

Australian Multicultural Foundation

Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia
Do They Exist?

Report No. 2
Turkish Young People

by
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Part 1:

Background to the Research

1.1 Introduction

The present report is one of six reports which present findings from a study of 'ethnic youth gangs' in the Melbourne metropolitan area over the period 1996-1998. The six reports in this series include:

- No.1 Vietnamese Young People
- No.2 Turkish Young People
- No.3 Pacific Islander Young People
- No.4 Somalian Young People
- No.5 Latin American Young People
- No.6 Anglo Australian Young People

In addition to these reports, which deal with specific groups of ethnic minority and Anglo Australian young people, there is also a broad overview report. The latter report presents the overall findings of the study, and involves comparisons between the different groups as well as highlighting common features. The overview report also discusses further the general issues relating to perceptions of, and responses to, 'youth gangs' in the context of a culturally diverse society.

i. Ethnic Minority Youth

For present purposes the term *ethnic minority* refers to non-Anglo Australians who are non-indigenous (Zelinka, 1995). Australia is a polyethnic society, with a population comprised of over 100 different countries and speaking over 150 different languages. While ethnically, religiously and culturally diverse, it is nevertheless the case that Australia remains dominated by the majority Anglo-Australian population and that particular non-Anglo groups thereby have 'minority' status (Guerra & White, 1995). This is reflected in a number of different ways, in terms of culture, economic patterns and institutional arrangements (see Jamrozik, Boland & Urquhart, 1995).

To appreciate fully the situation of ethnic minority young people, analysis also has to be sensitive to the diversity of backgrounds and life circumstances of different young people. It is worth noting in this regard that the migrant experience varies considerably. It depends upon such factors as time period of migration (e.g., job opportunities in the 1950s versus high unemployment in the post-1974 period), place of origin and circumstances of migration (e.g., war refugees, flight from an authoritarian regime), relationship between first and subsequent generations (e.g., conflicting values) and availability of appropriate services (e.g., settlement, English-language courses). Particular groups of ethnic minority young people, such as unattached refugee children, are more likely to experience disadvantage, for example, than young people with well established family and community networks.

The notion of *ethnic youth gangs* has featured prominently in media reports of youth activities over the last few years. Around the country, tales are told of ethnic-based or multi-racial groups of young people being involved in a wide range of illegal, criminal and anti-social activities (see, for example, Healey, 1996). Allegations of a 'Lebanese youth gang' participating in a drive-by shooting of a police station in Sydney in 1998 is but a recent example of the kind of media coverage and public outcry relating to ethnic minority youth in Australia today.

The police, too, have expressed considerable concern over a perceived rise in ethnic youth involvement in crime, and in particular, serious crimes such as heroin and other drug dealing. This is reflected to some extent in figures relating to the increasing number of Indo-Chinese young people held in detention in New South Wales on drug offences (Cain, 1994).

Concern has also been expressed by the police and others that the relationship between ethnic minority young people and the police at the street level is deteriorating. This was reflected in the first National Summit on Police Ethnic Youth Relations held in Melbourne in 1995, and is a topic raised in several recent academic and community reports on police-youth interaction (Youth Justice Coalition, 1994; White, 1996; Maher, Dixon, Swift & Nguyen, 1997).

While media and police concern over 'ethnic youth gangs' has appeared to be on the rise, there has in fact been very little empirical information regarding the actual activities of ethnic minority young people (but see Guerra & White, 1995; Pe-Pua, 1996). Specifically, little is known about the *demographic characteristics* of the ethnic minority people in question – for example, their ages, gender composition, level of education, employment status, socio-economic background and migration experiences. Nor do we know much about what they do with their time, and where they spend it. This is particularly the case with respect to young women of ethnic minority background.

Even less is known about those ethnic minority young people allegedly involved in drug-related activities and other kinds of offending behaviour. Concern has been raised regarding state responsibilities to collect relevant data on these issues (see Cunneen, 1994), but to date there has been a dearth of systematic statistical material regarding welfare, criminal justice and employment trends in relation to these young people. Within the criminal justice sphere specifically, there has, however, been some movement toward analysis of the nature and extent of ethnic minority youth offending (Easteal, 1997), to examine sentencing disparities in relation to the ethnicity of juvenile offenders (Gallagher & Poletti, 1998) and to consider the special requirements of ethnic minority offenders held in detention (NSW Ombudsman, 1996). However, much more study and conceptual work is needed if we are to appreciate fully the place of ethnic minority youth in the criminal justice system, and the reasons for their involvement with this system.

The limited work which has been undertaken in the area of ethnic minority group experiences has nevertheless indicated that there are strong *social reasons* and *economic forces* which are propelling increasing numbers of these young people into extremely vulnerable circumstances (Lyons, 1994; Guerra & White, 1995). A number of factors are seen to affect their social development and integration into mainstream Australian society – including, for example, conflicts between their parents' expectations and their own behaviour and lifestyle choices; lack of parents; homelessness; unemployment; illiteracy and semi-literacy; poor self-esteem; racism; stress and trauma associated with settling into a new country; trying to adjust to a different cultural environment; language difficulties; and so on (Byrne, 1995; Moss, 1993; Pe-Pua, 1996).

ii. Diverse Assumptions

The published material on ethnic minority young people tends to be based upon a number of diverse and at times competing assumptions. For instance, on the one hand, they

themselves are seen as *the problem*. This is usually the substance of media stories and sometimes police reports about 'ethnic youth gangs'.

On the other hand, assumptions are also made regarding the *problems experienced* by these young people. In particular, mention is made of their poor economic and social status, their position as refugees or recent migrants, and difficulties associated with family life.

