering where age gap in socio-emotional perceptions was not a blocker but a bridge of understanding and reflection. The training ended with professionals planning for how they may adapt the technique in their professional practice.

This helps me personally, as well as professionally (Shkodër training participant)



*Images: Training participants sharing music tracks in the training session*

## OVERVIEW OF TRAINING CONTENT

The training content was designed to follow on from the key thematic areas from the Year 1 music elicitation study conducted in Albania (please refer to this report for detail on the theory and principles underlying them. The training was supported using the 'Music Elicitation Handbook' which included all the relevant information, research background, and practice and safeguarding tips which are relevant to the training. These included Music Elicitation theory; Masculinity theory with a focus on street life; Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); Mattering. The aims and objectives of the training were as follows.

Explore the concept of music elicitation as a listening tool.

Summary of Music Elicitation research conducted with 'men in conflict with the law' in Albania.

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), Mattering and Music Elicitation

Understand the benefits of the technique in creating supportive and open listening spaces.

Practicalities of creating a trusting environment: ethics and safeguarding

Enrolment in the ongoing evaluation

### By the end of the workshop participants will:

Understand the principles of music elicitation as a social research tool.

Have considered the relevance of music as a listening tool in their own research and/or front-line practice.

Have engaged in knowledge exchange with other local researchers/practitioners.

Have considered the practical and ethical issues to be aware of when conducting music elicitation.

Have explored an understanding of applicability and transferability to the Albanian context.

These topics were explored with a range of experiential and collaborative tasks, including.

- Lectures on the theoretical and practical aspects of music elicitation as an intervention tool.
- Role play of a music elicitation interview based on the theme of 'mattering;' specifically, participants were asked to 'Select a music track which reminds you of a time you felt you mattered'.
- Collaborative music analysis- using a variety of popular tracks, as well as some from the fieldwork.
- Participatory lecture on the findings from the music elicitation year 1 research through playing selected music videos, sharing participant testimonies, and inspiring group discussions around the themes of gender, masculinity, crime, vulnerability, and children 'at risk'.
- Topical discussions on common gendered norms, stereotypes, and expectations in Albania
- Group work in the form of planning of practice work using music elicitation on large flip-chart paper and group presentations to share plans and discussions.

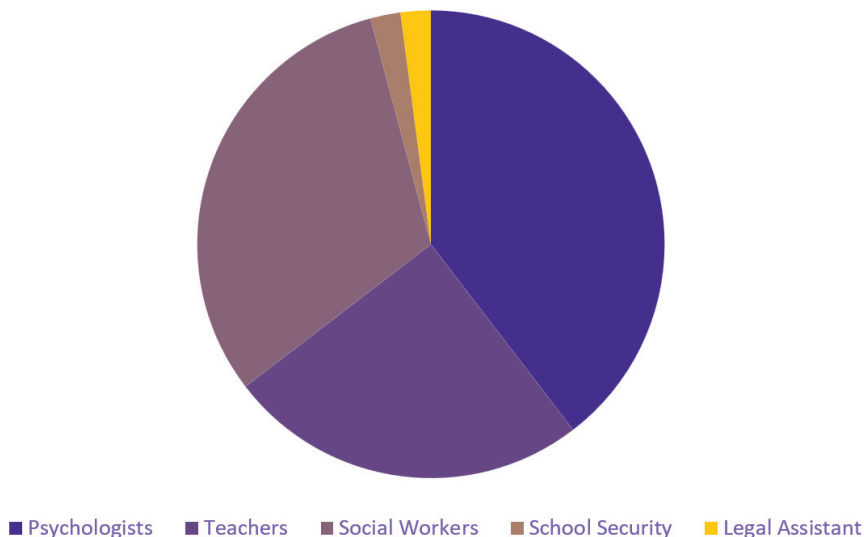
The training was delivered in the three project areas: Shkodër (2 days training), Kukës (2 days training), and Elbasan (1 day training). Reflections on these different delivery modes is later in the report.

## OVERVIEW OF TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

There were forty-nine professionals who attended the training across three locations. The makeup was as follows.

Location	Males	Females
Shkodër	3	18
Kukës	1	14
Elbasan	6	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>39</b>

### Training Participant Professions



## CREATION OF SAFE SPACES

As previously mentioned, at this point in the training the atmosphere of a safe space was in place, and participants felt free to share different concerns and points of view with each other and the trainers. The training started with the trainer asking the attendees an open question - What does music mean to you?

