Young people as victims of violence

by

Boronia Halstead

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About the author

BORONIA HALSTEAD is a Research Officer at the Australian Institute of Criminology. She has worked on a number of youth-related pro jects including a Youth Crime l'revention Policy Forum in 1990, which she coordinated and for which she edited the proceedings. Other pro jects she has been involved with have considered the involvement of young people in sexwork. She has also worked in neighbourhood centres, providing support for low-income families. Her ongoing interest in Aboriginal issues arose from work in Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Her book Lookin' for Your Mob provides information to Aboriginal people tracing their family trees. It was co-authored with Diane Smith and published by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies .

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1. Introduction

Violence in context

Public concern about young people and violence tends to focus on stereotypes of young people as perpetrators of violence: bashing of the elderly, gang brawls, violence on public transport, victimisation of minority groups, and drug-related crime. In fact, however, the evidence indicates that the main victims of young people are young people, and that the factors which predispose young people towards perpetration of violence are in many cases the same factors that make them vulnerable to violence. Because a young person may be both perpetrator and victim in the same incident, much of this violence is unreported, and difficult, if not impossible, to quantify.

This paper provides an overview of the situation of young Australians who are victims of violence. It reviews the range of factors which predispose particular groups of young people to violent victimisation, from the socioeconomic and environmental to the immediate stresses which precipitate violent action. It considers the impact of violence at different levels upon young people, developing a model upon which to draw in considering the adequacy of the provision of services for the victims.

The questions which were posed in the consultancy brief and addressed in this paper are:

- To what extent are young people victims of violence, victimisation and "perpetration"?
- To what extent are existing programs and services assisting young people who are victims of violence?
- What are the needs of young people who are victims of violence?
- Would young people who are victims of violence benefit from improved services?

The age group covered by the term "youth" may be between about 10 years old, or late primary, to about 25 or early adulthood. Statistics suggest that the perpetration of serious assault is most common in the 15 to 19-year-old-age group. Homicides tend to show up at a later age, mostly in early adulthood (Strang 1991). For the purposes of this paper, however, young people are defined as 10 to 20-year-olds – from the age at which children generally tend to exhibit definite signs of aggressive, competitive behaviour, to the age at which most have moved from the adult-dominated world of school into tertiary education or the work force.

One of the major difficulties in dealing with violence in society is identifying the point or level of violence at which it becomes excessive, or socially unacceptable. The capacity for violence is a survival mechanism, bred into most species and triggered in the well-known "fight or flight" syndrome. The socially acceptable level of violence is a function of culture and need. In Australian society, for example, spanking of children for disciplinary purposes is widely accepted (National Committee on Violence 1990), while assault is regarded as a crime. A higher level of violence may be accepted in some contact sports than in normal social contact, while presentation of violence in the media is a common form of entertainment. The problem thus is not violence per se, but levels of violence which are damaging to the individual, group or society. Though a detailed examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this paper, which focuses on socially unacceptable or excessive violence, it is essential to bear them in mind in discussing the position of victims of violence.

While some definitions of violence (e.g. National Committee on Violence Against Women 1991) include any action which, even if not physical, causes emotional or economic stress, such all-encompassing definitions often make it difficult to isolate a level at which violence becomes socially unacceptable behaviour. They are thus too general for the practical purposes of developing appropriate services and programs. This paper therefore restricts its definition of violence to physical behaviour which results in physical, sexual and/or psychological

damage, forced social isolation, or economic deprivation, or behaviour which leaves another person in fear. For similar reasons, it classifies the victim as the person or persons who suffer directly from violent action. Indirect victims, such as the family or friends of a homicide victim, while an enormously important group in terms of their needs and overall effect on the stability of society, are too large a category to cover here.

The behaviour which precipitates an excessively violent action may also be direct or indirect. A violent action may be entirely due to behaviour of the perpetrator, or it may represent a physical response to provocation or other behaviour by the eventual victim. It may result from behaviour by a third party or parties, as is often the case in brawls at drinking venues. It may be a lagged response to a past situation, such as a hatred of women or fear of men generated by an abused childhood, or a pre-emptive response to the fear of an anticipated threat.

An individual's propensity for violence may derive from a genetic predisposition to violence, or derive from any of a variety of factors, including brain damage, certain illnesses, or excessive metabolic levels of the body chemicals associated with aggressive urges, such as testosterone or adrenalin. Malnutrition and chronic poisoning, whether from alcohol and drug use or from a polluted environment, may be exhibited in abnormal behaviour leading either to provocation or to perpetration of violence. Biological cycles – most notably the menstrual cycle – may result in surges of aggression (see Easteal 1991). A predisposition towards excessive violence may be exacerbated by stresses in childhood, such as those caused by poor parenting or by disadvantaged socioeconomic status, or by the stresses and physiological changes of puberty.

For young people in their teen years, learning to cope with their own and others' propensity to violence is an important but to date relatively neglected part of growing up. That many of these factors may be common to perpetrator and victim, and are seen particularly in disadvantaged communities, suggests that many of the causes of violence may also be causally correlated with social disadvantage. The inability to cope with the normal stresses of life is one such factor.

This paper examines violence at three levels. The first is the relationship between young people and the socioeconomic structure. At this level, such factors as economic and social deprivation and Australian cultural attitudes towards youth are key elements in understanding violence among young people. It includes the relationship between authorities – such as the police, the school system and institutions – and young people.

The second level consists of the group, and relationships between groups and between a particular group and the authorities. The importance of in-groups and out-groups, the pursuit of peer acceptance as a factor in self-esteem and the contribution of media campaigns which adversely target particular subgroups of young people, such as Aboriginal young people, also need to be considered. Group issues include gang violence, school bullying, violence in sport and the propensity for violence of some locations and some types of youth recreation.

The fact that young people tend to seek out and cluster in groups of their peers is an important factor in their vulnerability to violence both as perpetrators and as victims. Needs for self-esteem and security lead to participation in group sports and social events, and also to the formation of gangs. The in-group may be a tightly knit, strongly structured group, such as a group of scouts or a football team, or it may be a loose group with which the individual identifies, such as a racial grouping or neighbourhood. In each case, however, vulnerability to violence tends to be associated with the group's identification of another grouping as an out-group or of another individual as having the characteristics associated with an identified out-group. Racial minorities, by virtue perhaps of being easy to define, are traditionally among the most vulnerable to group violence.

The third level relates to violence as experienced by individuals. The impact of physical violence such as violence in the home, homicides, suicide and motor vehicle accidents, the isolation faced by young people who have been victimised and the usefulness or otherwise of the various types of assistance, formal and informal, offered by society to young victims of violence are important factors.

2. Structural issues : The socioeconomic context

A considerable amount of recent research has documented the increasing economic marginalisation of youth in Australian society (e.g. White 1989; Maas 1990). Some writers see this marginalisation as itself a violent imposition upon young people (White et al. 1991, p.27). Notable in youth marginalisation has been the marked decline in employment opportunities for under 20-year-olds, and a policy shift towards prolonged dependence of young people upon their families, while young people undertake longer periods of education and training. In 1966, 63% of 15 to 19-year-olds were employed and 30% were in education, while in 1989 only 37% were employed and 58% were studying (Maas 1990, p.24). The percentage of 15 to 19-year-olds seeking full-time employment in February 1992 was 35.7% (Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey (6203.0) 1992, p.32).

Most unemployed young people are themselves from low-income families. In addition to the immediate effect

upon the young people concerned, any policy shift which increases the burden upon these families, such as more stringent criteria for independent benefit status and lengthy waiting periods for benefits, may increase stress and levels of domestic conflict to the extent of physical violence.

Many families are unable to meet the expectations placed upon them to support young people over a longer period. Indeed, the family as traditionally understood is itself undergoing major restructuring. Changes identified by the Senate Standing Committee on Social Welfare, and referred to in the report of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), include:

- a substantial decline in formal marriages;
- a substantial increase in divorce;
- an increase in remarriages involving at least one divorced partner;
- a substantial increase in sole parent families as a proportion of total families;
- an increasing number of mothers entering the work force;
- a growing tendency for young people to leave home to establish themselves independently prior to marriage; and
- a decline in the extended family network and the increased isolation of the nuclear family (HREOC 1989, p.9).

These changes, collectively or in isolation, have severely eroded the traditional security and reassurance of home and family for many troubled young people.

The market for labour generally, and unskilled labour in particular, has declined under the impact of the current global recession. Unskilled and inexperienced young people are especially vulnerable to any downturn in the economy. While there has been an increase in the proportion of part-time jobs available, unskilled young people are often unable or unwilling to compete with the increased numbers of better qualified students and older women also seeking these positions. Lack of apprenticeship and employment opportunities has also meant that school retention rates are higher, putting more pressure on teaching staff and often resulting in less sensitivity by those in authority at school to individual problems.

Accompanying the shift in the labour market has been a contraction of the level of income support available to young people from the state. Support is no longer available for the first 13 weeks of unemployment after leaving school, unless the young person is able to prove that he or she is a victim of sexual or other abuse. The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) claims that when figures for 1982-83 were compared with figures for 1991, "the level of income support for unemployed young people has fallen on average by at least 30% in real terms, and up to 60% for most under 18 years. All levels of payment remain well below the Poverty Line" (ACOSS 1991, p.3) (Table 1). After March 1992, eligibility for Rent Assistance at a maximum level of $32 per week will be extended to under 18-year-old independent/homeless people, but this will only increase their maximum weekly Social Security entitlement to $138.00 per week, even if they are eligible for Young Homeless Allowance.

The combination of family upheaval, loss of employment options and lack of income support contributes to stresses which place young people at risk of exposure to physical violence both within and outside the home, with limited opportunities to make choices which could remove them from the threat of victimisation.

Lack of basic shelter and personal security is a fundamental problem for young people seeking to avoid violence. A spokesperson from the Youth Accommodation Association estimates that in New South Wales only 1000 beds are available at any one time for an estimated 30,000 homeless people. Conventional rites of passage into adulthood, however, assume that the individual will have adequate food and shelter, find employment, and obtain sufficient financial security eventually to provide for a family.

Many young people presumed to be at greatest risk of victimisation do not access services, such as social security benefits, for which they would be eligible. Although waiting periods may be waived in special need cases (for example cases involving violence and sexual abuse), in practice the stringency of eligibility criteria and the requirement to "prove" special need status can deter potential applicants, particularly with regard to "proof" of sexual abuse. Other problems include inadequate training and pressure on counter staff, which is sometimes reflected in scepticism towards the client's claims to special need status. Young people, especially those who have been abused, may not have the confidence or emotional energy to persevere with their claims in the face of apparently intrusive questioning, or to pursue their rights.

In analysing the reasons why some young homeless people fail to apply for income support when they have been abused or abandoned, Hirst concludes that alienation from the mainstream may be their only status, and to access the income support bureaucracy "is a concession they are unable to make" (Hirst 1989, p.7). To counter this problem, a pilot program is under way in New South Wales to develop an outreach approach by Social Security staff, in which youth refuges are visited and clients informed of their entitlements. Nonetheless, the basic problem remains that even government workers with the best of intentions may be unable to communicate with young people for whom self-respect and status are inextricably linked to rejection of authority.

Table 1: Comparison of levels of youth entitlements to social security benefits with adult rates and the poverty line

	November 1983		
Age group	*Rates of UB per week $*	*% of adult rate*	*% of poverty line*
All 16-17	45	61	47
All 18-20	74	100	76
21+	74	100	76
	January 1992		
Age group	*Rates of JSA/UB per week $*	*% of adult rate*	*% of poverty line*
16-17 reduced due to parental income test*	30	22	18
16-17 not reduced	64	46	41
16-17 independent rate and YHA	106	76	68
18-20 at home	77	55	49
18-20 away from home	117	84	75
21+	139	100	89

Notes:

1. Poverty Line for a single person not in work was $94 per week in November 1983, $152 in September 1990, and $157 in September 1991.
2. UB: Unemployment Benefit paid to unemployed people of all ages until January 1988, and then only to those 18 and over.
3. JSA: Job Search Allowance paid to 16 and 17-year-old unemployed people from January 1988.
4. *Applied if joint parental income is greater than $20,700
5. Independent JSA and YHA (Young Homeless Allowance) paid to young people who live away from home or who are defined as "homeless". Strict qualifying rules apply to these payments.

Source: Adapted from ACOSS 1991, p.3 and updated as of January 1992.

3. The nature of the problem

Young people as perpetrators of violence

A number of qualifiers need to be borne in mind when considering the extent to which young people are perpetrators of violence.