A third area where assumptions are made relates to the *consequences* of allowing such ethnic youth gangs to exist and operate in the wider community. Much attention, for instance, is given to the need for coercive police methods to rein in gang activity. Issues of police resources, special units and police powers are at the centre of these discussions.

Others argue that much more is needed to support the young people before they are forced into a position of committing crime for either economic reasons, or to establish a sense of communal identity with their peers. Discussion here might centre on changes to immigration settlement policy and services, and the concentration of particular ethnic groups in specific geographical areas.

A further issue which is occasionally raised in relation to 'ethnic youth gangs' are the costs associated with their activities and visible presence in some communities. Reference can be made here to things such as the direct costs of crime (e.g., property damage, losses due to theft, social and health costs); the costs of crime control and security (e.g., policing, private security guards and systems); the costs to business (e.g., negative media attention leading to damaged reputation of some commercial districts); and the costs to specific ethnic minority communities (e.g., the fostering of negative stereotypes based on the actions of a few).

The assumptions made about ethnic minority young people have direct consequences for the *development of appropriate strategies* to deal with issues relevant to their livelihood and lifestyles.

Rather than responding to media images and unsubstantiated assumptions regarding youth behaviour and activity, it is essential therefore to frame policy and service-provision on the basis of grounded knowledge. For example, whether a coercive or a developmental strategy is called for, or a mix of the two, really depends upon what is actually happening in the lives of the specific ethnic minority group in question. Fundamentally, this is a matter of research – of talking with the young people directly.

1.2 The Study

The specific impetus for the present study arose from media and political concerns over 'ethnic youth gangs' in Melbourne in the early 1990s. An informal meeting of youth and community workers, academics, and government representatives was held in 1994 to discuss the rise in public attention on this issue, and to consider whether or not there was in fact such a problem in this city. What emerged from this meeting was a general acknowledgement that there was a lack of systematic research on 'ethnic youth gangs', and thus the moral panic over so called gangs had largely been untested empirically. Nevertheless, there was a generally shared feeling that many of the young people in ethnic minority communities were experiencing major economic and social difficulties. It was also pointed out that there were periodic conflicts between different groups of young people, and that in some instances

criminal or illegal activity was occurring, although not necessarily within a 'gang' setting or structure. It was decided that more research was needed on these issues.

Initially, the instigation for, and organisation of, research in this area was carried out by the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research. The Bureau began to gather information about ethnic minority involvement in gang-related activity and crime, in Australia and overseas. A research advisory team was put together to contribute and oversee the project. However, with the closing of the Bureau's Melbourne office in 1996, the project was forced to go elsewhere for financial and community support. The Australian Multicultural Foundation, and the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, met with the research team and after careful consideration of the study proposal, provided the resources necessary for the undertaking of the research.

i. Aims of Research

The *aims of the research* were:

- To develop a workable and precise definition of 'gang' in the Australian context, and to distinguish group and gang activity
- To explore the perspectives of young people regarding youth activities, according to:
 - i) 'ethnic' versus 'non-ethnic' [i.e., Anglo Australian] background
 - ii) gang versus non-gang membership and activities
 - iii) diversity of religious and cultural influences within and between various ethnic minority groups, and how this affects gang membership and activity
- To examine the specific place and role of young women in the context of gang membership and activity
- To develop a description of the social background of gang members, including such things as age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, employment status, socio-economic background and migrant experience
- To identify the types of activities engaged in by gangs/groups of ethnic minority young people, and where illegal or criminal activity fits into their overall activities
- To explore possible underlying causes for gang membership, and any common themes regarding background experiences and difficulties
- To obtain information on how welfare, educational and police officials respond to the needs, and activities, of ethnic minority young people, including gang members
- To provide possible strategies and programme directions which will assist ethnic minority young people and the wider communities dealing with gang-related issues.

Importantly, in devising these research questions, the team was highly conscious that a central question would have to be answered: namely, *do ethnic youth gangs exist?* As the discussion in the following section indicates, the existing material on youth gangs in Australia renders this question somewhat contentious. This is so because of the different definitions used in relation to the term 'gang', and the diverse types of group formation among young people, not all of which may signify gang-like behaviour or social relationships.

The research team was also motivated by a desire to deal with issues surrounding the perceptions and activities of ethnic minority youth in a *socially constructive* manner. For example, given anecdotal and existing academic knowledge about the marginalised situation of some ethnic minority young people, an important consideration of the research was to assist in devising ways to promote policies which are socially inclusive.

ii. Methods of Research

The *research methodology* adopted for the study consisted of:

- Review of relevant Australian and overseas literature on youth gangs and ‘ethnic youth gangs’
- Collection of information and relevant statistical data on ethnic young people in Australia, with a special focus on Melbourne
- Interviews with 20 young people across 5 different areas of Melbourne (for a total of 100 young people) which have reportedly a high incidence of ‘ethnic youth gang’ activity
- The main sample of young people was comprised of youth aged 15 to 25, with the main focus of attention on the ‘dominant’ ethnic groups in particular regions
- Interviews with 20 young people with an Anglo Australian background, in order to make comparisons with the ethnic minority young people
- The utilisation of youth and community workers to contact and conduct the interviews, so as to have the best available knowledge and expertise when it comes to street-level group formations and interactions.

While specific local areas were the initial focus for the research, on the assumption that certain ethnic minority groups tended to reside or hang around in these locales (e.g., Vietnamese youth in Footscray), we discovered early on in the research that a more sophisticated and complex pattern of movement often took place. Indeed, it was often the case that there were certain corridors within the metropolitan area within which the young people moved, and that while these were not suburb specific, they did range in specific territorial directions (e.g., fanning out from the city centre toward the Western suburbs for one group; mainly concentrated along the coastal beaches for another group). In addition, many of the young people spoken with did not in fact live in the place within which they spent the most time.