It's a beautiful and emotional song', she said, 'and although we are completely different in personalities, and often do not understand each other, we come together through this song (Elbasan training participant)

One participant, a music teacher, gave an enthusiastic response, saying,

Music is an emotional state. You might not like it or accept it, but music moves you, it moves the child inside us, the artist inside us. Sometimes I enter the class singing, I fire up the kids with music. The sleeping child inside every one of us is awakened with music. The kids who are good in art class, they excel at everything. (Elbasan training participant)

I discussed the themes for two hours with a friend over coffee. Thank you for reminding me how important music was to me. (Shkodër training participant)

What became evident in the training was that music elicitation was an effective pedagogic tool so that the participants learned in an experiential way. This was conducted in a range of ways, including group discussions of

existing local rap songs which dealt with issues of gender and youth, as well as sharing the principles of 'mattering' and asking professionals to bring a song which reminded them of a time that they feel they matter. I will demonstrate that this training series show that the tool can create flat hierarchies and open sharing even among youth and social work professionals. Music paved the road of constructive communication about gender roles, gender equality, motherhood, and mattering where age gap in socio-emotional perceptions was not a blocker but a bridge of understanding and reflection. It became quickly clear in the training that the experiential teaching and learning practices that aimed to give the participants and embodied understanding of the method were effective. The holistic practice of co-listening and sharing music with peers in an empowering and respectful way is a form of embodied teaching. The reasons that it worked as a teaching tool as well is because it is an embodied practice. You learn by doing. It is through co-listening that we all understand the power of music, the intimacy it creates, the vulnerability of sharing. As we decide which tracks, we want to share, we replicate the processes of the participant. We replicate in that decision- how much to tell- how safe do I feel? We experience the power of being heard. In practice this meant that much of the aims of the training were achieved by giving the professional participants an experience of the techniques that were being shared. Below are the principles of successful engagement with vulnerable and marginalized young people who are involved in the criminal justice system. These principles outline the ways in which 'safe spaces' are created by intervention facilitators. These same principles were applied in the professional training room.

**Safety:** The environment is free of physical, emotional, and sexual harassment and spoken and unspoken rules of conduct provide appropriate boundaries. Although it may be impossible for a staff member to guarantee safety in her/his agency or institution, it is imperative that the treatment group itself be a safe place.

**Connection:** Exchanges among the treatment group facilitator and group members need to feel mutual rather than one-way and authoritarian. Young people start to heal when they sense that a group facilitator wants to understand their experiences, is

present with them when they recall painful experiences, allows their stories to affect her, and is not overwhelmed by their stories.

**Empowerment:** The facilitator needs to model how a woman or girl can use power with and for others, rather than either using power over others or being powerless. It is important to set firm, respectful, and empathic limits and to encourage the group members to believe in and exercise their abilities.'

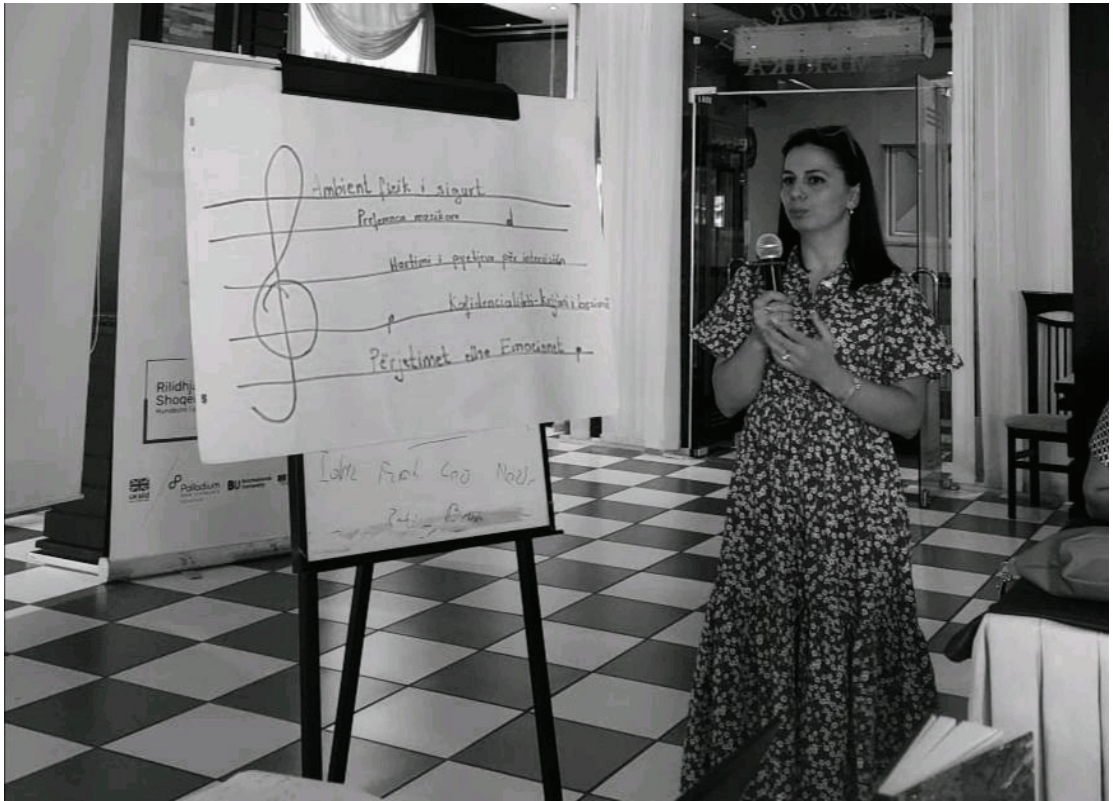
*(Adapted from Bloom and Covington cited in Rosenbaum & Spivack, 2014, p. 10)*