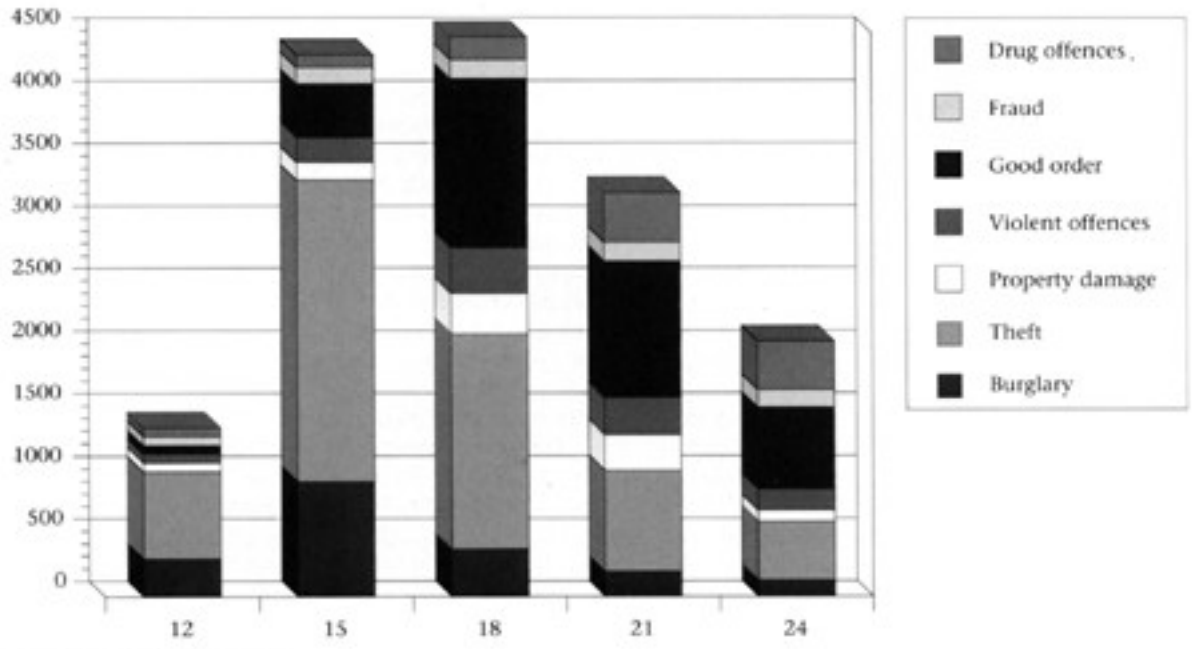
There is a marked difference between the demographic criminal profile of the 12 to 17 age-group, usually defined by the criminal justice system as "juveniles'" and the 17 to 19-year-olds, usually considered to be "youth". The distinction between the two groups is often blurred in discussions of the level of "youth crime". In addition, definitions of youth and juvenile vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

The peak age for property offences in Australia is 15 years (Figure 1) (Walker & Henderson 1991, p.2). Violent offences peak at 18 years of age. This pattern of increasing seriousness of crimes over these age-groups has been attributed to increased experimentation with alcohol, cars and sex, prior to the adoption of adult lifestyles (ibid.).

Compared to youth and adult offenders, juveniles tend to commit less serious crimes than adults, and to commit crimes in groups, so that a number of juveniles may be arrested for a single offence. They also tend to commit crimes close to where they live and therefore they are more easily recognised and apprehended. Not surprisingly, juveniles are generally unsophisticated criminals and are generally not armed with deadly weapons (Mukherjee 1985, p.23). This, however, may be changing.

Over the past decade, crime statistics for the teenage years have been influenced by what has been dubbed "the baby-boom echo". This short-term population trend is a

Figure 1: Comparative rates of arrest/caution for non-traffic offences, persons aged 12, 15, 18, 21 and 24 years, per 100,000 per annum



Peak Age of Arrest/Caution:
15 years – Burglary; Theft
18 years – Property damage; Violent offences; Good order.
21 years – Fraud; Drug offences.
Source: Walker & Henderson 1991, p.2.

result of the offspring from both the large post-war baby boom and increased immigration in the late 1940s and early 1950s. A rise in the incidence of property crimes peaked around 1986-87 with the movement through of this echo of 16 to 17-year-olds. Correspondingly there was a peak in the incidence of violent crime a few years later as this group aged and started drinking alcohol, driving cars and living independently. We probably can anticipate a corresponding decline in the rate of some violent crime as the echo moves into adulthood (Walker & Henderson 1991).

The progression of this group towards adulthood has been accompanied in recent years by global recession, pressures on social services from increased youth unemployment, pressures on places in tertiary institutions, limited accessibility of low-cost housing and other socioeconomic constraints. These factors have implications for the levels of violence experienced by young people, as well as for the extent of their perpetration of violence.

The victimisation/perpetration relationship

Victims and perpetrators often share common characteristics. Those common predisposing factors which often apply to both groups include unemployment, low socioeconomic status, being a young male, low self-esteem and, very often, boredom. Not surprisingly, therefore, the victim population contains many individuals who are or have been perpetrators themselves.

Unresolved victimisation can lead to victimisation of others by the initial sufferer, resulting in a "cycle of violence". A high number of men who batter their wives, for example, were observers of violence by their fathers against their mothers, or had been abused themselves as children (Edleson et al. 1985, p.232). Recent American research by Straus (1991) indicated a relationship between physical punishment in the family and adult violence outside the family. "The more physical punishment experienced by the respondent as a child", he said, "the higher the proportion who as an adult reported acts of physical aggression outside the family" (Straus 1991, p.143). The victims of violence may also victimise themselves, through self-destructive behaviour, self-mutilation, or suicide (Ross 1980, p.284).

High rates of violent victimisation and perpetration coincide in the late teens, resulting in high levels of youth on youth violence. Many adolescents who perpetrate violent acts upon others might usefully be described as having poorly developed self-control. They are

characteristically risk-taking, reckless and adventuresome and find the constraints of school, work and home overly restricting (Gottfredson & Hirschi 1990, p.157). They therefore tend to gravitate to environments and groups where they feel less constrained, such as the street or the wheel of a fast car. In their personal relationships, they may be unreliable and thoughtless, which sometimes leads to angry conflict with peers, particularly if they are disinhibited by alcohol. Their victims are likely to be those in the nearest proximity – family members, school mates, or other young people who share the same public spaces and/or recreational pursuits on the street or on public transport. They may be particularly provocative to anyone seeking to restrain their activities, including police officers or peers adversely affected by their activities. Violent behaviour may be an end in itself, a form of bravado, asserting "masculinity" and providing excitement in its own right.

Attempts to mask feelings of powerlessness as a result of victimisation may be directed elsewhere through involvement in violent activities against more helpless others, or through membership of violent gangs.

In a survey of young homeless people in Melbourne, Alder (1990) found that violence against young males was most often perpetrated by other young males. These incidents took place in public places where most of these young men spend their time – the street, railway stations and near pubs. Alcohol was often a factor, and some of the attacks were apparently unprovoked. Interpersonal aggravation, such as "mouthing off", or "bumping into" one another, was often a trigger for such violent exchanges. While seemingly trivial, these slights are seen as threatening to the other's precarious sense of personal dignity and reputation. For such young men, public places are their backyard, since refuges are usually closed during the day and they may be unable to afford other leisure options. They may form loose groups for mutual protection, which may result in inter-group violence as well as inter-personal violence. Fear of such violence was a constant feature of their lives (Alder 1990, p.50).

The young women in Alder's (1990) survey reported that their violent experiences involved sexual assault and were inflicted by young men whom they knew, often "friends" from whom they expected support and comfort. They often regard such matters as personal and were reluctant to discuss them.

Assessing the extent of victimisation

The most straightforward but possibly the most unreliable approach to the issue of the extent of violent victimisation of young people is assessment of the number and type of violent victimisation incidents. Reported violence, however, probably represents a relatively small proportion of violent incidents. Young people are often reluctant to report incidents, especially where they may have contributed or are likely to be suspected of having contributed to the incident. In some situations peer loyalty or distrust of the authorities may override all but the most serious concerns about an incident.

The numerical approach almost invariably fails to acknowledge the multidimensional nature of violence. At the structural level, violence is induced when society fails to provide basic social necessities for its citizens or when the organisation of society creates confrontationist or excessively stressful situations for young people. At the group level, violence can be perpetrated through behaviour and policies which infringe the civil liberties of a particular group; and at the individual level, violence, whether from the perspective of perpetrator or recipient, can be a response to particular personal tensions, home problems, feelings of inadequacy or even an individual's physiology and general state of health. The extent of victimisation at the individual level will be affected as much by the speed, ease and completeness of the process of recovery as by the severity of the original incident.

Figures showing age-specific death rates by cause from the Australian Bureau of Statistics identify the major causes of death for young people in relation to violent incidents as, in order, motor vehicle accidents, suicide, and homicide (Table 2).

Motor vehicle accidents

Motor vehicle accidents are the leading cause of violent death for the 15 to 24-year-old age-group (Table 2), and the 17 to 20-year-old age-group has the highest number of persons killed of all age groups (Figure 2). The number of young males killed in this age-group is three times more than the number of females killed. Inexperienced driving at high speed, sometimes accompanied by alcohol consumption, contributes to this outcome. Alcohol has been shown to have a greater effect on young people than on adults, resulting in higher crash-risk levels at given alcohol levels than for older drivers (Papadakis & Moore 1991, p.85). A sense of personal invulnerability among many young people, accompanied by thrill-seeking behaviour – often with other young people in a single vehicle – are related factors.

Youth suicide and self-harm

Recent evidence indicates that young people in Australia suffer a very high rate of suicide by international standards, particularly in rural areas. Within Australia, suicide is the second highest cause of death for the 15 to 24 years age-group (Table 2). One survey of trends in youth suicide, comparing rates for urban and rural New South Wales, found a dramatic increase in recent years in the rate of suicide for young males aged between 15 and 19 in smaller country towns and farming communities (Dudley & Waters 1991, p.90) (Figure 3).

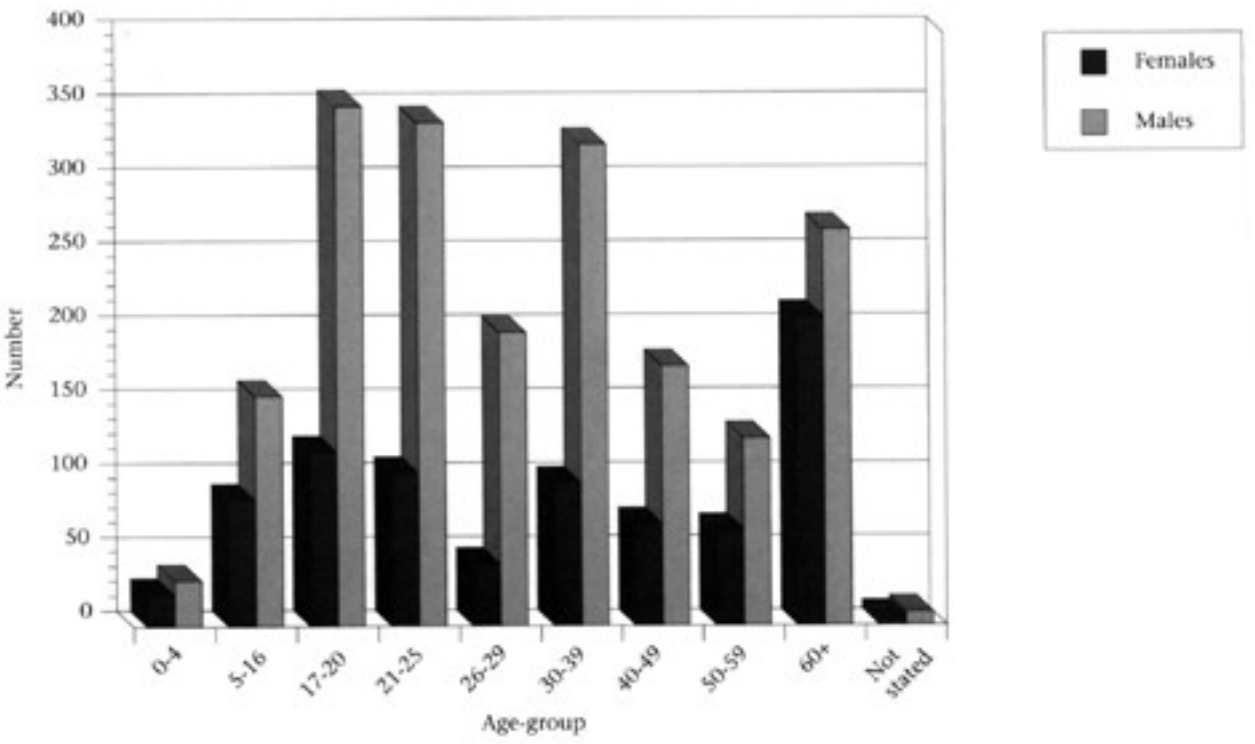
Reasons put forward for such a marked increase include access to firearms, economic stresses on rural families due

Table 2: Australia: Age-specific death rates by cause (rate per 100 000, 1989)

	Age							
Causes of death	*Under 1 year*	*1-14 years*	*15.24 years*	*25-44 years*	*45-54 years*	*55-64 years*	*65-74 years*	*75+ years*
Motor vehicle traffic accidents	4.4	5.3	33.8	17.1	11.2	13.2	17.5	28.6
Accidental falls	0.4	0.3	0.8	1.3	1.8	3.5	11.9	109.5
Suicides and self-inflicted	0.0	0.3	13.8	16.6	15.6	15.7	17.5	17.2
Neoplasms	2.8	4.3	5.6	27.3	144.8	408.3	821.8	1497.1
Heart disease	4.8	0.5	1.7	12.3	85.1	302.5	877.6	3260.7
Cerebrovascular disease	0.0	0.2	0.6	3.5	14.5	53.4	212.4	1229.3
Homicide	4.0	0.6	2.2	2.8	2.4	1.0	1.2	1.9