In recruiting interviewers, care was taken to ensure that, where possible, the person spoke the first language of the target group and/or they had prior contact with or were members of the particular ethnic minority community. To ensure consistency in the interview approach and technique, each interviewer was briefed on the project, and was provided with information kits which described the ethics and procedures of undertaking research of this nature. In some cases, the interviewers were de-briefed about their interaction with the young people.

The research was informed by the basic principles of ethical social research. These include an emphasis on ‘voluntary consent’ to participate, ‘anonymity’ of information sources, and complete ‘confidentiality’ of the participant and their contribution to the research project. Due care was taken to protect the privacy and rights of each participant. In addition, a ‘plain

language' statement was prepared, as well as a 'consent' form, and each participant was briefed fully on the nature of the project and their role in the research process.

There was considerable variation in how the samples of young people were selected, and in the nature of the interviewer-young person relationship. As much as anything this had to do with the contingencies of social research of this kind: the diverse communities and the sensitivity of the subject matter was bound to complicate sample selection and the interview process in varying ways.

The specific sample groups for each defined ethnic youth population were selected and interviewed according to the social connections and research opportunities of each community-based interviewer. The Anglo-Australian young people, for example, were selected at random, and were drawn from local schools, and from the local shopping centre. The Vietnamese sample was based upon prior contacts established by the interviewer, who had had extensive experience in working with and within the community. The Somalian sample was comprised of individuals chosen at random on the street, and recruitment of primarily female respondents through friendship networks (this form of sample selection was influenced by the nature of gender relations within the community, especially as this relates to street-frequenting activity). The Pacific Islander sample was shaped by the fact that two separate interviewers were involved, each of whom tapped into different groups of young people. In the one case, the young people who were interviewed tended to be involved in church-related networks and activities; in the other, the sample was mainly drawn from young people who were severely disadvantaged economically and who had experienced major family difficulties. Two interviewers were also involved with the Latin American young people. Each interviewer had difficulties in obtaining random samples due to the reluctance of individuals and agencies to participate in the project. Accordingly, the sample was constructed mainly through family members and friends who assisted in the process of making contact with potential subjects. The Turkish sample likewise involved two interviewers, reflecting the cultural mores of having a male interview young men, and a female interview young women. Again, family and friends were used extensively in recruitment of interview subjects.

The composition of the sample, and the dynamics of the interview process, were thus bound to be quite different depending upon the group in question. It is for this reason that direct comparisons between the groups needs to be placed into appropriate methodological as well as social contexts. Methodologically, it is important therefore to acknowledge that the prior research background and ethnic background of each interviewer will inevitably play a role in facilitating or hindering the sample selection and information gathering processes. The presence or absence of guardians, the closeness to or distance from the young person's family on the part of the interviewer, and the basic level of familiarity or trust between interviewer and interviewee, will all affect the research process.

So too will the social experiences and social position of the particular group in question. For example, in cases where the interviewer was not known to a particular migrant family, the young people (and their parents) tended to be suspicious about what was going on: suspecting that perhaps the interviewer was a government employee sent by child protection services to determine the fitness of the family to raise children. In another instance, there was longstanding antagonism between the particular ethnic minority young people and Anglo

Australians. Given that one of the interviewers was Anglo Australian, and given the high degree of intervention into their lives by social welfare agencies of various kinds, some of the young people may have been very suspicious of the questions being asked. There were also instances where young people may have been reluctant to speak about certain matters. This was most apparent in the case of some refugees who were deeply suspicious regarding questions about authority figures such as the police. In a similar vein, the notion of 'gangs' was also culturally bounded for many refugees from war-torn countries. In their experience, 'gang' referred to men brandishing weapons, who roam the streets robbing people, pilfering, raping and engaging in all manner of serious offence, including murder. Such 'gangs' clearly do not exist in Australia.

The research process was very complex and required that we take into account a wide range of methodological and social issues. While there was considerable variation in the sampling and interview contexts, nevertheless the research findings indicate strong lines of *commonality* across the diverse groups. In other words, regardless of specific methodological differences and variations, the information conveyed through the interviews proved to be remarkably similar and consistent across the sample groups. The approach adopted for this study has generated important information about the youth gang issues. We also feel that it provides a useful template for future research of this kind, taking into account the limitations and strengths of the present study.

1.3 The Notion of Youth Gangs

The term 'gang' is highly emotive. Yet, rarely does it have a fixed definition in terms of social use or legal meaning. It can be used to cover any group and any kind of activity engaged in by young people, such as 'hanging out' together. Or, in a more specific sense, it may just refer to those young people who combine together on a regular basis for the purposes of criminal activity. It may be associated with groups which act to defend a particular patch or territory from other young people, including the use of violent means. It may simply refer to any type of illegal or criminal activity engaged in by young people acting in groups. The notion of gang can mean different things to different people. Imprecise definitions and perceptions of young people based on stereotypes, however, often feature prominently in media treatments of ethnic minority youth. Drawing upon material presented in a recent major report on young people and public space, the following discussions examine the nature of youth gangs in greater detail (see White, 1999).

i. Criminal Youth Gangs

Much of the public consternation over youth gangs seems to be driven by images of 'colour gangs' in the United States. Close examination of the Australian social landscape, however, makes it hard to substantiate the presence of such gangs in this country. Nevertheless, the presence of large groups of young people on the street, or young people dressed in particular ways or with particular group affiliations, appears to have fostered the idea that we, too, have a gang problem.