The reasons that it worked as a teaching tool as well is because it is an embodied practice. You learn by doing. It is through co-listening that we all understand the power of music, the intimacy it creates, the vulnerability of sharing. As we decide which tracks, we want to share, we replicate the processes of the participant. We replicate in that decision- how much to tell- how safe do I feel? We experience the power of being heard. After 30 minutes of discussion, a few participants choose to share their music choices. Choosing to speak on motherhood again, a female participant shared how a video that her son made for her on Mother's Day is what gets her emotional. Another female participant chose to share a song from her teenage years, 'The show must go on' by Queen. She spoke.

This song reminds me of the stage of life, when I was a teenager, when I had so many questions, and I was wondering about the meaning of life, about life after death, and what we are living for. I listened to this song, and half of it is questions. I felt so represented by the song, like I am not alone, like I know the singer, like he wrote this for me. But as time passed, and I chose a profession, created a family, the questions were answered. So, for me it is not a moment, but a stage of life in this song. (Shkodër training participant)

In Albania this was more notable in that there was a distinction between the elders and youngsters. External evaluators noted that they had never seen such intergenerational co-operation and understanding. People found common ground of their experiences such as womanhood, motherhood, parenthood. They also were able to note differences such as age, generation, experience of communism vs capitalism. What the opening process has brought there was space created for common ground. They were also not used to my teaching presence.

## TRAINING FEEDBACK OVERVIEW



### SHKODËR

High satisfaction of participants with the training activity. Most of the respondents self-reported to 'agree' or 'strongly agree' about the usefulness of this training including its content, learning objectives, length, methods, and lecturers' knowledge and interaction. Across all statements there were no participants who self-reported 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree.'

Participants' feedback (highlights)

Very special, clear, concrete, simple, creative (Shkodër training participant)

I liked very much the power and impact of music elicitation to create a collaborative working environment with marginalized groups (Shkodër training participant)

I felt confident during this activity. I was curious to learn this new method to communicate with different persons (Shkodër training participant)



The training went well. I learned something new about music elicitation that I had not heard before. I liked a lot of lecture's communication and kindness. (Shkodër training participant)

## KUKËS

4) very high satisfaction of participants with the training activity as a whole: as indicated in Figure 7, all respondents (100%) self-reported to 'strongly agree' that 'The lecturer was knowledgeable, engaging and interesting about topics covered', 'The methods were well suited to the workshop objectives and content', 'The length of the workshop was adequate for the objectives and content', 'I found the workshop useful'.

Participants' feedback (highlights)

I liked this training very much. It was immensely helpful. Both lecturing style and group work made us interact and absorb new knowledge (Kukës training participant)

I enjoyed these two training days very much. I freely expressed my ideas, thoughts (Kukës training participant)

Everything went well; very valuable activity for our work with young people (Kukës training participant)

## ELBASAN

Very high satisfaction of participants with the training activity as a whole: all respondents (100%) self-reported to 'strongly agree' with 'I found the training useful'; 90% self-reported to 'strongly agree' with each of the statements respectively, 'The lecturer was knowledgeable, engaging and interesting about topics covered', and 'The content of the training was consistent with its objectives'. More than two thirds of the respondents (80%) self-reported to 'strongly agree' with each of the statements respectively, 'The methods were well suited to the workshop objectives and content', 'Themes were dealt with in as much in depth as the length of the training session allowed' and 'The training met my learning objectives'.