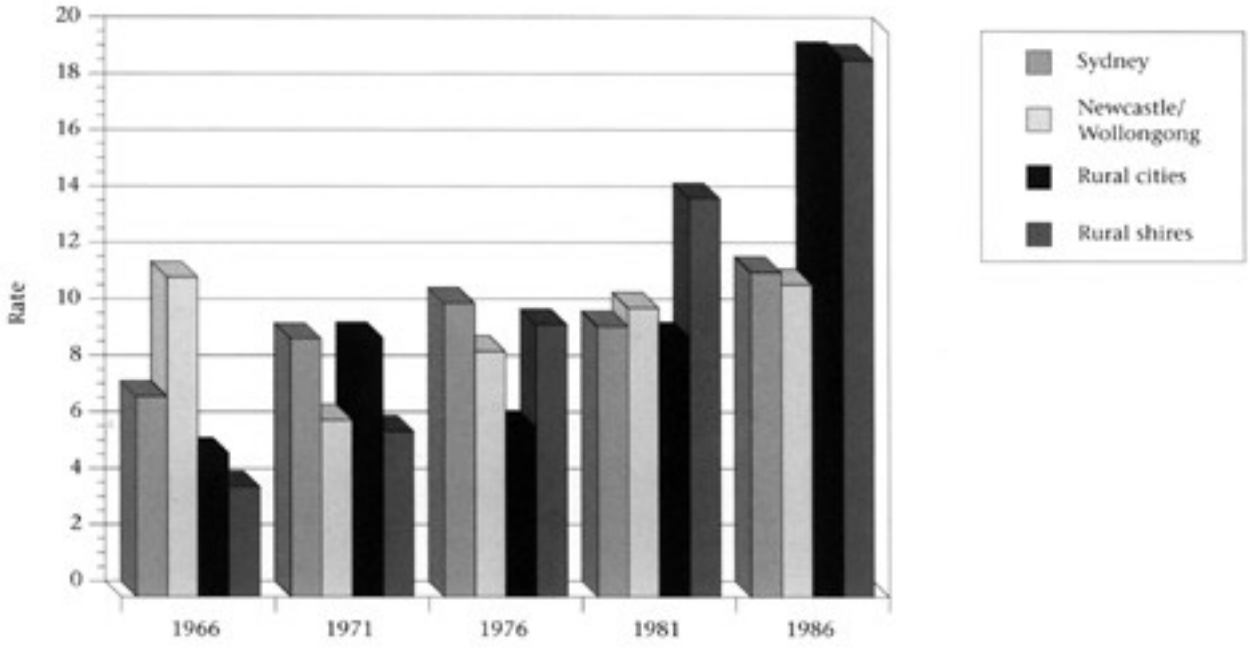
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1989 *Causes of Death Australia*, Cat. 3303.0
Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1989, Microfiche, *Causes of Death Australia*.

Figure 2: Females and males killed in road accidents by age-group, 1989



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1991.

Figure 3: Suicide of males 15 to 19 years (rate per 100,000 population) in New South Wales by area of residence 1964-1988



Source: Dudley et al. (1991).

to increased rural unemployment and poverty, and the marked discrepancy between traditional views about sex roles and male self-reliance (which is perhaps most enduring in these areas) and the reality of diminishing opportunities and rewards (indicated for example by high youth unemployment and people being forced off the land) (Dudley et al. [1991], pp.18-19). Other factors include traditional values of self-reliance, and fears of lack of confidentiality in smaller communities.

The predominance of male suicide is a phenomenon found in most Western countries. Dudley et al. (1991) suggest that this may be attributed to a general reluctance among men to seek psychiatric help. "It is possible that they would see such programs, as they would see help-seeking in general, as an alternative for the weak, and avoid or dismiss them" (Dudley et al. 1991, p.22). Under-resourcing of health needs, including mental health, is a problem in rural areas. Isolation, dispersed populations and the relatively high costs of access and provision of services tend to mean that marginally viable rural services are generally the first to go when budget stringencies are needed.

For young people low self-esteem and lack of interest in their own well-being, as a result of abuse or inability to have control over negative influences on their lives, are often manifest in self-destructive behaviour, in self-mutilation or substance abuse. One submission to the Burdekin Report reported that "this phenomenon of non-suicidal self-harm is rarely seen in adults, but is characteristic of this group of [homeless] young people" (HREOC 1989, p.235).

Homicide

Homicide is the most extreme form of physical violence. Table 3 shows the extent of perpetration of homicide by age (Strang 1991, p.23). These figures do not include driving-related manslaughter.

Homicide is the third highest cause of death from violence for the 15 to 24-year-old age-group. Males in the 20 to 29-year-old age-group are at the highest risk of victimisation (Table 4) (Strang 1991, p. 28). As shown in Figure 1, violent offences in general, peak at around 18 years of age. Homicide offenders show a similar pattern, with highest rates also in the 20 to 29-year-old male age-group.

Victim surveys

While victim surveys may pick up a greater number of incidents than reports to the police or other authorities, the results may be distorted by deliberate or unintentional reporting inaccuracies. Fear of repercussions, varying interpretations by respondents of what represents

violence, or shame at having been unable to prevent or control an incident may also distort the results of victim surveys.

The International Crime Victim Survey (Walker 1991) provides comparative victimisation data from several countries. Surveys of this breadth, however, are often handicapped by the difficulties of finding common ground between the reporting and administrative systems of different countries. The International Crime Victim Survey did not include persons younger than 16, for example, as self-reporting for this age-group was not considered sufficiently reliable for inclusion.

Unfortunately, the overall sample size of 2012 in the Australian component of the international survey meant that when disaggregated according to age-ranges for the 16 to 19-year-olds, the numbers in each response category were often too small to provide any reliable information. The total number of 16 to 19-year-old victims within each offence category ranged from six to 24. Given that the samples are not necessarily representative, any insights into the incidence of violent acts upon young people from this survey are tentative.

The Australian component of the International Crime Victim Survey shows that 16 to 19-year-olds are

Table 3: Age of offender by sex, number (N) and rate (R) per 100,000 population, Australia 1989-90

		Age of offender								
		0-19	*20-29*	*30-39*	*40-49*	*50-59*	*60+*	*Unknown*	*Total*	*%*
Male	N	44	105	54	35	20	7	23	288	86
	R	1.7	7.5	4.0	3.2	2.6	0.6		3.4	
Female	N	4	21	9	4	1	1	2	42	13
	R	0.2	1.5	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.1		0.5	
Unknown	N	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	5	1
Total	N	48	126	63	39	21	8	30	335	100
	R	0.5	4.6	2.4	1.8	1.4	0.3		2.0	
Per cent		14	38	19	12	6	2	9	100	

Source: Strang 1991, p.23.

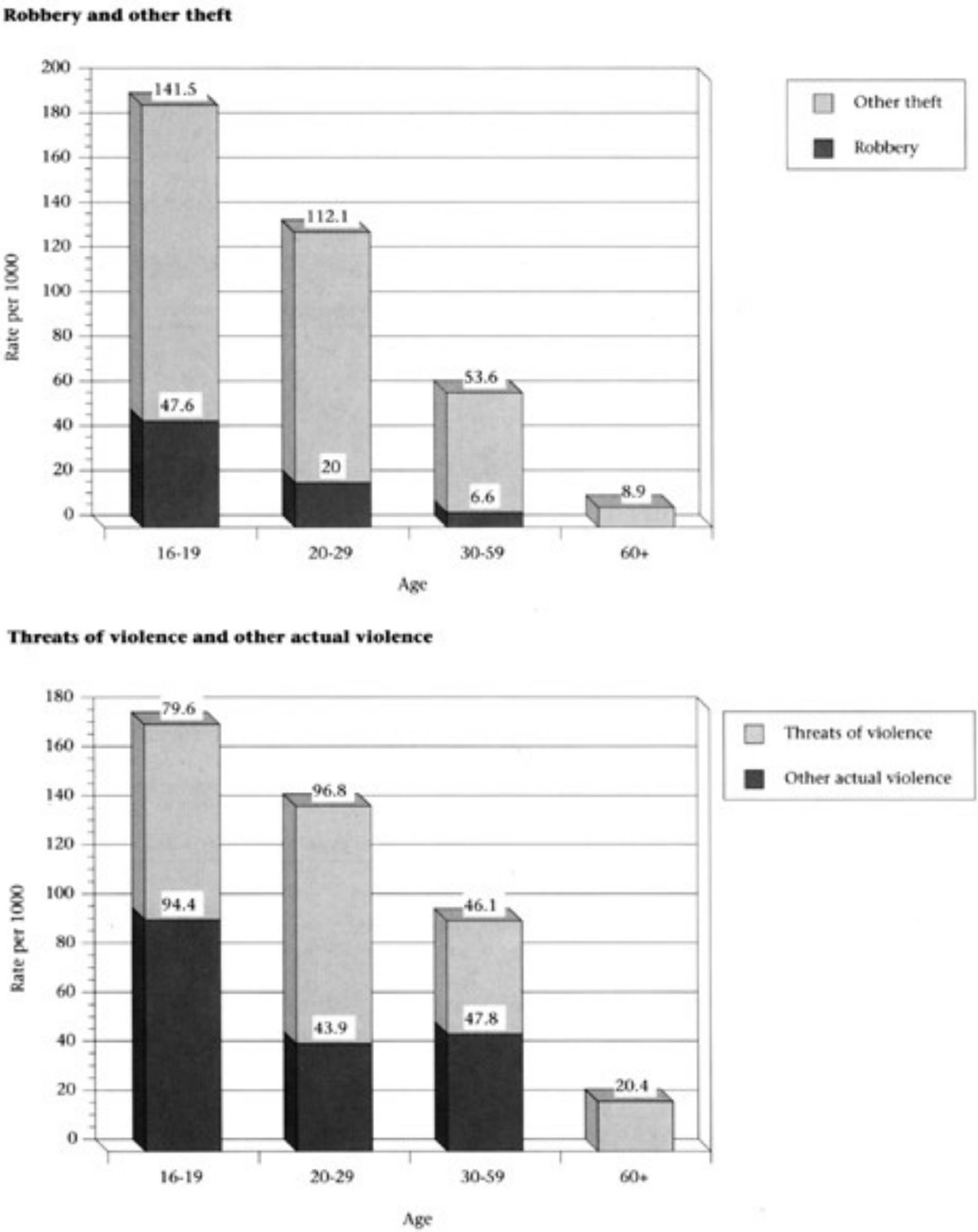
Table 4: Age of victim by sex, number (N) and rate (R) per 100,000 population, Australia 1989-90

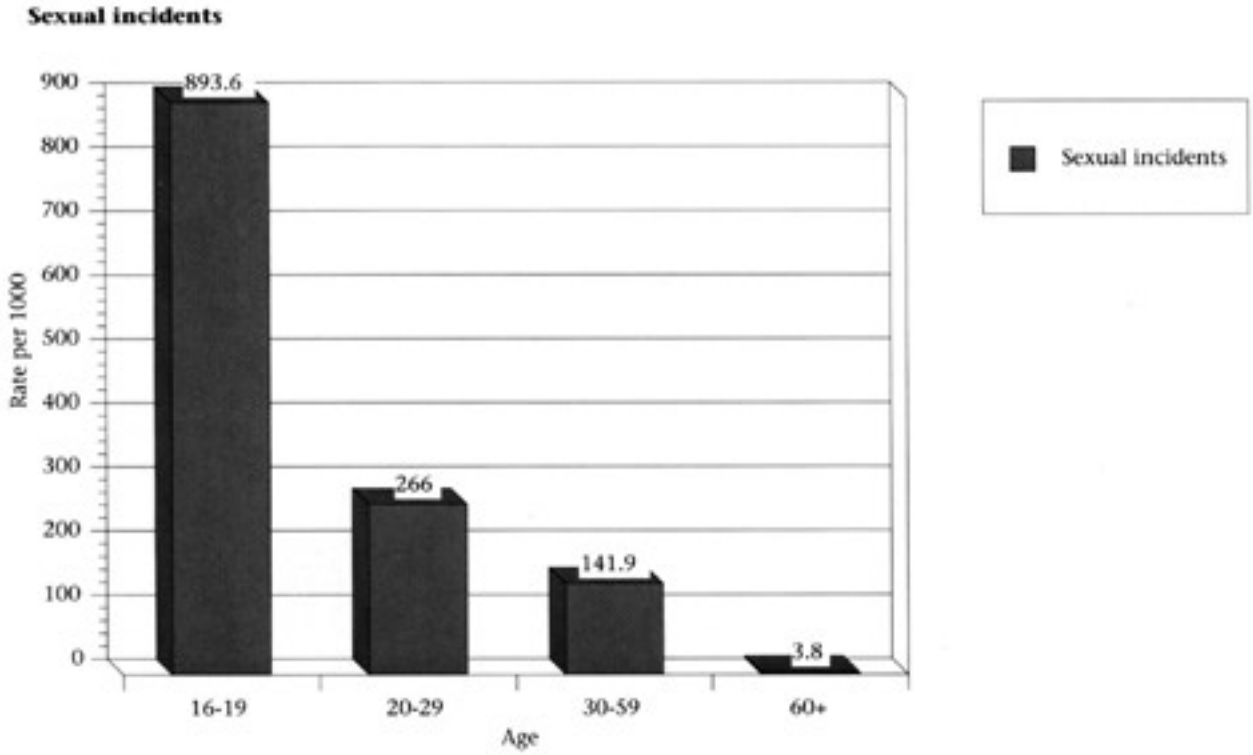
		Age of victim										
		<1	*1-9*	*10-19*	*20-29*	*30-39*	*40-49*	*50-59*	*60+*	*Unknown*	*Total*	*%*
Male	N	2	8	25	51	40	27	22	18	22	215	65
	R	1.6	0.7	1.8	3.6	3.0	2.4	2.8	1.6		2.6	
Female	N	5	5	8	24	25	20	5	11	11	114	35
	R	4.1	0.5	0.6	1.8	1.9	1.9	1.7	0.8		1.4	
Total	N	7	13	33	75	65	47	2	29	33	330*	100
	R	2.8	0.6	1.2	2.7	2.4	2.2	1.8	1.1		2.0	
Per cent	2	4	10	23	20	14	1	9	10	100		

*Includes one whose sex was unknown at the time of data collection.