There certainly is a long tradition of gang research in the United States (see for example, Miller, 1975; Huff, 1996; Sanders, 1994; Klein, Maxson & Miller, 1995). There appears to be good reason for this. A survey of police departments in 1992 across the USA, for example,

found that (Curry, Ball & Fox, 1994: 1):

- gangs are a problem in the over-whelming majority of large and small US cities surveyed
- gang-related crime is above all a violent crime problem, with homicide and other violent crimes accounting for about half of all recorded gang-related crime incidents
- the proportion of females in gangs and committing gang-related crime is relatively small
- although the overwhelming majority of gang members are black or Hispanic, the proportion of white youth involvement is increasing

While discussions and debate continues over the precise definition of a gang, as defined by different police organisations and by sociologists, the key element in the American definitions is that of violent or criminal behaviour as a major activity of group members. From this point onward, however, the definitions vary considerably. Sanders (1994: 20) provides an example of a contemporary attempt to differentiate different types of groups (such as skinhead hate groups) according to the following criteria:

A youth gang is any transpersonal group of youths that shows a willingness to use deadly violence to claim and defend territory, and attack rival gangs, extort or rob money, or engage in other criminal behavior as an activity associated with its group, and is recognized by itself and its immediate community as a distinct dangerous entity. The basic structure of gangs is one of age and gender differentiation, and leadership is informal and multiple.

Statistically (through recorded incidents of, for example, youth homicide rates), experientially (through visible street presence, such as use of 'colours' as symbolic markers) and in popular knowledge (through media reportage of events and groups, and fictional film accounts), youth gangs have a major presence in the American city. This is regularly confirmed in sociological and criminal justice research. Gangs exist, and they are engaged in violent and criminal activity.

In Australia, while historically there has long been concern with street-present young people, some of whom have been presented as constituting 'gangs' (e.g., the Sydney push larrikins at the turn of the century, the Bodgies and Widgies in the 1950s), the cultural and social environment is quite different to the American case. Unlike the U.S., for example, there is not a strong academic tradition of gang research, in part demonstrating the lack of a need for one in the first place. What research there is, has tended to find that 'gangs' in this country are very unlike their American counterparts.

For instance, a recent New South Wales inquiry received little or no evidence that the overseas style of gangs exist in that State, and commented that a usage of the term, which implies violence and an organised structure, has little relevance to youth activities in Australian communities (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995). Furthermore, while the police service reported the existence of some 54 street gangs in 1993, there was no other evidence to support either this or related allegations of extensive memberships.

Nevertheless, there is evidence that certain types of youth gangs do exist, albeit not to the extent suggested in media accounts (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995). Even here, it is noted that most gangs limit their criminal behaviour to petty theft, graffiti and vandalism.

Few gangs have a violent nature. Moreover, when violence such as homicide does involve a gang member, it is usually not gang-related.

ii. ‘Gang’ Characteristics

By and large, it can be concluded that most bands of young people in Australia are not ‘gangs’, but groups (Standing Committee on Social Issues, 1995; White, 1996). Social analysis of ‘youth gangs’ in Melbourne, for example, found that while some characteristics of the groups mirror the media images (e.g., the masculine nature of youth gangs, their preferred ‘hang outs’, and shared identity markers such as shoes or clothes), the overall rationale for the group is simply one of *social connection*, not crime (Aumair & Warren, 1994). This is an important observation and worthy of further comment.

In their study, Aumair and Warren (1994) cited five key characteristics of youth ‘gangs’. These included:

- *overwhelming male involvement*, which in turn reinforced certain ‘masculine’ traits (such as fighting prowess, sexual conquest, substance use, minor criminal acts) in the group setting
- *high public visibility*, given the lack of money and therefore a reliance on free public spaces for recreational purposes
- *an outward display of collective identity*, in the form of the wearing of similar styles of clothing, adopting a common name for the group and so on
- *organisation principally for social reasons, and consequently low rates of criminal activity*, as indicated in the absence of formalised gang rules and a social rationale for gathering together, rather than a criminal objective
- *differences between public perceptions of the ‘gang problem’ and the real nature of the problem*, as illustrated by the fact that most criminal activity seemed to be inwardly focused, involving one-on-one fights and substance abuse.

Much of the criminality exhibited by ‘youth gangs’, therefore, is inward looking and linked to self-destructive behaviour such as substance abuse, drinking binges and the like. The popular perception is that gangs seek to violate the personal integrity and private property of the public in general; closer investigation reveals the insular nature of much of their activity (Aumair & Warren, 1994).

Groups of young people may well engage in anti-social or illegal behaviour. But it is a criminological truism that so do most young people at some stage in their lives. The key issue is whether the activity is sporadic, spontaneous and unusual for the group, or whether it is a main focus, thereby requiring a greater degree of criminal commitment and planning. The evidence certainly suggests the former is the case. Likewise, the statistics on youth crime indicate that use of criminal violence by young people in general is relatively rare (Cunneen & White, 1995; Mukherjee, Carcach & Higgins, 1997; Freeman, 1996).

When the available evidence on ‘gangs’ in Australia is weighed up, the picture presented appears to be something along the following lines (White, 1996). Rather than being fixed groups, with formal gang rules, most ‘gangs’ are transient groups of young people, which vary in size and which have informal structures of interaction. Rather than being inherently

anti-social, most of these groups involve 'hanging' out in a manner in which crime is incidental to the activities of the group as a whole. Rather than crime, the basis of activity is social activity, peer support, personal identity and self-esteem, and friendship networks. Rather than being exclusively of one ethnic background, many groups have members from a variety of different ethnic backgrounds. Rather than seeing themselves as 'dangerous' or 'gangsters', the young people speak about things such as 'loyalty', 'fun' and supporting their 'mates'. Rather than seeing themselves as the source of conflict on the streets, groups complain about constant police harassment and unfair treatment by adults.