Participants' feedback (highlights)

I liked the novelty of songs in our daily life (Elbasan training participant)

Highly creative and educational activity (Elbasan training participant)

Fruitful, collaborative, and creative activity. Thank you! (Elbasan training participant)

Very beautiful activity and experience (Elbasan training participant)

Very beautiful, inspiring, and pleasant activity (Elbasan training participant)

I am very satisfied with this training activity. I learned new things to practice in my work (Elbasan training participant)

### *One thing I will take away from the training ...*

Music as part of different individuals' lives and its connection with them (Elbasan training participant)

What I liked more was to choose a song and talk about it (Elbasan training participant)

I learned how music motivates people (Elbasan training participant)

I learned that through music elicitation I can understand children because it serves as a communication bridge with them (Elbasan training participant)

As a physical education teacher, I will apply this method during various games I will organize with pupils (Elbasan training participant)

To express feelings through music elicitation and prepare interview questions based on chosen music tracks (Kukës training participant)

I learned that music is a valuable tool to be used with young people because music tracks affect feelings, and emotions regardless good or bad (Kukës training participant)

What impressed me was the use of music to conduct interviews; the kind of music and chosen lyrics (Kukës training participant)

Music elicitation is a good technique that I will use with music sensitive pupils (Kukës training participant)

I understood how music can help me in my daily work to bridge with individuals to learn their life stories (Shkodër training participant)

Music fosters feelings and heals the soul (Shkodër training participant)

Music elicitation as a listening and narrative tool that creates a collaborative atmosphere for pupils to be listened and express what they want to say (Shkodër training participant)

The power of music and mattering (Shkodër training participant)

I will use music elicitation to start a counseling session (Shkodër training participant)

# 5. MUSIC ELICITATION AS AN INTERVENTION TOOL

I took the idea with me. Music gets you closer with people, the idea of finding yourself in the story of a track. This makes sense to us even before taking a professional shape (Shkodër training participant)

The principles of music elicitation as a listening tool were taken from the findings in the year 1 research pilot. As explained earlier in section 2, there are distinct benefits from the music elicitation method which have been found in this pilot as well as in prior research with marginalised and criminalised men (Levell, 2019a, 2022a). The premise of the training and the intervention pilot was that professionals would be able to harness the simplicity of music elicitation to build connections with young people who have otherwise been deemed 'hard to reach' and at risk of disengagement. This target group is important in the context of SOC prevention as the music elicitation research with criminalised men highlighted the range of adverse childhood experiences that were experienced in their lives and how this complex picture led to their involvement in crime. To deliver successful in-depth interventions (which the professional training attendees were already skilled at delivering), they need to be able to create bridges of understanding with the young people. Our premise was that music elicitation, involving co-listening and giving the opportunity for uninterrupted narratives by young people, would switch the traditional hierarchies and power imbalances. We have seen this process work in the year 1 research as well as between professionals in the year 2 training.

The professional training was conducted in July 2022 and the plan was to evaluate the use of music elicitation after the training for a period of six months. Due to school summer holidays (as many participants worked in schools) the evaluation period was decided to be September 2022 to February 2023. During this time monitoring took place with surveys distributed to training participants in November 2022 and February 2023. Although the take up of music elicitation on the ground was small in numbers what has become clear is that it was being used for outreach with extremely vulnerable and marginalised young people, victims of human trafficking, abuse, sexual exploitation, and domestic violence and abuse.

## GENERAL OVERVIEW

The main purpose of the follow-up of the training activity on "Music elicitation as a research and listening tool"<sup>1</sup> was threefold: a) to understand whether this new

1 This training activity was conducted in Elbasan, Shkodra, and Kukës during 11-15 July 2022 with 49 practitioners

technique was useful for practitioners in project areas (Kukës, Elbasan and Shkodra) in Albania to identify new cases of children/young people at risk (including the risk of their engagement in serious and organized crime) in their daily work and tailor concrete interventions to address their problems/needs/disadvantages; b) to understand challenges/difficulties faced by practitioners to apply it into practice in their local context; and c) to contribute to the improvement of this method, in general, and the indicators of its success, in particular. Self-administered electronic surveys and face-to-face semi-structured interviews were used to gather information during November 2022 – February 2023. An e-mail was circulated to training participants to explain the purpose of their participation in this training activity follow-up in order to obtain their consent to self-report the use of this method in their work and self-assess its impact in the context of their knowledge and skills change. Self-administered surveys included both, close-ended and open-ended questions (Annex 1). They were circulated to all training participants. In total, 19 practitioners responded (or 39% of the total number of training participants) and only 10 (or 20%) had applied it. Moreover, additional face-to-face individual interviews were held with some of those who self-reported to have used this method aiming at learning: a) whether they applied this new method as it was explained in its written guideline or modified it depending on the context; and b) how these modifications led to concrete results, if any.

## PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

There was a gender-balanced participation of respondents who self-reported to have used this method (Figure 1); the majority of them were social workers (Figure 2) and work in civil society organizations (Figure 3); two thirds worked in the city (Figure 4) and mainly in Elbasan (Figure 5). They mainly applied this new method with young people aged 14-16 years old (Figure 6) and mostly once (Figure 7).

Figure 1. Respondents by gender (N = 10)

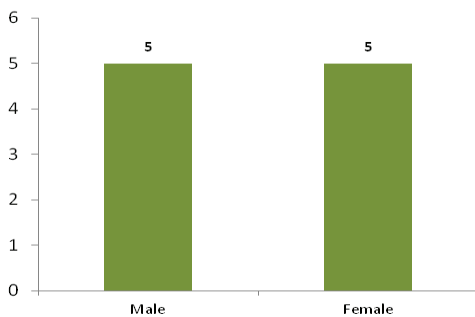


Figure 2. Respondents by position (N = 10)

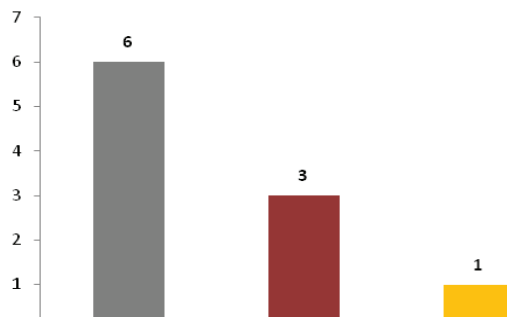


Figure 3. Respondents by place of work (N = 10)

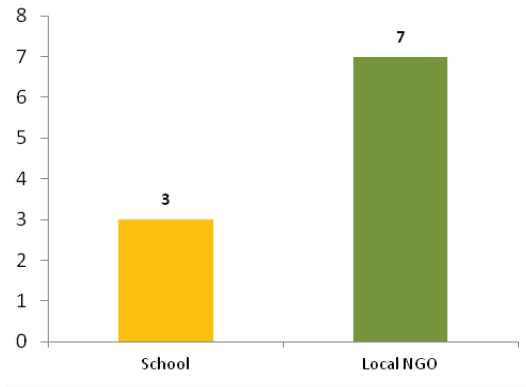


Figure 4. Respondents by location (N = 10)

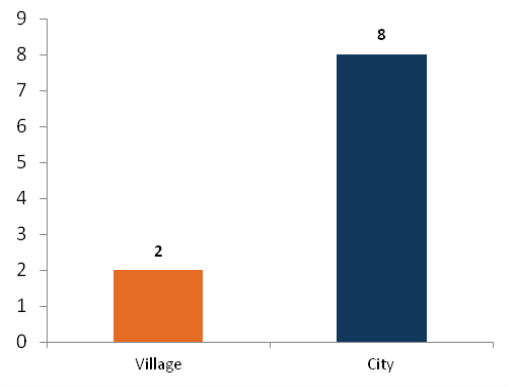


Figure 5. Respondents by municipality (N = 10)

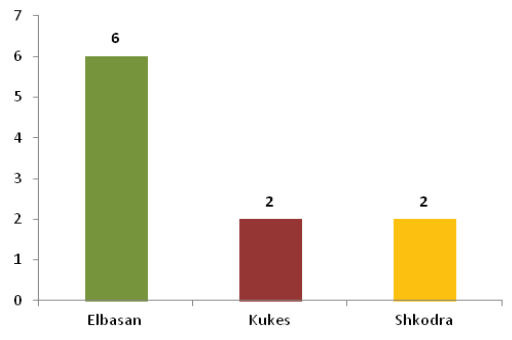


Figure 6. Respondents by target group method application (N = 10)