Source: Strang, 1991, p.23.

Figure 4: Estimated incidence rates of selected personal crimes, by age of victim, Australia 1988





Source: Walker 1991, pp.64-8.

significantly more likely to be victims of crime than other adult age-groups (Walker 1991, pp.64-8). Taking into account the qualifiers previously mentioned, this is likely to be the case for all types of personal crime, including robbery (defined as stealing by force), other theft, sexual incidents and other actual violence (Figure 4). For each category, apart from "other theft", the incidence rates are at least twice those of any other age bracket.

For sexual incidents, the rate of 893.6/1000 is almost three times higher than the next highest incidence rate. However, it should be noted that the survey question upon which Figure 4 is based did not allow the respondents to specify the severity of the incident, and in follow-up questions 40.8% of the respondents did not regard the incident as serious enough to report. The question was asked only of women. The 16 to 19-year-old group was found to be less likely to report the incident than other age-groups. In the next International Crime Victim Survey, due to take place in 1992, respondents will be invited to provide more specific information about the severity of such incidents.

The Australian data is in keeping with trends found in overseas studies. In the United States, the most recent figures indicate that 12 to 24 year-olds have the highest rates of victimisation for crimes of violence. In 1987 the estimated rates of victimisation for crimes of violence per 1000 population in each age-group were:

55.6 (12 to 15 years)
67.5 (16 to 19 years)
62.5 (20 to 24 years)
33.5 (25 to 34 years)
18.5 (35 to 49 years)
8.6 (50 to 64 years)
5.5 (65+ years)

(Source: U.S. Department of Justice 1989, p.17, cited in Alder 1990, p.1.)

Demographic profiles of crime victims in Australia and other English-speaking countries show that, in general, young, single unemployed males appear to run greater risks of becoming victims of assault and robbery (Grabosky 1989, p.4).

A small number of surveys have examined victimisation of particular subgroups of youth. In 1990 Alder reported on a study in Melbourne of homeless youth as victims of violence (Alder 1990). In Western Australia, White et al. (1991) undertook a major survey of youth workers to determine the extent to which users of youth services were victims of violence, such as incest, assault and harassment.

Victimisation in the family home

The family home can often be a source of violent victimisation for young people. This kind of abuse is

notoriously under-reported. Perpetrators often seek to isolate the victim from assistance with threats of violence and psychological torment. The victim may choose to "keep the family secret" to avoid the possibility that the perpetrator may be jailed, or that the family may disintegrate if they report their abuse. Victims have sometimes suffered further abuse in the course of, or as a result of, seeking assistance for their victimisation.

Relating abuse to a series of agencies including police, medical officers, and social workers can be a further ordeal. Victims are often removed from the family home "for their own safety", thereby also removing them from their friends, school and other family members with whom they may have supportive ties. In some instances recognition of this further victimisation has led to policies for the removal of the offender from the family, rather than the victim. Delays in processing charges against the offender, however, and failure to attend to the needs of the victim for long-term ongoing support can lead to an obstruction of the recovery process.

WELSTAT data (Figures 5 to 11) show a very marked increase in the numbers of substantiated cases of physical, emotional and sexual abuse for girls aged 12 to 16 compared to other age-groups. For boys in this age-group, however, levels of substantiated cases of abuse appear to show a general decline, apart from a rise in the incidence of emotional abuse of boys from 12 to 13 years of age. While it has been estimated that "at least one in every 100 Australian children suffers so severely from maltreatment that their plight warrants referral to a protective agency" (Family Violence Professional Education Task-force 1991, p.221), the pattern shown in the WELSTAT data implies that the incidence for girls in this age-group may be one-third more than for girls across all age-groups. Goldman and Goldman found in a survey of Australian tertiary students that "one in four girls and one in 11 boys had been the victims of child sexual abuse by a male more than five years their senior. In the case of girls the average age of the victim was 10 years and the perpetrator 31 years; and in the case of boys, the average age of the victim was again 10 years and the perpetrator 22 years" (cited in Dwyer 1989, p.2].

The link between abuse within the family and homelessness is well documented, and is confirmed in the findings of the National Inquiry into Homeless Children (HREOC 1989, p.85). However, these young people are often moving from an abuse situation in the family into further abuse on the streets. Alder (1990, pp.17-18), in a study of 51 homeless young people in Melbourne, found that 96% of males and 74% of females had been physically hurt since leaving home. The proportion who had been sexually assaulted since leaving home was 76% for females and 29% for males.

A shortage of low-cost housing will directly affect the extent to which young women can choose alternatives to abusive domestic relationships. For young homeless women a shortage of affordable housing "keeps them in...relationships [with older employed men] longer than would otherwise be desirable. They frequently move from being abused in the home to being abused in the context of a de facto relationship" (Hirst 1989, p.4).

However, the needs of those young people who are suffering abuse in the family and who do not access support services or leave home, who "keep the family secret", remain largely unknown. Abused young people from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB) in particular may be unwilling to take steps to disclose their problems and remove themselves from the abuse. In many NESB communities, the family is the main source of advice and support in adversity. When the family is itself creating the problem, seeking outside help may go against this tradition, and invite further pressure upon the victim.

Police/youth interrelationships

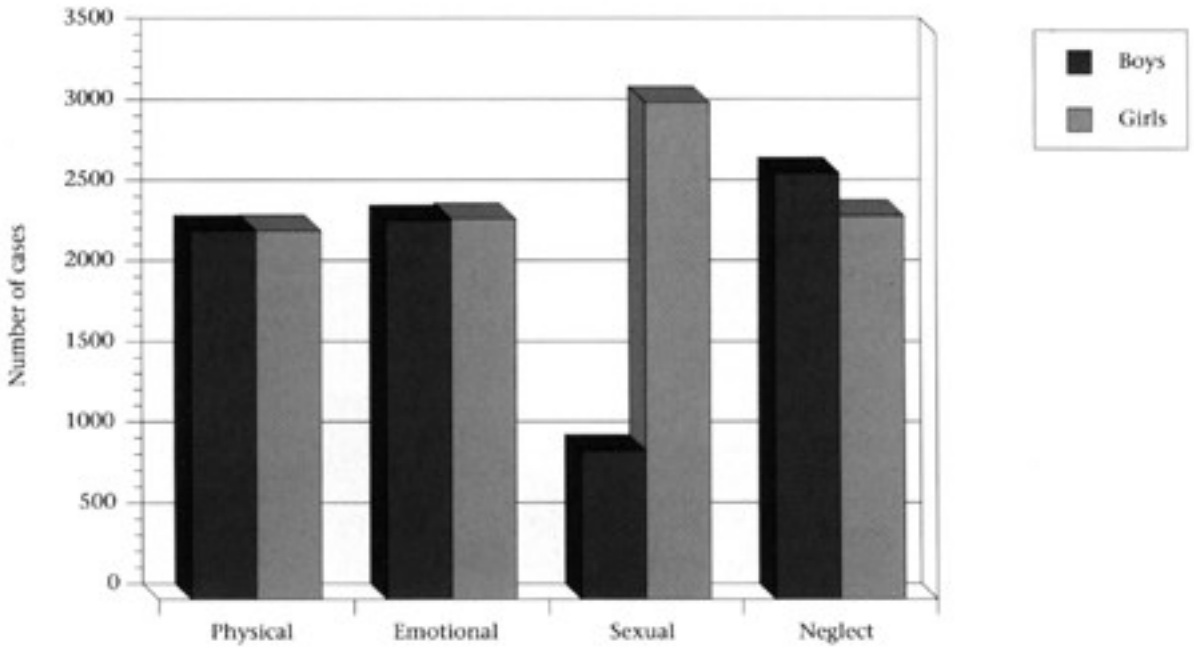
The structural aspects of youth victimisation are also evident at times in the treatment of young people by those in authority. Institutionalised young people, the disabled and the intellectually handicapped are particularly vulnerable. Violence against young people generally at the hands of police has been consistently shown to be a significant problem, and many young people are reluctant to seek police assistance. In the study conducted by Alder, 39% of the sample of 51 homeless young people interviewed claimed to have suffered violent treatment by police (Alder 1990). In Hirst's larger study of 200 homeless youth in Melbourne, 60% of those charged with criminal offences claimed to have been physically assaulted while in police custody. Twenty-five per cent said they had been interviewed by the police without an independent witness while they were still under 17 years of age (Hirst 1989, p.61). In the *Kids in justice* report "one-third of the young people interviewed complained of police violence" (Youth Justice Coalition 1990, p.253). Young people rarely report such incidents, and even when they do may feel discouraged when they are usually unable to prove incidents which occur without non-police witnesses.

The fact that young people often congregate in public places in groups whose behaviour and demeanour may be out of the ordinary often attracts the attention of police. Police perceptions that groups of youth are "potential trouble" in public places and therefore should be "moved on" can lead to a sense of injustice and distrust on the part of young people generally.

An illegitimate demand to "move on", especially for young people whose homeless status testifies to a history of actual or perceived injustice, may fuel a mind set which interprets their general situation as one of being buffeted by forces which do not care or understand. Such a young person may simply not cooperate with the police request (Alder 1990, p.51), thereby exacerbating the situation.

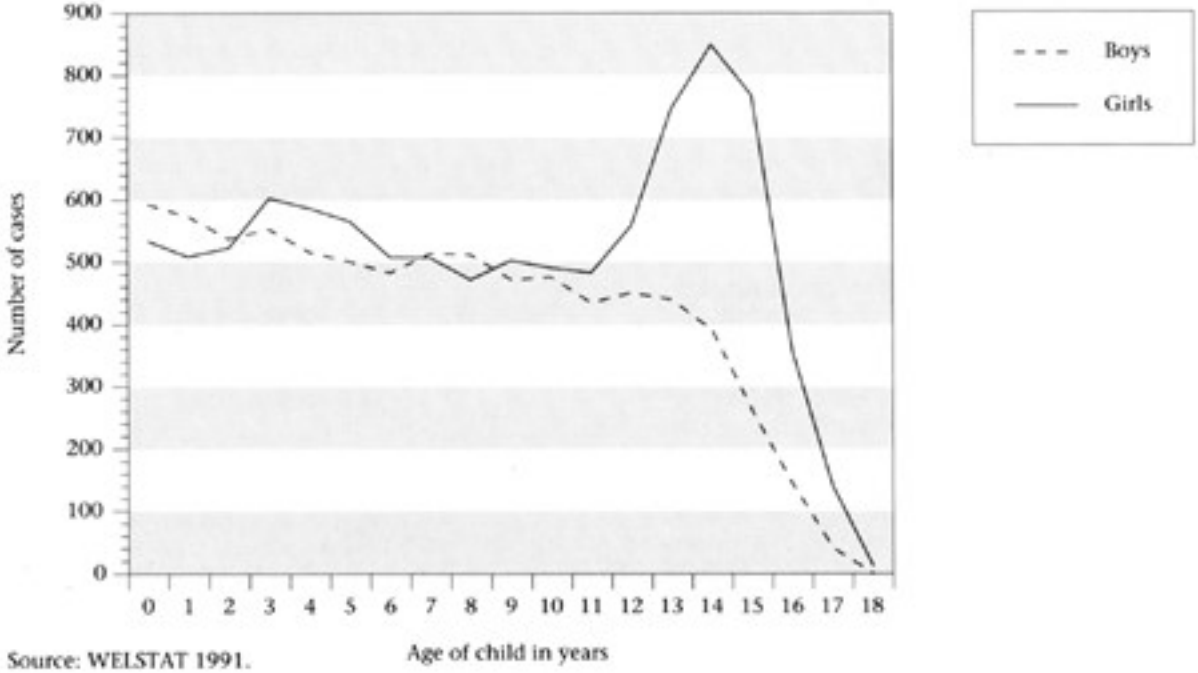
Action in the past to address youth problems has

Figure 5: Type of maltreatment substantiated by sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



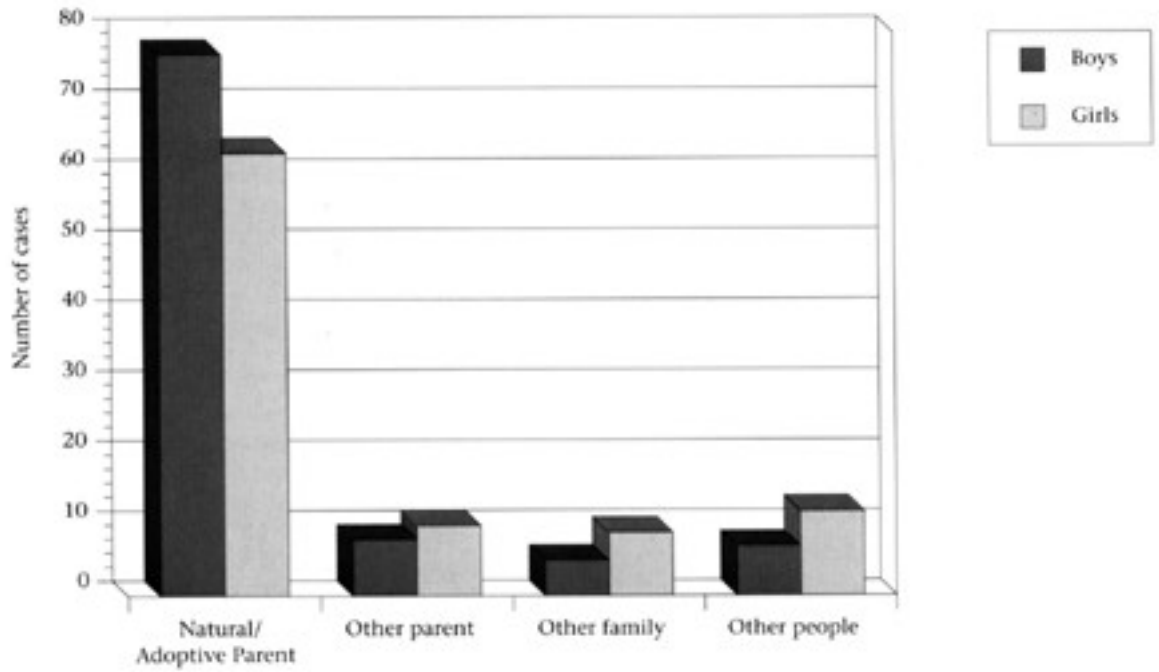
Source: WELSTAT 1991.