In the specific case of 'ethnic youth gangs', the activities and perceptions by and of ethnic minority youth present a special case. The over-riding message of most media reports, for example, is that such 'gangs' are entirely negative, dangerous and threatening. Indeed, in recent years the hype and sensationalised treatment of 'youth gangs' have tended to have an increasingly *racialised* character. That is, the media have emphasised the 'racial' background of alleged gang members, and thereby fostered the perception that, for instance, 'young Lebanese' or 'young Vietnamese' equals 'gang member'. The extra 'visibility' of youth ethnic minority people (relative to the Anglo Australian 'norm') feeds the media moral panic over 'youth gangs', as well as bolstering a racist stereotyping based upon physical appearance (and including such things as language, clothes and skin colour). Whole communities of young people can be affected, regardless of the fact that most young people are not systematic law-breakers or particularly violent individuals. The result is an inordinate level of public and police suspicion and hostility being directed towards people from certain ethnic minority backgrounds.

iii. Youth Formations

Confusions over the status of 'youth gangs' in the Australian context stem in part from the lack of adequate conceptual tools to analyse youth group behaviour. Recent work in Canada provides a useful series of benchmarks, especially considering the many similarities in social structure and cultural life between the two countries. Gordon has developed a typology of gangs and groups based on work done in Vancouver (see Gordon, 1995, 1997; Gordon & Foley, 1998). The typology consists of six categories:

- *Youth Movements*, which are social movement characterised by a distinctive mode of dress or other bodily adornments, a leisure time preference, and other distinguishing features (e.g., punk rockers)
- *Youth Groups*, which are comprised of small clusters of young people who hang out together in public places such as shopping centres (e.g., sometimes referred to as 'Mallies')
- *Criminal Groups*, which are small clusters of friends who band together, usually for a short period of time, to commit crime primarily for financial gain (may contain young and not so young adults as well)
- *Wannabe Groups*, which include young people who band together in a loosely structured group primarily to engage in spontaneous social activity and exciting, impulsive, criminal activity including collective violence against other groups of youths (e.g., territorial and use identifying markers of some kind)
- *Street Gangs*, which are groups of young people and young adults who band together to form a semi-structured organisation, the primary purpose of which is to engage in planned

and profitable criminal behaviour or organised violence against rival street gangs (e.g., less visible but more permanent than other groups)

- *Criminal Business Organisations*, which are groups that exhibit a formal structure and a high degree of sophistication, comprised mainly of adults, and which engage in criminal activity primarily for economic reasons and almost invariably maintain a low profile (e.g., may have a name but rarely visible)

An important observation made by Gordon (1997) is that street gangs tend to appear and disappear in waves. This appears to be due to a combination of factors, ranging from effective targeting of key individuals by the police, the maturation of gang members and community development schemes as to why they disappear; and on the other hand, the spawning of new branches from an existing formation, creation of gangs in defensive response to other gangs, and the pressure of youth fashion as to why they may emerge. In a telling comment, Gordon (1995: 318) indicates the importance of social and cultural infrastructures in keeping street gangs as a cyclical, rather than permanent, phenomenon:

Unlike the situation in many American cities, street gangs have not become an entrenched feature of the Canadian urban landscape, and the chances of them doing so are still fairly slim. Cities like Vancouver tend not to have, and are unlikely to acquire, the decayed and disorganized inner urban areas containing large populations of disenfranchised, dissolute, and desperate youths and young adults. There is relatively strict gun control in Canada and not much opposition to making such control stricter. Canadian cities have an educational and social service apparatus that provides an effective social safety net that is staffed by generally optimistic personnel who are concerned to address the issues of youth disenchantment and prevent the entrenchment of street gangs. Every effort should be made to preserve these critical preventative factors.

These are words which need to be well heeded in Australia. So too, we need to learn from the Canadian experience, where again until recently there has been little research on gangs available, and develop models and appraisals of gangs and gang-related behaviour which are indicative of Australian local, regional and national realities and contexts.

iv. Youth in Groups

Meanwhile, what is known about street gangs in Australia seems to confirm that their actual, rather than presumed, existence is much less than popularly believed, and that their activities are highly circumscribed in terms of violence or criminal activity directed at members of the general public. Nevertheless, the image of 'gangs' is a powerful one, and has engendered varying kinds of social reactions.

For example, the social status and public perception of young people in groups very much influences the regulation of public space. Many groups of young people, some of whom might be labelled 'gangs', for instance, tend to hang out in places like shopping centres. Difficulties in providing a precise, or uniform, definition of what a 'gang' actually refers to, and the diversity of youth dress, language and behaviour associated with specific *subcultural forms* (e.g., gothics, punks), means that more often than not young people are treated as 'outsiders' by commercial managers and authority figures on the basis of appearance, not solely actual behaviour.

The combination of being 'bored' and feeling unwelcome in such public domains can have a negative impact on the young people, and make them resentful of the way in which they are always subject to scrutiny and social exclusion. This, in turn, can lead to various kinds of 'deviant' behaviour, as in the case of young people who play cat-and-mouse with security guards for the fun of it. It is unfortunate that the perception of gang membership may lead to exclusion or negative responses from authority figures, and that this in turn may itself generate gang-like behaviour on the part of the young people so affected.

To a certain extent, much of the concern about gangs is really a misunderstanding of the nature of youth subcultures, of how young people naturally associate with each other in groups, and of the material opportunities open to them to circulate and do things in particular places. The diversity of youth subcultural forms, especially the spectacular youth subcultures, has historically been a source of consternation among certain sections of the adult population (Murray, 1973; Stratton, 1992; White, 1993). It has also been associated with conflicts *between* different groups of young people, and youth fearfulness *of* certain young people, based on certain social and cultural affiliations (e.g., Homies, Surfies, Skinheads, Punks). In most cases, however, the presence of identifiable groups is not the precursor to activity which is going to menace the community as a whole.