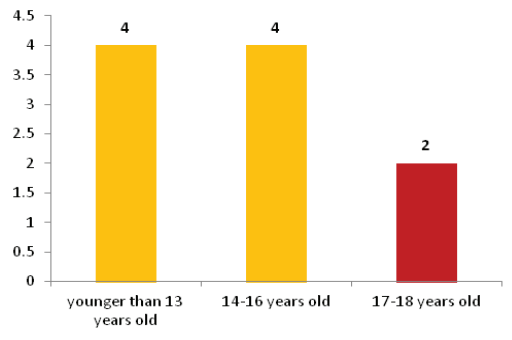
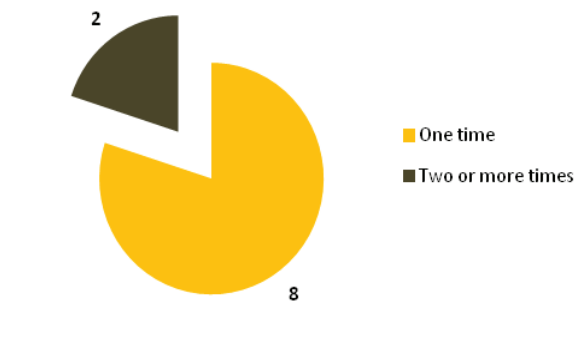


Figure 7. Respondents by the number of times of the application of the method (N = 10)



## ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004)<sup>2</sup> was used to analyze data collected for this follow-up assessment. Results showed:

### 3.1 The use of music elicitation method in different contexts, settings, and target group

#### 3.1.1 Music elicitation method as a tool to understand the 'inner world', feelings, and needs of a minor and young person.

a) music elicitation method was used by school psychologists to identify minors/young people at risk and understand their problems:

I used this method for the first time with a 10th grader in a village school where I work. He seemed lost in his world inside and outside the school and did not interact with others. One day I invited him in my office and started talking in general. He talked for different things, but he did not say any word about his problem. Then I asked him what he liked to do in his free time, and he answered that he liked music listening. I asked him whether we could hear a song and he could tell me what he felt while he heard it. While the song started, the boy started crying. Little by little he started talking about his problem. He was concerned about his behavior and its consequences especially to his mother'

b) music elicitation method was used by social workers to bridge communication with newly accepted and accommodated abused minors (including victims of sexual exploitation, domestic violence, neglect, and human trafficking) in shelters to facilitate their process of adjustment in the new setting and ensure their smooth integration:

I applied this method with a 15-year-old girl who recently arrived in the shelter. It was difficult to talk even tactfully to her because of her severe emotional state. Therefore, I asked her whether she liked music listening and whether she had any favorite song she wanted to listen at that moment. She accepted and I let her find her song in my laptop. As we started listening to it, she burst into tears. I let her cry a bit while she started talking about her difficult life. She identified herself with the girl of the song who was abandoned, alone and did not have any support to cope with her problems. Every effort she made did not yield any positive result. Her narrative made me more aware of her situation which she did not want to share with others.

c) music elicitation method minimized language and cultural barriers in communication for non-Albanian minors accommodated in shelters setting relationships and forging connections:

An unaccompanied 12-year-old Syrian boy, suspected victim of trafficking, was referred to our shelter but he did not speak Albanian language while his English language knowledge was very basic... just few words. To communicate with him I used music downloaded from YouTube. He liked some Arabic songs with video clips while

2 Krippendorff, K. (2004). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology. 2nd Edition, SAGE Publications, Inc.

I tried to understand them using google translator. This helped me understand his psycho-social situation and establish trust relationships with him. The boy felt more relaxed and willing to express his problems through songs.

3.1.2 Music elicitation method as a tool to raise awareness of young people about various behavior problems and critically reflect on them in groups.

a) music elicitation method was used by school psychologists to sensitize young people about bullying and critically reflect on its consequences on victim's life:

A group of young people aged 14-16 years were invited in one of the civic education classes in the school where I work to discuss about bullying. Initially they heard some songs with bullying-related lyrics, bullying victims and their emotional state. After they heard them, I invited young participants to share their thoughts and impressions about them. The discussion was very dynamic and constructive. Participants also identified various types of violence in the school and the family that we had not discussed before. Their interaction and exchange of information created a 'constructive and fruitful communication atmosphere'.

b) music elicitation method as a 'conversation starter' to engage and keep young people focused on group discussions about various anti-social behaviors:

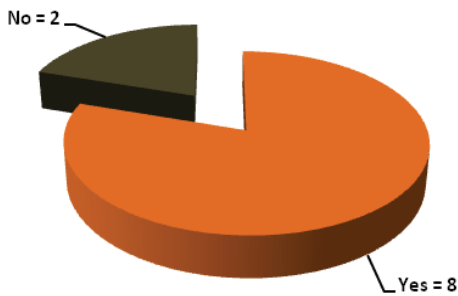
Music elicitation method was used in the context of 'Reflective group meetings' where we usually discuss with male youngsters aged 15-18 years about their problems and ask them to reflect about their experiences. Male participants were referred to our organization by different stakeholders that is why music was initially used to release their emotions, spark great insights and reflections, increase their concentration and engagement in discussions, and build bonds among them.