Figure 6: Total substantiated maltreatment cases: By age and sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



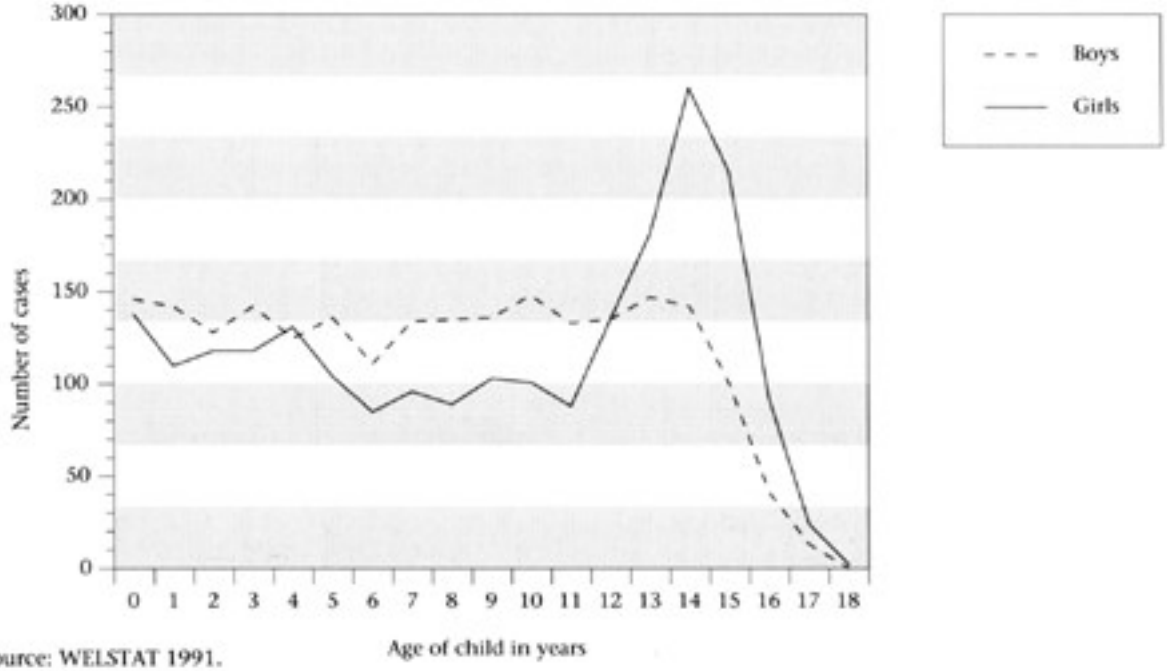
Source: WELSTAT 1991.

Figure 7: Total substantiated maltreatment cases: Sex of child by relationship of maltreater to child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



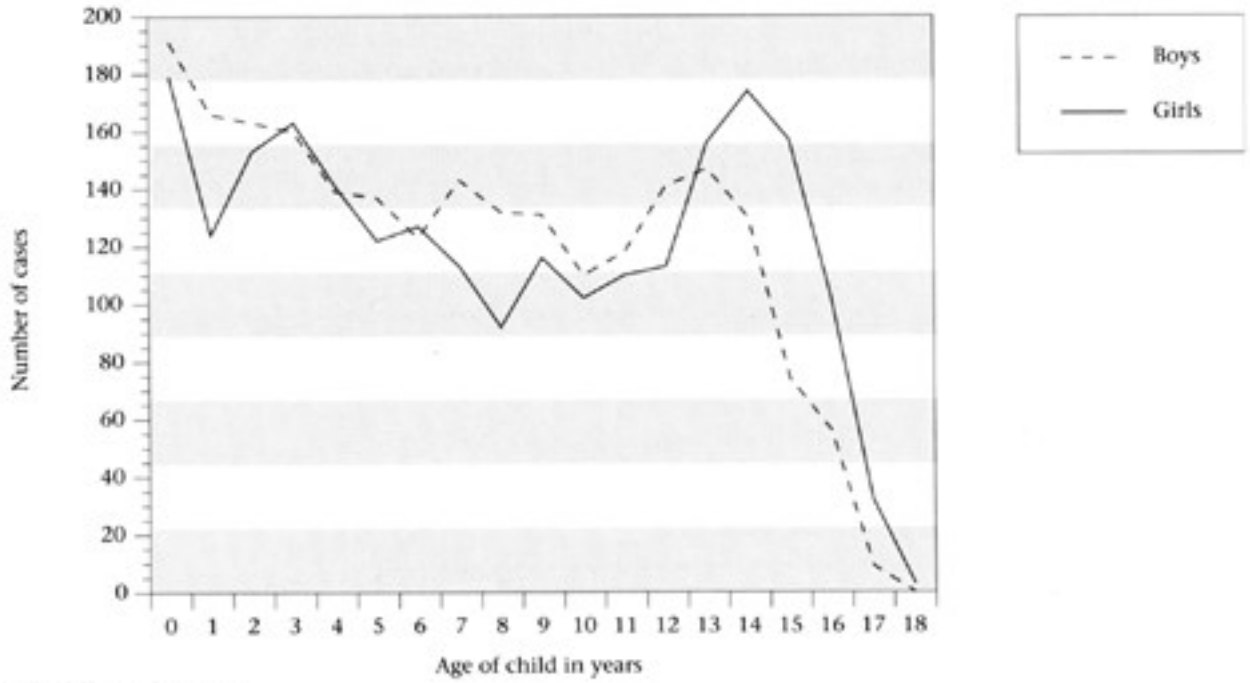
Note: Other parent includes: step parent, de facto parent, foster parent, guardian.
Source: WELSTAT 1991.

Figure 8: Substantiated physical abuse cases: By age and sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



Source: WELSTAT 1991.

Figure 9: Substantiated emotional abuse cases: By age and sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



Source: WELSTAT 1991.

Figure 10: Substantiated sexual abuse cases: By age and sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990

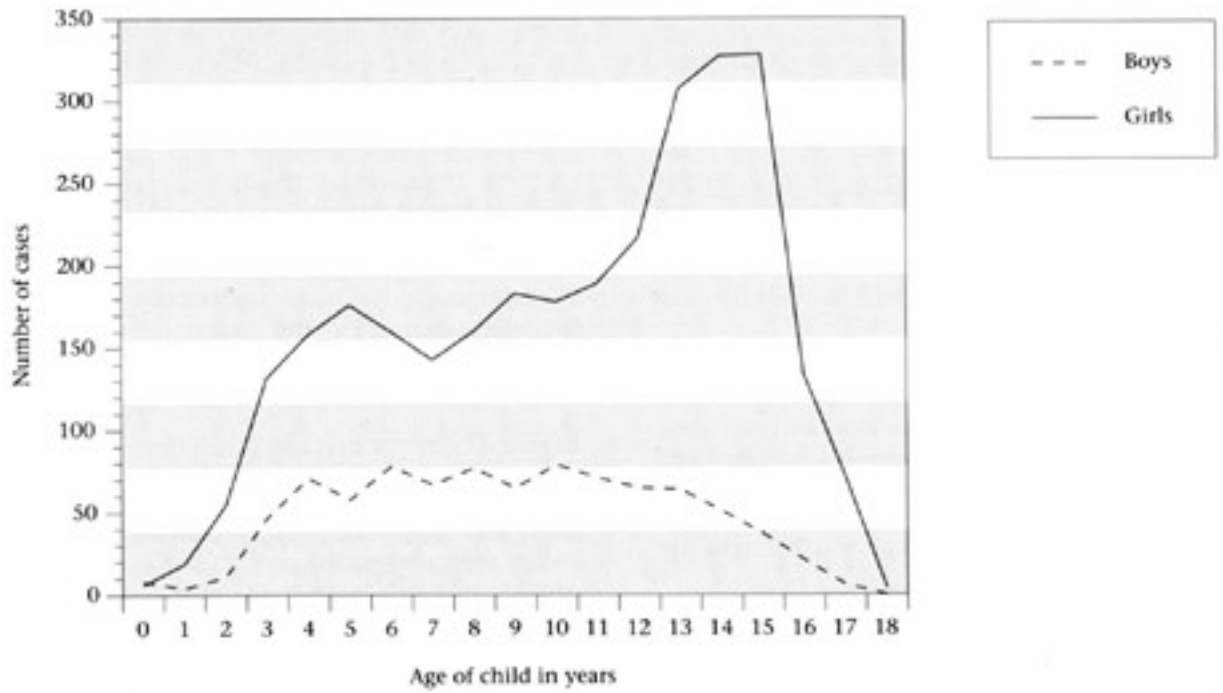
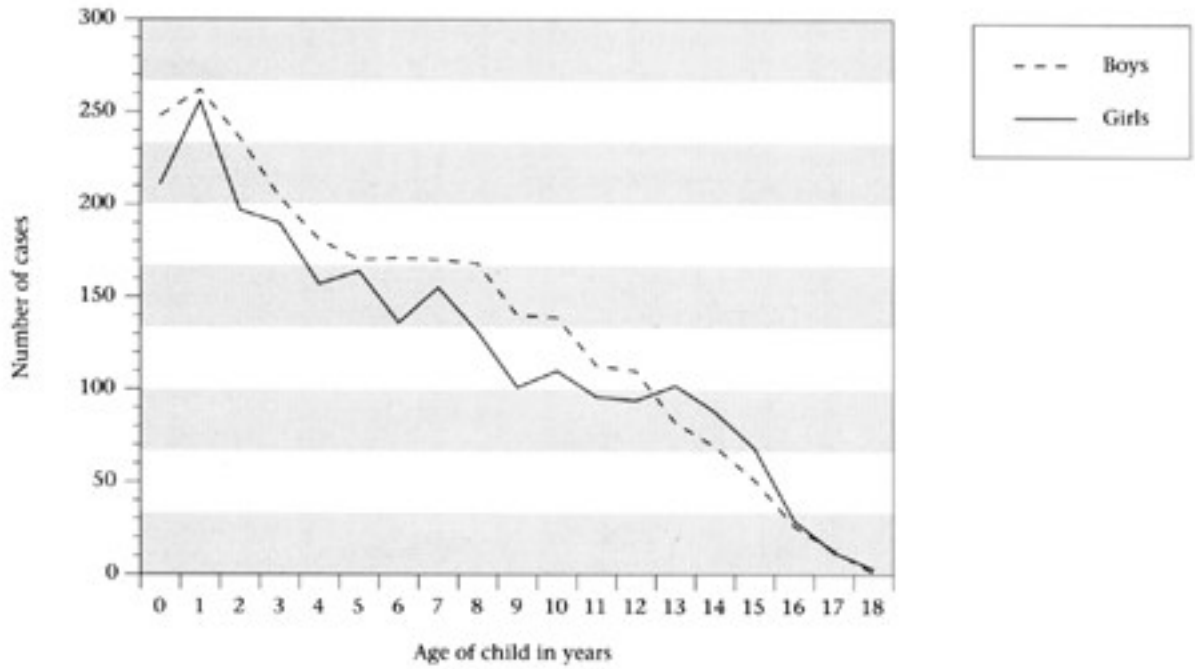


Figure 11: Substantiated neglect cases: By age and sex of child, Australia (except Tasmania and ACT), 1 July 1989-30 June 1990



sometimes appeared to perpetuate the problems it was designed to solve. Media campaigns about alleged juvenile crime waves, for example, though not always substantiated by careful examination of the facts, tend – when combined with police and political interests and public stereotypes of a youth problem – to result in "law and order" campaigns. These, which are usually delivered in whole or in part by police, almost invariably generate a higher arrest rate, thus producing a so-called "crime wave" (Sercombe 1991, p.12). Campaigns which increase the vigour with which public spaces are policed and the overall visibility of young people to police may generate in turn more hostility towards police on the part of young people.