Having said this, it is still essential to recognise that the pre-conditions for more serious types of gang formation are beginning to emerge in the Australian context. A recent review article of American gangs points out that turf- and honour-based violence are best understood as arising out of particular political economic contexts, marked by patterns of unemployment, immigration and social marginalisation (Adamson, 1998). It is related to both attempts to engage in alternative productive activity (such as the illegal drug economy), and alternative consumption activity (in the form of dealing with lack of consumer purchasing power by taking the possessions of others). It also relates to attempts to assert masculinity in a period where traditional avenues to 'manhood' have been severely eroded for many young men. Given the trends toward ghettoisation and social polarisations in this country (see Gregory & Hunter, 1995), major questions can be asked regarding the potential for such gang formations in Australian cities.

With respect to these developments, it is significant that the increased frequency of involvement with the criminal justice system on the part of some ethnic minority young people, particularly in relation to drug offences and use of violence, has led to heightened media attention of ethnic young people generally. However, the extent of the shifts in criminal justice involvement do not warrant the intensity and universalising tendencies apparent in much media coverage, which tend to provide negative images of ethnic minority people as a whole. **The concern about the propensity of the media to perpetuate negative images of ethnic minority young people is not new.** For example, the 1995 First National Summit on Police & Ethnic Youth Relations recommended the development of a joint project with **the media industry and unions which would help to foster more positive portrayals of youth (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1995).** The problems associated with police-ethnic minority youth relations have probably contributed to the negativity as well, and forms an important part of the 'image-building' in relation to ethnic youth gangs.

A New South Wales study, for example, found that ethnic minority young people were more likely than other groups of Australian young people (with the exception of indigenous people)

to be stopped by the police, to be questioned, and to be subject to varying forms of mistreatment (Youth Justice Coalition, 1994). Young Vietnamese Australians in Melbourne and Sydney have complained about unfair treatment, and racism, in their dealings with the police (Doan, 1995; Lyons, 1995). This is confirmed in a recent study of encounters between police and young Asian background people in Cabramatta, which found that the young people (who were heroin users) were subject to routine harassment, intimidation, 'ethnic' targeting, racism and offensive treatment (Maher et.al., 1997). Furthermore, there were a number of specific problems relating to cultural issues in that: 'Crucial norms of respect, shame and authority are routinely transgressed by police officers' (Maher et.al., 1997: 3). In the context of police rhetoric about adopting harm minimisation policies in dealing with drug issues, these coercive strategies were viewed by the young people as counter-productive.

More generally, a negative interaction between ethnic minority young people and the police breeds mistrust and disrespect. A minority of people in any community is engaged in particularly anti-social behaviour and criminal activity. The problem in this case is that the prejudicial stereotyping often leads to the *differential policing* of the whole population group (White, 1996). This kind of policing not only violates the ideals of treating all citizens and residents with the same respect and rights, but it can inadvertently lead to further law-breaking behaviour.

For example, as victims of racist violence, ethnic minority young people may be reluctant to approach state authorities for help, when these same figures have done little to entrust confidence or respect. As with similar cases overseas, the lack of police protection can lead some young people to adopt the stance that 'self-defence is no offence' and thus to arm themselves against racist attacks (Edwards, Oakley & Carey, 1987). Concern about the carrying of weapons not only justifies even more intense police intervention, it feeds media distortions about the problem of 'ethnic youth gangs'. Clearly there is a need for concerted efforts to modify existing police practices and to re-think community policing as this applies to ethnic minority young people (see Chan, 1994, 1997). The implementation of the recommendations arising out of the First National Summit on Police & Ethnic Youth Relations would certainly assist in making significant improvements in police-ethnic minority youth relations in Australia (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1995). To this end, the establishment of State/Territory Support Implementation Teams by the National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau appears to be a step in the right direction. The teams, which are comprised of a police representative in charge of youth affairs in every jurisdiction and a representative from the youth sector, will be the main vehicles for advocating the implementation of the Summit Recommendations (National Police Ethnic Advisory Bureau, 1997).

1.4 Research Contribution

The contribution of this research project is to expand our empirical knowledge about 'ethnic youth gangs'. As can be seen from this brief review, there has been very little systematic empirical examination of the phenomenon. There have been examples of critical analysis and interpretation of what little material has been collected (by government bodies as well as academic and community researchers), but quite often this has been ignored by the press and by political leaders as selected events, such as drive-by shootings, come to public notice.

Research projects such as this may be able to provide a better and more informed analysis of the concrete basis for the fear of crime in some neighbourhoods, as well as the extent and nature of existing 'gang' crime. It builds upon other recent studies undertaken on street-frequenting youth of non-English speaking background in Sydney (Pe-Pua, 1996), stories collected about the street youth of Cabramatta (Maher, Nguyen & Le, 1999), and the experience of homelessness among young people from Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam in Melbourne (Frederico, Cooper & Picton, 1996). It further develops our knowledge of more recent immigrant youth (such as Somalian young people), as well as considers the experiences of groups which have been established in this country for some time (such as Turkish young people).

It is our hope that the research will contribute, as well, to closer examination of how street-level activity is related to existing service provision, programme development and policy implementation. How federal, state and local government agencies carry out their work, and the policy context within which this occurs, are important variables in the quality of life for young people, and ultimately for the welfare and safety of all citizens and residents.