### **RESPONDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT RESULTS ACHIEVED FROM THE APPLICATION OF THE MUSIC ELICITATION METHOD.**

More than two thirds of the respondents self-reported that they had achieved positive results from the application of this method in dealing with different cases (Figure 8).



Figure 8. Respondents' self-assessment of the results achieved from the application of the new knowledge and skills (N = 10)



Results achieved were at different levels of communication/interaction/collaboration with children and young people including:

- simple identification of the new 'at risk' cases exposed to various forms of abuse and exploitation.
- quick self-expression of emotions, and feelings of young people and children who do not easily talk about themselves and their problems.
- openness to talk and willingness to share their thoughts.
- fast display of personal character/personality trait/personal qualities.
- calmness of strong emotions or 'emotional storm'.
- better collaboration with practitioners about their needs, problems, etc.
- pro-active engagement in development of individual intervention plans to ensure young person's proper integration and adjustment in new settings.

However, not all practitioners achieved positive results from the application of this method. Those who did not achieve them highlighted the importance of taking into consideration the age-group when applying this method:

I did not achieve any positive result from the application of this method because I applied it with younger children (aged 11 – 13 years) who selected a random song that is widely sung nowadays. They did not have any specific song that depicted their life/problems/needs or to draw parallels with their difficulties, challenges, or personality characteristics. Probably this method is more useful for older age-groups who have developed a different way of thinking about their favored songs and project their life events/lifestyle/personal experiences to them.

Some others said that this method was very good to break the ice between participants or create a more informal communication among them, but it can't stand alone. It should relate to other elements, or it should be combined with other tools to yield positive results.

## RESPONDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT RELATED TO THEIR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE IMPROVEMENT.

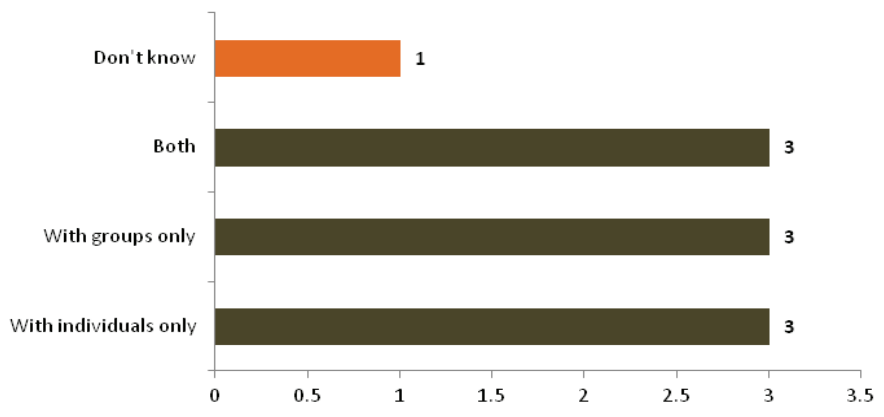
All respondents self-reported that the application of the music elicitation method had improved their listening and communication skills in their work. While some of them had never imagined before the power of music listening in self-expression and personal storytelling of minors/young people in need or at risk within their office premises, the others listed various aspects of their skills and knowledge improvement looking at them from different angles such as:

- improved active listening of songs and their lyrics because they transmit strong and important messages related to the case, I have to work with.
- increased attention and concentration to grasp every detail related to the lyric of the song and the concrete case including body language.
- improved understanding of the child/young person context and background.
- better organization of thoughts on how to deal with the case.

## RESPONDENTS' SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MUSIC ELICITATION METHOD

Overall respondents positively self-assessed the effectiveness of the music elicitation method in their work with respectively, a) with individuals only, b) groups only, or c) both (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Respondents' self-assessment of the effectiveness of the music elicitation method (N = 10)



Respondents identified several indicators to assess the impact of the application of the music elicitation method in their work with children and young people including:

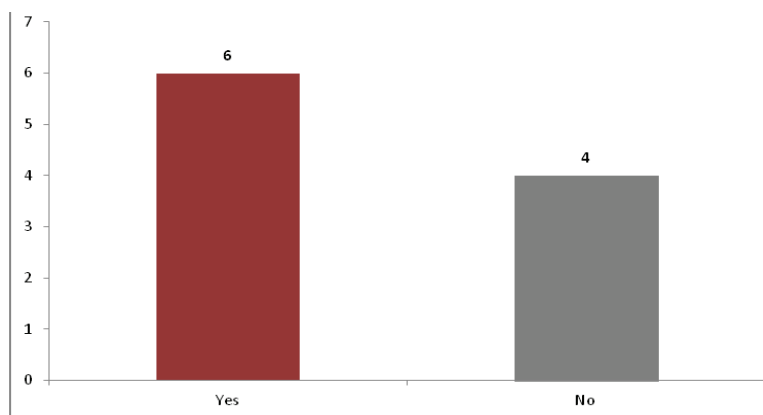
- High interest of the child/young person to collaborate because they perceive it as an interesting activity that does not overload their emotional situation.

- high willingness to talk about their personal experiences as they are listening to the song.
- easily accepted social worker by the child/young people at risk and/or in need of help/support/protection.
- timely organization of the intervention and provision of support.

## RESPONDENTS' VIEWS ABOUT THE APPLICATION OF THE MUSIC ELICITATION METHOD

Slightly more than half of the respondents self-reported that they adjusted their tools/ techniques or interventions based on knowledge and skills gained during music elicitation method training activity (Figure 10).

*Figure 10. Respondents' views about the modification/adjustment of their tools/techniques (N = 10)*



Respondents self-reported how they modified/adjusted this technique in their work including:

- method adjustment based on verbal expression barriers/difficulties of the child/ young person.
- method application based on the purpose and objective of the intervention.

Moreover, there were cases when adjustment of the application of the method was related to the cases analysis:

I followed several steps that helped me better apply this tool. Initially I saw a) whether the case was interested to listen and showed proper attention; b) tried to grasp music preferences and collaborate with the case in this regard; c) as an instrument that can help me in my work with the case; and d) its positive impact on the emotional state and psycho-social situation of the case.

## CONCLUSIONS

This follow-up assessment of the application of the music elicitation method by a group of practitioners formerly trained in Albania showed that it was a useful tool to identify children/young people at risk (at both, individual level, and group level) and design proper intervention plan to address needs/problems they faced. As a new tool it has been applied in various contexts mostly in shelters, NGO premises, and rarely in the school. Regardless the context of its use, it was positively rated by respondents who emphasized the importance of their skills and knowledge improvement with this new technique. However, it showed some limitations that were related to: a) difficulty to stand alone as a technique in case identification due to insufficient expertise; and b) low or lack of success when applied to younger age groups because they were not able to draw parallels with their life and did not have any music preference related to their present/past experience. The success of music elicitation is to be measured in the development of authentic connections held in community.

# 6. CONCLUSION: MUSIC, MASCULINITY, AND MATTERING

## Using music enables young people both **to speak and be heard**

The frame of the development of music elicitation as both a professional listening tool, as well as music creation as an engagement tool, is to explore the role music plays in young people feeling that they 'matter'. All of the above suggested activities relate to the concept of being **able both to speak, as well as to be heard**. The music elicitation pilot suggested that for some criminalized young people the method offered a space to open up and develop an environment of trust within which to share very sensitive aspects of their lives, adversity, marginalization, and future aspirations. There is potential that this can be used more widely as a way to develop different relationships with 'at risk' young people in an empowering and sensitive way. There were several key findings in the music elicitation pilot which could be utilised in the development of wider interventions. In particular this data could be used to understand the gendered experiences of growing up as boys and young men in Albania.

We had a unique and important opportunity to use the findings of the music elicitation research to understand the deeper motivations and desires of the young men we are trying to reach in the RAYS project. As discussed above, there were expressions of masculinity pressures, related to wider experiences of migration, which can be drawn on in the communications related to crime prevention. Being able to construct messages which resonate with young people themselves, as our primary beneficiaries, is essential. These could include; Masculinity pressures; Pressures to be financially independent or financial supporters of single parent household; Impact of migration on boys in the family (pressure to migrate in childhood, and/or pressure to be 'the man of the house' when family migrate). Ultimately, the lens of masculinity could be used as leverage to support positive changes.

The music elicitation pilot was not just about the specific research method but was also about using the power of music in engaging criminalised young men to share their stories. In this function it was shown to be effective, not just as a hook for engagement, but also in supporting the articulation of difficult memories and experiences. As demonstrated in the popularity of music, as well as the few participants who engaged in their own music creation and recording, it has enormous potential in youth work. There is a potential to capitalise on this through the creation of music hubs as safe spaces for young people to create, record, and listen to music. The professional training demonstrated the ways in which music helped foster communication and empathy even between professionals from different roles and generations.

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