A number of studies suggest that the quality of police treatment is often related to the extent of "cooperation" by the young person with police demands. This is sometimes to the detriment of the young person's legal rights. Young people who are aggressive about their legal rights have been known to suffer further harassment, if not actual violence (O'Connor & Sweetapple 1988, p.21).

Though many police officers cultivate an in loco parentis relationship with juveniles, police frustrations with court processes and apparently inadequate sentencing for recidivist juvenile offenders may cause some to justify rough treatment of young suspects on the ground that they need a good hiding. The Youth Justice Coalition Report noted that:

> *"Getting away with it" is a phenomenon which both young people and police are very aware of. The police tend to expect that for every offence they can prove against a young person, there will probably have been many more for which they were not apprehended...In this connection, however, we should note that young people are far more likely to be apprehended for their crimes than are adults* (Youth Justice Coalition 1990, p.233).

Another problem may be police inexperience. Patrolling public spaces is often a duty of new police graduates, sometimes not much older than the young people they encounter. Some have difficulty asserting authority and may get caught up in an escalating game of point-scoring with rowdy groups of young people.

It must be said that the majority of police probably do not employ violent methods in the discharge of their duties. The problem may well be concealed within the police force, in the same way that domestic violence is hidden from public view. Where violence is used only in the presence of acquiescing officers, it may not come to the attention of police officers who do not approve of such practices. Police authorities around the country, however, have introduced several initiatives to tackle the problem. These include the development in New South Wales of a Police Service Youth Policy Statement, and the deployment of specially trained General Duties Youth Officers in police patrols. Community policing strategies also offer hope that better understanding may develop between young people and police.

Non-reporting of complaints against police

In many cases the procedures for reporting complaints against police are inhibiting. A 24-hour time limit on the period after an incident in which complaints may be made may apply. The young person may be expected to endure a lengthy waiting period at a police station, during which statements must be made to various officers. An examination by a police doctor may be required, accompanied by photographs of injuries by the police photographer. This process can take many hours, depending on the availability of personnel. Unless the young person is accompanied by a support person, who is also able to spend a lengthy period of time with them, it is unlikely that the complaint will be seen through to its conclusion.

Another reason for failure to report complaints of police victimisation is the frequent lack of an independent witness to support the young person's claims. Fear of retribution from the police when the young person is back on the street also deters young victims from making formal complaints. Many young people simply wish to escape the situation as quickly as possible and try to forget their victimisation.

Those who provide legal support to young suspects through the court system often feel that to draw attention during a case to allegations of police violence against a young client may prejudice the credibility of the client. This has been claimed particularly with reference to young Aboriginal people appearing before the courts. As one practising Children's Court solicitor recently said:

> *The reason why it's better for me not to mention it in court, is because, if it's raised, and raised without any back-up – medical attention, back-up witnesses – then the child is seen to be exaggerating and lying. If the issue of credibility is an important one in the trial, then I don't want any slurs upon his truth-telling* (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCADC) 1990, p.169).

Aboriginal youth

Aboriginal young people are the victims of a particularly high level of physical violence, at the hands of police, within their own communities and disturbingly, it appears, increasingly at their own hand. In many instances, however, the experiences of Aboriginal young people are an extreme example of levels of violence which are found to a greater or lesser extent among young people generally.

Evidence to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody repeatedly referred to the over-representation of Aboriginal youth at all levels of the criminal justice system. This over-representation is apparently even more extreme among Aboriginal youth than for Aboriginal adults (Cunneen 1991, p.6). The level of over-representation of young Aboriginal women appears to be equally high (Carrington 1990, p.2).

Demographic factors may be associated with levels of youth victimisation and perpetration of personal crime in Aboriginal communities. The 1986 census showed that 40% of the Aboriginal population was aged less than 15 years, compared with only 23% for the total Australian population at that time (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCADC) 1990, p.56). Many in this age-group are moving into the age-group associated with the highest rates of property and personal crime in the community generally.

The high rate of offences by Aboriginal youth has also been attributed to factors such as poverty, resistance to policing, and consumption of alcohol in public places. Although there is debate about whether a causal relationship exists between socioeconomic disadvantage and high crime rates, there is general agreement on the existence of a statistical relationship (Devery 1991, p.57).

Attempts to deal with violence against and among Aboriginal communities by closer surveillance have not always met with unqualified success. Indeed, overpolicing of areas with high residential concentrations of Aboriginal people has been found to be a major factor in the over-representation of Aboriginal people in the criminal justice system (Carrington 1990, p.5).

The visibility of Aboriginal youth in public places and the residential concentration of Aboriginal communities makes Aboriginal young people easy targets for police surveillance. Moreover the intrusion of routine police surveillance into the social space or "backyards" of these young people, including local parks, river banks and reserves, allows much higher levels of detection by police when incidents occur. This, combined with a "law and order crisis" mentality in many towns with high Aboriginal populations, produces regular demands for more police and, in some towns, calls for blanket curfews for all youth, as recently occurred in Port Augusta.

Gale et al. (1990, p.3) report a tendency for young Aboriginal people to follow harsher routes than usual through the criminal justice system: "At each point in the system where discretion operates, young Aborigines are significantly more likely than other young persons to receive the most severe outcomes of those available to the decision-makers."

Submissions to the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia drew attention to the extent of police violence against young Aboriginal suspects. One stated that "the targets of such acts are often the people in extremely desperate social situations...not capable of taking adequate steps to defend themselves or expose what has occurred" (HREOC 1991, p.115). Such attacks contribute to a general sense of hopelessness in many Aboriginal communities, leading to high levels of offending and of violence.

Cunneen found through interviews with 171 Aboriginal juveniles in detention centres in NSW, Queensland and Western Australia, that an "overwhelming majority (88%)...reported being hit, punched, kicked or

slapped by police". Most had suffered police violence more than once. Less than 10% had made any form of complaint. The violence was "primarily related to gaining admissions from individuals who have been arrested, but also often includes a routine form of summary punishment" (Cunneen 1991, p.7).

Tatz portrays a gloomy picture of escalating levels of personal violence within Aboriginal communities, following a field survey of 71 communities around Australia. He refers to "the greater prevalence of homicide, suicide, parasuicide [attempted suicide] and self-mutilation; the even 'newer' phenomenon of rape, child-molestation and incest" (Tatz 1990, p.251). He recorded an alarming level of attempted suicides in the communities he visited, and also remarked on an increased incidence of suicides among young, urban, Aboriginal males.

Aboriginal young people regularly face institutionalised discrimination based both on race and social class. They are also often involved in inter- and intra-group violence, and frequently experience direct or indirect violence in their personal lives. Levels of self-esteem among young Aboriginals are so low that many engage in the most extreme level of self-inflicted violence through attempted or actual suicide, providing grave cause for concern.

Racist violence and violence against young people from non-English speaking backgrounds

The recently published Report of the National Inquiry into Racist Violence in Australia documented similar problems of harassment and intimidation experienced by young NESB people. This often takes place on public transport and in public places, where young people congregate. In a survey of 100 Central American refugees, 25% of students and 15% of adults reported being victims of physical assault (HREOC 1991, p.216). In a survey in Campbelltown of 128 adult migrants and 152 young people from a variety of backgrounds, 9% of adults and 14% of students reported race-related physical harassment. In Marrickville, 7% of adults and 9% of students surveyed had experienced physical harassment (HREOC 1991, p.214). In each survey, young people reported having experienced higher levels of victimisation than adults did.

For many of the young people surveyed, informing the inquiry of the incident was the first time they had spoken about their experiences to anyone outside their family and friends. The racist victimisation was itself felt to be stigmatising. Few believed that any positive outcome would arise out of formal reporting of abuse. Language difficulties are also obstacles to managing and formally reporting a potential or actual abuse situation, and were sometimes the original trigger for the abuse.

The intensity of racist violence is influenced by economic and international crises. The present high level of unemployment fuels beliefs in some sectors of the community that migrants are to "blame" for the problem. The Gulf War was a trigger for hostility and suspicion against middle eastern migrants.

Data collection and non-reporting

Most data are collected at the stage of an official report. This, however, is not a reliable indicator of the incidence of violent victimisation. Statistics on offences reported to police, for example, are often as much an indicator of the level of community confidence in police as of the extent of the problem. Only about one in 10 sexual assault victims may report the assault to the police (Family Violence Professional Education Task-force 1991, p.225). The extent of reporting will also be determined by the community's knowledge of legal rights, access to legal aid, and the level of support for victims from agencies such as youth refuges.

Apart from problems which affect reporting levels, recording procedures and the classification of offences may be more a reflection of government processes than of actual events. They also vary between jurisdictions and within jurisdictions, limiting the value of comparisons and aggregations of data. Responsibility for notifying instances of maltreatment vary. Some states, for example, have legislation requiring mandatory reporting of child maltreatment; others do not. Moreover the categories of mandatory notifiers vary between those states requiring mandatory reporting.

While some information indicating the extent of reported victimisation of young people is available, and some surveys have been undertaken of specific groups of young people, aggregate information providing an overall socioeconomic, geographic and ethnic profile of victims is not readily available.

Non-reporting of victimisation

The frequent failure by young people to make formal complaints to police of violence perpetrated against them severely vitiates the usefulness of reported data in estimating the extent of such violence. Alder (1990) reported that 76% of the sample of homeless youth she studied did not report their violent victimisation to the police. Males were much more likely to seek formal redress than females (p.42).

Some of the young homeless people surveyed did not even seek medical assistance when they were ill or injured. Reasons for non-reporting of violent incidents include fear of reprisals from the perpetrator, fear that parents would be informed and that police would be involved, and embarrassment at their general predicament. Most turned to friends for assistance (ibid., p.52).

Some young people said that they did not report their victimisation to police for fear of "being busted" for real

or alleged offences for which they were believed to be responsible. The involvement with drugs which often accompanies street life increases the mutual suspicion between police and young people.

The perception that some violent experiences were the young person's fault was sometimes cited as a factor in non-reporting:

> *Oh well see, that's the thing with abuse at home you sort of, you put it on yourself, it's something that you find very hard to talk about, oh it doesn't worry me now but then it was just something that I couldn't mention, it was almost as if it was my own fault* (Hirst 1989, p.132).

The quality of police-youth trust will have a direct bearing on the preparedness of young people to seek formal redress for wrongs perpetrated against them. Failure to respond to a young person's request for assistance on one occasion can lead to loss of trust and non-reporting from that point onwards.

Loss of faith in police protection leaves the young person vulnerable to exploitation through standover tactics, and to further involvement in illegal and/or dangerous activities, either as a victim or as a perpetrator. Retaliation may be seen as the only option open to a victim, if police protection is not perceived to be available, and this often leads to further pay-backs, either at the group or the individual level.

The extent to which young people, especially socially marginal young people, rely on support from peers is an important factor in the concealment of much youth victimisation. From a survey of homeless Melbourne youth, Hirst found that the young people interviewed, allowing for age and sex differences, formed a distinct subculture. The majority (69%) gained the greatest amount of personal support from their friends (Hirst 1989, p.8).

4. Services for victims

Main needs of young victims of violence

Youthful victims of violence have special needs, both materially and personally. Low income levels impinge on their general material security and also their self-esteem. They often have less general credibility in society, and are less aware of services and rights available to them, and of how the "system" works than adults. They are at a transition stage in their personal lives, moving from the family and the education system into independent living, in search of their own identity, intimate relationships and employment. This time of transition is traumatic enough in ordinary circumstances.

If the young people are further burdened by efforts to cope with violent victimisation, especially within their families, they will carry with them the strategies with which they have learned to endure or deal with the abusive experiences they have suffered. These strategies, however, may be destructive influences on other personal relationships, and in some cases are downright antisocial, involving a negative self-image and an inability to trust either themselves or others (Bolton et al. 1989, p.110).

Most services for young victims of violence focus on the provision of assistance after harm has been reported. This is only one chapter in the recovery process, however, and many victims' needs are not addressed even then because their victimisation is not reported to an agency which will respond effectively. Assistance may be necessary at all stages in the process.

A six-stage model of victimisation based loosely on the model developed by Viano (1989) can be used to identify points at which particular needs exist (Figure 12).

Stage one : development of vulnerability. In this stage, which may range from the entire lifetime to the short period immediately preceding an incident, individuals may become vulnerable to harm as a result of such factors as malnutrition, disability, parental abuse, lack of shelter, and lack of social or peer group support. They may be vulnerable because they are in a particular location, or engaging in a particular activity, or provoking a confrontation. Their vulnerability may be chronic or sudden.

Stage two : the point of violence. This is the point at which the individual suffers immediate physical harm or injury of a violent nature.

Stage three : the reaction to violence. The individual response to a violent incident is invariably an attempt to minimise damage, and may take one of several forms:

- withdrawal or flight, where the victim takes no overt action but withdraws from the scene or the contact. This may, in minor incidents, be an effective way of minimising the problem but it may also, particularly in relation to major trauma, lead the victim into a situation of greater vulnerability;
- physical action, where the victim either fights back against the aggressor at the time, or where the victim becomes more prone to attack possible aggressors at a later stage, either on provocation or, sometimes, by victimisation of others, continuing the cycle of harm; and
- remedial action, where the victim focuses on finding a remedy or assistance to mitigate the damage. One manifestation of this response is to report the incident to police or service providers who may be able to assist.

Stage four : the response. This is the point at which most services to victims are involved, where a negative or inadequate response may feed back into increased

vulnerability or increased harm for the person concerned, or where a positive and effective response may accelerate the process of recovery.