Finally, given the Melbourne focus for the current project, we would hope that the research opens the door to further work of a comparative nature, particularly in places such as Sydney and Brisbane which have large immigrant populations and diverse ethnic communities. The issues are of national importance, however, and should be responded to with policies and practices which acknowledge the cultural diversity, and changing nature, of Australian society.

Part 2:

Turkish Young People

2.1 Social History

Turkey is a mountainous country located at the north eastern end of the mediterranean sea. It shares borders with Greece, Bulgaria, Iran, and Georgia. Turkey is often described as being part of the middle east, or as being at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. As such, Turkey is the only country to have parts in both Asia and Europe.

Turkey's population is predominantly Islamic, with approximately 98 per cent of the people sharing this religion. Modern Turkey is nevertheless a secular state, and is the only Islamic country where the Islamic code is not official law. About 85 per cent of the population is comprised of ethnic turks. There are also numerous minorities, including for example, Jewish, Christian, Kurdish and Armenian communities.

i. Migration

The Turkish commenced settling in Australia in a structured manner in the 1960s (Basarin & Basarin, 1993). The Turkish/Australian bilateral migration agreement of 1967, lead to some 30,000 Turkish people migrating to Australia over the next 30 years. In the mid 1970's the Australian government reduced the levels of assisted migration from Turkey and the numbers steadily decreased (Elley & Inglis, 1995).

By the 1980s, Turkish migration had levelled off, mainly due to changes in government policy and economic improvements in Turkey. In the 1990s, the numbers of migrants arriving from Turkey were relatively small, and mainly comprised of professionals, or relatives and spouses of earlier immigrants to Australia. The current number of Turkish people migrating to Australia each year is under 1000.

There are over 75,000 people in Australia who are either Turkish born (28,860) or who are of Turkish background or speak the Turkish language (46,204) (ABS, 1996). In Victoria, about 1 per cent of the state's population is Turkish born.

ii. Settlement Processes

The Turkish migrants have mainly settled, in equal numbers, in Melbourne and Sydney. In Victoria they settled pre-dominantly in the North-Western corridor of the metropolitan area, with smaller numbers moving to the more affluent Eastern suburbs. A similar pattern occurred in Sydney, where the community settled mainly in the Western suburbs. The areas settled were mainly near migrant hostels, in areas where housing was affordable or where there were employment opportunities.

The early Turkish arrivals were to enter a country with a very different religious and cultural base, and one which was unfamiliar with Islamic religious spiritual centres. There were also few basic support services provided for Turkish migrants.

The re-settlement process in Australia has gone through several distinct phases (Elley & Ingliss, 1995). The earlier stages of this migratory flow were characterised by the immigrants' clear intention to return to Turkey within two or three years of their arrival in Australia. This view was contrary to the expectations of Australian officials, but was a reflection of the more general Turkish experience of emigration, which did not encompass permanent settlement in another country.

The many difficulties faced by Turkish migrants when they arrived in Australia were thus compounded by the fact that immigration was not seen as a permanent decision. In particular, it was to have a major impact on the experiences of children and grandchildren of the immigrants.

To understand the unique process of migration and re-settlement as this relates to the Turkish population it needs to be appreciated that the Turkish migrant experience was based on the 'guest worker' concept already initiated with Germany and Holland (Basarin & Basarin, 1993). The guest worker concept was based upon the idea of short-term migration. The host country invited workers to migrate as temporary working residents and the workers then returned to their country of origin. The rapidly industrialised post-war European countries needed workers and temporary labour to fill factory shortages. The host countries had no intention of settling the workers permanently; and the workers intention was that they would eventually return to Turkey. Unlike other European countries, permanent migration from Turkey was rare.

The Turkish migration program to Australia, though deemed to be a permanent programme by Australian immigration officials, was not necessarily seen this way by the Turkish migrants themselves. The need to find work and save money was of paramount concern. In the early days of the program the intention to return home was to have a great influence on decisions relating to their children. For instance, learning English and developing stable roots in Australia for their family, were generally seen as pointless. Little emphasis was placed on maintaining children in school beyond the compulsory age. Rather, children were encouraged to contribute to the family, find work, or support younger siblings and undertake family responsibilities. The ultimate aim was to prepare the next generation for their future life in Turkey.

This attitude, coupled with the complication of migrating to a non-Muslim country, led the community to become somewhat insular. In most families, Turkish was the main language, English not seen as necessary, marriage took place within the community, and the values and practices of the homeland were emphasised. Maintenance of the Turkish language, Turkish community values and Turkish religion were thus high priorities. The values of the new country were perceived as undesirable, and encouraging undisciplined, disrespectful social practices in their children.

By the late 1970s, however, attitudes to migration started to change. Many families had made attempts to go back and re-settle in Turkey, but without much success. The Turkey they had left was not the country they found on their return. It had changed. Many people felt that they did not fit and that they should reconsider their place in Australia.

iii. Permanent Settlement

By the 1990s the process of change associated with longer residence and commitment to staying in Australia has gone further. This is illustrated concretely in a number of ways. For example, young Turkish-Australians have begun to achieve levels of educational attainment closer to the national norms, a situation very different to the schooling experience of earlier migrant young people. The school retention rate for young people from Turkish backgrounds, and their participation in tertiary education, has since the mid-1980s been higher proportionately than most other groups in Australia, including Anglo-Australians (Inglis, 1993).

A recent study conducted in Melbourne in 1996, with over 300 Turkish young people between the ages of 12 and 25 provides the most up-to-date profile of the needs and concerns of this group (Fontaine & Kaymacki, 1996). The study found that the distinctive cultural, religious and family background of Turkish-Australians led these young people to consider themselves to be different from the mainstream youth population. They saw their Islamic religion and Turkish background, along with their family, as playing an important part in determining their future in terms of identity, marriage and place of residence. Interestingly, the study also identified that there were also a number of key issues which they shared with their non-Turkish youth counterparts. They saw that education, employment, a stable environment and provision of basic social and recreational services were all highly important.