Stage five : the remedy. Some victims receive validation of their claim to victim status, become "official" victims, and possibly benefit from various types of support.

Stage six : recovery. Some individuals recover from their period of trauma and are able to take up their lives again, having regained a sense of personal power and purpose.

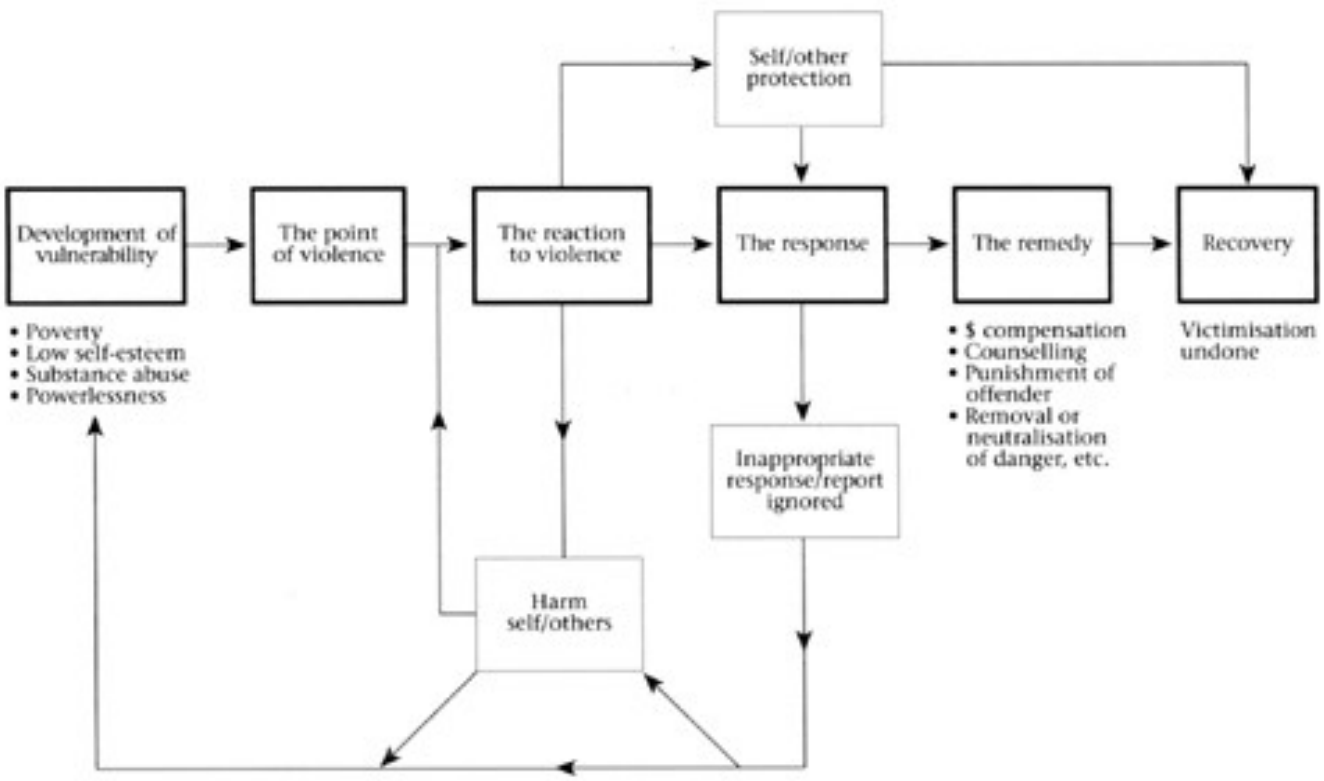
Victimisation services often fall into the trap of focusing on particular stages or types of need and of ignoring others, losing sight of the ultimate need to remedy the victimisation. Emphasis on compensation of the victim, for example, may potentially freeze a victim into long-term victimhood, to justify payment of compensation. If the process of assessment for compensation is delayed, obstruction of the recovery process may similarly occur.

Ideally, recovery from victimisation is the ultimate outcome of victim support. Support to pass through the intervening stages, however, is also essential. Individuals will pass through the process to recovery along differing paths, and may be obstructed in this by a wide range of problems, many of which may be almost impossible to identify from an external service perspective.

In reducing victimisation, emphasis can be given to the construction of fences at the top of the cliff, or the provision of ambulance services at the bottom. Preventive services can be construed very widely, for factors which place young people at risk of violent victimisation include a wide range of diverse influences. Access to adequate levels of income support, family support, accommodation, recreation space, protective behaviours programs in schools and similar services may be useful in some circumstances but not in others.

At each stage after the triggering incident, the victim's needs may vary. To obtain help a victim must pass over a number of hurdles, described succinctly in access theory as the gateway, queue and counter (Schaffer 1975). At the gateway, the victim must find out what services are available and where they will find the right service for each stage of the recovery process. They must then persevere with any obstacles through the queue, such as time delays, embarrassment and a multiplicity of agencies. Finally, they must be able to convince the agency representative at the counter that their case is worthy of attention, and that they qualify for whatever assistance is available. These factors determine much of the value of any given service, before assessment of the effectiveness of the service itself can be made.

Figure 12: Dynamics of victimisation



Fears of being labelled a "loser", a "faggot" or a "dobber", either by others or themselves, may deter victims from seeking help. Inability to develop trusting relationships is a common outcome of sustained abuse, particularly in the family, and reduces the ability of many young victims to share their problems.

Services targeted at youth need to take account of the hypersensitivity of many young people to the perceptions of their peers. Some youth workers have argued for the provision of what they call "problem sensitive" services, or services which are able to identify a problem regardless of the context in which it manifests itself, rather than "problem specific" services which focus exclusively on a particular problem. A "problem sensitive" approach allows a victim to utilise the service under such guises as playing pool, listening to music or spending time with friends at a coffee shop on the premises, for example. It enables them to meet and develop a trusting relationship with youth workers on their own ground, and to share their problem at a later time without loss of face or fear of others identifying their anxiety. Workers need to be trained to communicate so that they can deal sensitively and effectively with a range of problem areas, and be able to refer clients on to appropriate agencies where necessary. A "problem sensitive" approach is also responsive to the need to minimise labelling of the clients both by the system and by themselves.

Confidentiality is acutely important for young people, who often imagine that thousands of critical eyes follow their every move. The fact that actually entering the premises of, say, a sexual abuse service, an AIDS information bus or a Social Security office may be known to their peers, might not be manageable to a person whose self-esteem is already crippled.

A recent survey of the needs of young NESB people conducted in the Australian Capital Territory (Davenport 1992) was particularly revealing about the needs of this group. It found that NESB youth were very sensitive to feeling different from non-ethnic peers, and did not wish to utilise services which were ethno-specific. Culturally sensitive services are needed to overcome the differences without emphasising them.

Also significant was the finding that family and friends were chosen as their main source of support. Many of these young people and/or their families have been victims of or witnesses to horrific atrocities in their countries of origin, and have special needs which are currently not being met in many cases (ibid.). Since, in their countries of origin, governments and officialdom often were not trusted, and were not involved in the provision of social services in the same way that they are in Australia, the extended family was seen as the primary source of support. This pattern of family support often continues, and may be successful in many circumstances. However, if the family is the source of victimisation, or collectively is ignorant of available services, there will be limits to the effectiveness of that support.

Effectiveness of existing services

This paper of necessity has not examined the causality of victimisation in detail. Tackling causality, however, is as important as fostering recovery from victimisation for the long-range effectiveness of services for victims of violence.

Effective services for youth victims need:

- mobility and flexibility – a service should to be able to provide outreach to young victims, to enable widespread awareness of services and ease of access;
- empathy with the needs of particular subgroups of youth should be conspicuously promoted;
- a relaxed, congenial and good-humoured atmosphere, tolerant of violent young people and of the fact that young people will make mistakes in the course of growing up, especially if they are victims of abuse;
- sensitivity to problems of the labelling of victims;
- sensitivity to the overwhelming need for adolescents to be seen to fit in with peers, not to look odd, or to be seen as "losers"; and
- to minimise coercion and maximise young people's rights to develop autonomy and self-determination.

Fragmentation and specialisation in services to young people may mean that the service providers themselves are not aware of what their service can mean to a client. A recently produced directory of "Services for Victims of Crime in Australia" (David et al. 1990), for example, noted that many of the agencies surveyed had not previously considered that the service they offered could be considered a crime victim service.

Coordination of programs across the public, private and non-profit sectors is an ongoing need, particularly for youth services. Problems of "ownership" and rivalry between youth services, many of which are provided by non-government organisations, can make it difficult for young people to find the service appropriate to their needs. Where they rely on their peers, information may be incomplete or distorted. In a crisis situation, the need for quick and easy access to information about sources of help is crucial.

The recent Progress Report on implementation of the National Committee on Violence (NCV) recommendations (Herlihy & Scandia 1991) demonstrates the need for coordination of information about youth services. It provides a comprehensive list of the responses from state, territory and Commonwealth agencies to the recommendations originally put forward by the NCV. These range from parenting programs, therapeutic intervention, emergency care, and sexual assault programs to action to prevent violence in sport or to deal with violence in the media. The wide-ranging nature of these clearly demonstrates the need for coordination of information and for a "one-stop" source of advice and referral for young people in trouble. The enormous number of calls to the new telephone "Helpline" for

children in Brisbane is evidence of this need.

Many youth services already provide generalised assistance of both a preventive and a reactive nature, based loosely on a problem sensitive approach. These services, however, vary greatly in their approach and their target groups. Frequently their effectiveness is determined by the personal qualities of individual youth workers. Lack of evaluation of many of these means that while some are cost-effective, others may be relatively useless. Young people in trouble are not usually in a position to evaluate the comparative usefulness of individual services to their own situation and may give up, disillusioned, if a service fails them. In view of the high costs of such failure to young people in trouble, and to the economy as a whole, regular and rigorous evaluation of youth programs is essential.

Some of the more successful recent projects are tapping into youth networks. The recently established Peer Education Program in Melbourne builds on the fact that young people most often share their problems with peers. This project provides workshops for community groups such as refuges with which young people are involved, on request. The workshops focus on family violence, and provide information about surviving family violence and access to services.

The incorporation of non-violent conflict resolution skills into school curicula and teacher training in all states is very promising. Courses in personal development and human relationships, which are now promoted in all states, also offer hope that the victim/perpetrator dynamic may be weakened.

While a meaningful comparison of services available from state to state would require resources well in excess of those available for the present project, some general remarks can be made about responses to violent crimes perpetrated by youth in some states. Public sensitivity to repeated violent incidents in some areas is increasing. Toughening the penalties applied to young recidivist offenders, however, as has been enacted in Western Australia recently, does not necessarily address the problem. In particular, it takes no account of the multiplicity of factors involved for many of the young people affected, whether as perpetrators or victims. There is a need for services for young offenders which assist them, where appropriate, to deal with past abuse and low self-esteem, and which provide them with some alternative to violence as a problem-solving strategy.

Support for parents of young people

Attention to the importance of parenting skills has recently become a major focus of child and youth services. The NCV in 1990 (p.61) noted that families constitute the training ground for aggression. It pointed out that parenting can be an extremely stressful experience for which many Australian parents have been insufficiently prepared (ibid., p.127). While parenting today shares the responsibility for youth enculturation fairly evenly with school influences and after hours activities, it is of particular importance for young children. At the same time, many young people have grown beyond the child's need for a secure and stable home life, and their needs have changed. The new parenting services need to differentiate between parenting for young children, and parenting for young adults.

There are special difficulties and stresses involved with blended families, which may require special support. Sexual and physical abuse by step-parents is a theme which arises again and again in discussions of maltreatment of young people.

In the range of parent support services described in the Progress Report on the Implementation of the National Committee on Violence Recommendations there is a general emphasis in all states and territories on the provision of training programs for parents in crisis situations, or programs for the immediate post-natal period.

Many parents, however, like many young people, are hesitant to access services which are not readily available. There is a need for greater attention to "shop-front" or easily accessible services in high-risk areas, where parents can seek immediate support and counselling before a crisis situation develops, rather than receiving this support after or during the event when feelings of failure and hopelessness often set in, sapping any energy to try new strategies for dealing with family problems. In the *Kids in justice* report, Recommendation 76 suggests that "services provided by Young Offender Support, Adolescent Support, Family Support, Detached Family Counselling and Home School Liaison Services should be advertised and promoted in the media as a resource for assistance at early stages in family tensions, and allocated adequate resources to allow them to be available when needed" (Youth Justice Coalition 1990, p.166).

For some families, making a commitment to be part of a "program" in a time of domestic upheaval requires more organisational skills than are available to them there and then. And some families, like young people, resist support from official sources. Offers from "welfare" are sometimes interpreted as patronising, interventionist, or stigmatising, suggesting that the family has failed to meet its obligations. Indeed, where government agencies are short-staffed and forced into a reactive mode, this perception may be quite reasonable.

Such services may best be provided by agencies with which families have other neutral relationships, such as neighbourhood centres, and which also provide recreational activities. This approach removes the stigma which may attach to parenting support/training provided by crisis agencies.

In the past, parenting programs directed at acutely vulnerable parents have not received a high level of

patronage by their target group. O'Brien (1991), investigating the reasons for this problem, came up with some very interesting insights. Many of these parents are themselves victims of previous abuse in their families of origin. They are often so debilitated by their unresolved hurt that they are not ready to acknowledge their own responsibility for abusing their children and to take on the pain that such responsibility entails. The birth of their children may be their only successful venture in life, and they take pride in the fact that they love their children, however distorted this message may become in day to day child-rearing.

Groups of strangers in a program which troubled adults perceive as being provided for "poor parents" may be intimidating to people whose lives have been socially isolated, and who have difficulty developing trusting relationships. Often formal learning settings have negative associations for these people. Some evidence suggests that abuse actually impairs conceptual and cognitive development, so that the people concerned are unable to grasp the abstract concepts offered in many packaged parenting programs (O'Brien 1991, p.22). Parenting programs targeted to vulnerable parents need to take these factors into account if they are to be of real value to participants.

Would young people who are victims of violence benefit from improved services?

Assistance for victimisation is dependent upon recognition of harm suffered. Those who have particular problems in this regard are those who are most socioeconomically disadvantaged – including homeless young people and Aboriginal youth. They are also often the most difficult to help under the existing system for service delivery. The question then arises whether the types of improvements which would be necessary to reach such groups are within the scope and budgets of service providers. An increase in the resources assigned to one objective may be counterproductive if it means withdrawal of a needed service from elsewhere. The available evidence, however, suggests that services to young victims of violence could be significantly improved without major resource costs by such methods as the establishment of information centres, clearinghouses or helplines, better coordination of services generally, and by more rigorous evaluation to weed out ineffective services and to redirect resources more profitably.

Young people in rural areas, especially young men, often lack access to counselling services. Structural factors, including the downturn in primary industry and the break-up of family pastoral interests, put them at high risk of self-harm, as evidenced by the high male suicide rate in rural Australia. The type of service which would be most appropriate for their needs would probably involve some outreach component, since they traditionally appear reluctant to seek assistance or to discuss personal anxieties. Young women in rural areas, and young men to a lesser extent, may be hindered from escaping domestic abuse due to a lack of alternative accommodation. Doubts about confidentiality in gaining access to such services may also be a deterrent. Most of these problems could be overcome by greater accessibility of information.

Some young people clearly would benefit through parenting support programs which were relevant and appealing to their parents, who may themselves be victims of abuse in their families of origin. Reconstituted families and families in the process of breakdown could also benefit from improved support for coping with the stresses of adolescent parenting.

The group of young men who are both victims and perpetrators of violence receives least attention from service providers, even those which recognise their victimisation. Their ambiguous situation as "culpable" victims places them in limbo, beyond the reach of the protection of the law, and "undeserving" of help. However, as has been pointed out, they are often victims of a victimisation/retaliation cycle, which may be fuelled by gender expectations and inadequate negotiation skills. Some of these young men have tenuous or nonexistent ties with schools, and will miss out on any preventive programs that may be offered by the education system. Programs which are entertaining and presented in the environments in which they are most comfortable – for example, amusement parlours, sporting venues, on television or on public transport – may be more successful than the traditional didactic approach. Location-specific services such as server intervention programs and transport safety programs, and attention to "designing out crime" by such simple methods as improved lighting in dark laneways where young people congregate, also have the capacity to reduce levels of violence dramatically.

Many of the more imaginative services which are provided by community agencies often suffer from severe financial uncertainty, which saps their professional energy and prevents the development of a skills base within agencies. The development of appropriate evaluation instruments, and the ability to switch resources from an unproductive use to a productive one, are critical to the ability of poorly resourced agencies to provide an effective service. The outcomes of an oblique approach to the problem of victimisation, such as problem sensitive services, are not always measurable according to the evaluation yardsticks in use.

5. Conclusions

Peaks of reported violence, in terms of both victims and perpetrators, tend to coincide/converge towards the end of the teenage years. Some groups appear to be at higher risk of victimisation than others. These groups correspond with those sections of the community suffering greatest socioeconomic disadvantage, such as homeless youth, Aboriginal youth and young offenders. Such young people have fewer options for safe accommodation, safe recreation and safe relationships with others. They are sometimes multiple problem young people, who may have spent a lot of their lives acting out unresolved abuse or neglect.

These groups are often least prepared to access the protection of the law when they are victimised. They often have limited knowledge of their rights and where they may seek help. They often tend to be distrustful of others, including those who might seek to assist them. They may also have limited negotiating skills when in a crisis situation or when confronted with someone in authority, and may therefore find themselves blundering into conflict with others, including the police. Sometimes violence may be perpetrated by police themselves, resulting in distrust of police as potential protectors from victimisation.

General factors contributing to the increased involvement of young people with violence, either as victims or perpetrators, include the customary congregation of young people in public places rather than in offices, factories or places of high-cost entertainment; the higher level of usage of public transport rather than private cars; and inexperience in negotiating disputes and avoiding dangerous situations. Alcohol is frequently associated with violent crimes committed by older teenagers. These acts are typically directed against their peers, or at figures of authority, such as police. A recent trend towards increased violence associated with discos, pubs and clubs has shown that a propensity to violence may be "exacerbated by crowding, limited facilities and poor crowd control techniques" (Walker & Henderson 1991). Yet simple boredom and a dearth of alternatives mean that young people frequently risk violence to seek entertainment and peer companionship.

Other forms of recorded victimisation, in particular for young women, show another pattern. The peak age of sexual abuse in the home appears to be in the very early teens. But the level of abuse in relationships with male peers in the later teens is under-researched in Australia and, judging by limited information from victim surveys, may be quite high. Overseas findings suggest that date-rape is likely to be high in the late teens, when negotiating skills in relationships tend to be low compared with the incidence of sexual encounters. In this situation, gender stereotypes may inhibit self-definition of young women as victims.

Recognition of the victimisation/perpetration dynamic, and of the feedback relationships that develop if abuse is not dealt with, is critical if some real impact on the levels of violent victimisation is to occur. Services must be available and seen to be available. They must have appeal to the "deserving" and the "undeserving" if the cycle of violence is to be slowed down, if not broken. Society already spends millions of dollars on short-term measures to address these issues, such as imprisonment of offenders. A longer-term view is well overdue.

6. Project development and further research

There is a need for:

- much closer monitoring and evaluation of the effectiveness of projects dealing with young people as victims of violence, so that ineffective and patently counterproductive programs can be quickly replaced;
- further evaluation of attitudes among young people towards violence and the relationship of these attitudes to levels of violence among young people;
- more information, and more accurate information, about the mechanisms used by young people to escape or deal with situations of chronic or intolerable violence;
- more research into the range of variables which may exacerbate or mitigate a predisposition to involvement in violent situations, whether as perpetrator or victim; and
- more attention to the development of services which take into account the particular stresses on young people which may inhibit their use of services designed to help them.

The following proposals are examples of specific projects for further development.

Police/youth relationships

Purpose
To identify policy initiatives which could significantly improve relations between police and youth.

Background
A number of studies have drawn attention to structural tensions between police and youth. The *Kids in justice*

report identified a number of problems in the policing of public spaces, and in the treatment of young suspects. O'Connor and Sweetapple (1988) found that police discretion in dealing with problems involving young people reflects the tensions that exist between young people and police. Since, statistically, high rates of property and personal crime are associated with young people, they may be seen as the criminal element in the community, and worthy of special police attention.

It should be noted that any research which focused on policing policies would need to be undertaken with the cooperation of the relevant police forces, and would have to be supported by them, and undertaken at their invitation.

Key issues to be addressed
Any of the following issues could be addressed in a research project:

- Adequacy of police training, including in relation to minority groups, and socially disadvantaged groups.
- What attitudes do police have to young people? How do these attitudes change over time? Compare a new recruit with a beat officer and with more senior police officers, for example.
- Scope and coverage of policing of public spaces occupied by young people.
- What problem situations develop into police/youth violence, and what can be done to support police with skills and information which could prevent them.
- Legislative framework (e.g. move-on powers, public nuisance provisions.)
- Police procedures for dealing with young offenders and suspected offenders.
- Identification of "best practice" models and successful approaches in use by police services in different states throughout Australia.
- Identification of successful strategies for giving police a more positive profile among young people, to diminish tensions, and ensure that young victims of violence feel able to seek the assistance of police, even when they may have been involved in the perpetration of violence themselves. (Perhaps a conflict resolution role may be more appropriate than a legalistic approach to the resolution of disputes where both parties are responsible for violence.)
- What complaints mechanisms currently operate from state to state, and how effectively do they provide an avenue of redress for young people?
- Identification of successful initiatives by youth groups to improve relations with police.

Peer support program

Purpose
To develop a model peer support program which might be utilised by welfare and youth workers and community organisations involved with youth to develop young people's skills and abilities to avoid situations which have the potential to lead to violence.

Background
The report highlights the vulnerability of youth arising from poorly developed negotiation and conflict resolution skills. It also identifies the fact that young people often operate within a closed system, in which they are often both victims and perpetrators of violent behaviour, and where generational factors operate to limit the support options perceived to be available. It follows that there is a strong prima facie case for utilising young people themselves to inform and educate their peers on issues relating to violence.

Key issues to be addressed
This research project would, by its very nature, be policy relevant. Its aim would be to develop an overall model which could be used and adapted in different policy settings and contexts.

Possible elements of the model might include:

- workshops to develop negotiation and self-protective behaviour skills;
- a youth conflict resolution service; and
- the development of strategies for the evaluation of new and existing peer support programs.

The key element in these initiatives would be the paid or voluntary participation of young people in delivering the service to their peers.

Survey of youth service utilisation

Purpose
To conduct a survey of a sample of young people to establish an appropriate program design and service delivery for victims of violence.

Background
The report has identified the fact that some groups of youth (e.g. the NESB group) may not be fully aware of existing services (Davenport 1992). Others reject available services known to them, for reasons which are not clearly understood. Alder (1990) reported, for example, that some homeless victims of violence did not seek medical attention for injuries received as a result of violent attacks, because some features of the health care available to them bothered them more than the injury itself. Young people may feel particularly embarrassed and ambivalent about seeking assistance when they feel, rightly or wrongly, that they contributed to a violent attack.

A survey would establish the extent of this problem generally, and also what features attract young people to particular services and deter them from utilising others. The survey would assist policy makers to adjust program design, implementation, and service delivery, thereby

improving access to services by a broader range of youth at risk of violence.

Key issues to be addressed
The survey should obtain qualitative and quantitative information on the perceived needs and expectations of youth who are victims of violence including:

- What are the features of successful services for young people?
- What features of services deter young people from using them?
- How do young people receive information about services that are available to them?
- What services are young people most aware of?

Methodology
A questionnaire would be developed, and information collected, preferably using young people themselves as interviewers. The interviewers and the sample would need to be chosen carefully to represent a cross-section of young people from varying sociocultural and economic backgrounds.

Survey of perceptions of sexual coercion among college students aged 16 to 18 years

Purpose
To conduct a survey of around 250 young men and women in colleges, in Years 11 and 12, to assess perceptions of sexual coercion in this group.

Background
A growing body of evidence from overseas studies indicates that sexual coercion is a common problem for young women, as it is for women of other age-groups. It has been estimated that from 25% to 50% of females in college populations suffer some sexually coercive experiences during a single academic year (Fenstermaker 1989, p.257). It is possible that young women are most vulnerable to such coercion, since they are likely to be more susceptible to peer pressure, which is weighted by gender stereotypes. They are also less likely to have well developed negotiation skills in sexually coercive situations.

Very little is known about the extent of coercive sexual encounters among young people in Australia, though it could be presumed to be widespread. Information about the extent of such victimisation of young women would be particularly useful, as it has been shown that there is likely to be a relationship between patterns of aggressive behaviour in courtship and future spousal aggression (Avni 1991; O'Leary 1988). It may be possible to provide early intervention services for young women, and to highlight the need for improved negotiating skills training for young women so that they can avoid coercive relationships.

Methodology
Proposal 1
It is proposed to survey around 250 young men and women in colleges, in Years 11 and 12, to assess perceptions of sexual coercion in this group. The design of the survey would be based loosely on the approach taken by Fenstermaker. It would be undertaken by presenting students with a questionnaire accompanied by a series of graded vignettes, ranging from unwanted sexual attention, such as kissing, through to sexual aggression on "one-night stands", so-called "date-rape", and to rape in the context of a longer-term relationship. Respondents would be asked to grade the severity of the aggression in each case. Responsibility for the outcome in each vignette would be attributed to the male or female involved, according to a number of factors which have previously been included in similar studies overseas, such as: whether the woman initiated the encounter; where the encounter took place – his or her place; whether alcohol was consumed; whether a prior transaction had taken place, such as paying for entertainment, a meal, or providing shelter; and so on.

Completion of the questionnaire would be followed by a discussion of the validity of perceptions, and the social context of public perceptions of sexual coercion.

Proposal 2
Using the same questionnaire and vignettes, a survey of changes in perceptions could be measured across a number of age-groups, or before and after discussion about the problems of negotiating sexual encounters for young people, and about the inappropriateness of the use of aggression to achieve sexual ends.

Proposal 3
The original survey could be conducted in conjunction with another survey of a sample group of different individuals from the same population of college students to assess the extent to which individual young men and women had been victims of situations similar to those portrayed in the vignettes.

The studies would provide useful information which could be used to develop policy initiatives for young men and women to encourage non-aggressive problem solving in sexual encounters and in other situations. This information would also be useful to health policy developers, in the context of controlling the spread of HIV infection at a preventive level.

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