The social place of Turkish young people of the 2nd and 3rd generation in Australia is complex. It is intrinsically intertwined with questions surrounding their identity, and the barriers they face in being accepted by mainstream society. Many Turkish-Australian young people are still growing up in families where material disadvantage, and a family experience of limited English, and often limited formal education, are the norm (Inglis, Elley & Manderson, 1992). While there have been major changes in educational and occupational mobility and advancement with regard to the young people, many parents and newly arrived immigrants have experienced unemployment and diminished job prospects due to the downturn in the manufacturing industry, and in unskilled and semi-skilled employment generally. Meanwhile, their close ethnic identification and religious affiliation has been associated with various forms of prejudice and racism directed at members of the Turkish community, including the young people.

2.2 Profile of Youth Interviewed

Twenty young people were interviewed in relation to the place and perceptions of youth gangs in the lives of young Turkish people. All of the interviews were undertaken with people living in the Melbourne suburb of Broadmeadows, in the northern part of the metropolitan region.

Of the 20 young people, 14 were born in Australia, 1 in Cyprus and 5 in Turkey. Most of those not born in Australia arrived before 1981 (3 came in 1974), while one person migrated in 1990. In other words, the young people were all well established in the Australian context, regardless of place of birth. Nevertheless, in terms of ethnic identification, they all viewed themselves as being distinctively 'Turkish', or in the case of 2 respondents, 'Cypriot Turkish', as well as 'Australian'.

The sample group was comprised of 7 females, and 13 males. All of the young people had Muslim religious beliefs. In terms of age, 11 respondents were between 21 and 25 years old, 6 were 17-18, and 3 were under 16 years of age. The ages ranged from 12 to 25.

Most (18) of the young people lived at home with their parents (10), mother (7) or father (1). Given their ages, this implies that the parental home is a central social location for Turkish young people, until marriage and the setting up of their own households. Most had lived in the same suburb, and the same accommodation, for a number of years. Most also lived in houses, rather than units or flats.

When asked about the main language used at home, 17 of the young people said that they spoke Turkish, 2 speak dual languages, and only 1 used English as the main language at home. With their peer groups, however, most (16) spoke English or English and Turkish (3). Only one person said that the usual language with their peers was Turkish.

Some indication of the socio-economic background of the young people was provided by a series of questions of the type of income sources and paid work of their parents. Only 4 mothers were undertaking paid work at the time of interview (in the manufacturing industry); and 13 were in receipt of state benefits such as the sole parent benefit or invalid pension. Of the fathers (two of whom were deceased, and 1 overseas), only 8 were in paid employment. They worked mainly in the service, trades and manufacturing industries. Many were in receipt of aged pensions, invalid pensions and unemployment benefits. Generally speaking, the economic resources of the households were fairly limited, as reflected in the employment patterns and income sources of the parents.

The majority of the interviewees had left school. Only one of the sample group had completed Year 12. Eight of the young people were presently still at school, while a few of the others were enrolled in TAFE or other educational courses.

2.3 Sources of Income

The economic situation of the young people was ascertained by asking a number of questions relating to sources of income and employment experiences. At the time of interview, only 4 of the young people were in any type of paid employment, and of these only 2 in full time jobs. Three of the young people worked in the formal waged economy; one worked on a cash-in-hand basis. The sorts of jobs in which they engaged included driving a taxi, working in a pizza shop, cleaning and working in a retail shop.

Most (18) of the young people described themselves as being unemployed. Only two of the young people had not had a job at some stage. However, most paid work was short-term, and only one person had ever worked for more than 6 months at a time.

Almost half (9) of the sample had received some type of job training or work experience, usually in the area of trades, or administrative or office work. Of these, 6 had received their job training as part of receiving benefits from the Department of Social Security.

The majority of young people (16) regularly undertook unpaid work at home for friends or family. This work included domestic labour and chores, childcare, gardening, mowing the grass, and washing the car.

Just over half (11) of the group also performed labour for 'favours' – that is, work performed for other people, for which they were not paid, but for which they might receive a favour of some kind, such as, for example, use of a car. In addition to the kinds of work associated with the household, this also included doing car repairs and undertaking various odd jobs for family and friends in the local area.

The main sources of income for the young people are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:
Sources of Income for Young People

| Sources of Income | Response to each category | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Unemployment/Dss benefits | 8 | 40.0 | 38.1 |
| Austudy | 3 | 15.0 | 14.3 |
| Family | 5 | 25.0 | 23.8 |
| Work | 3 | 15.0 | 14.3 |
| Casual/part time jobs | 2 | 10.0 | 9.5 |
| Total | 21 | | 100.0 |

N=20

As can be seen, most of the young people were reliant in some way upon state benefits. If they were experiencing money problems, the young people tended to either go to their parents, approach other relatives, or just as likely, to go to their friends for assistance. In some cases, the young people were reluctant to seek help from their parents, given their parents financial situation: *'If I've got money problems, I don't ask (parents for money) 'cause then I just put them under pressure, so I just close my mouth' (T7).*

The ways in which their limited resources were used in indicated in Table 2.

Table 2:
Ways in Which Young People Spent Their Money

| Ways in which money is spent | Response to each category | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Rent | 3 | 16.7 | 7.0 |
| Food/bills | 10 | 55.6 | 23.3 |
| Entertainment | 7 | 38.9 | 16.3 |
| Travel | 3 | 16.7 | 7.0 |
| Clothes | 9 | 50.0 | 20.9 |
| Family | 1 | 5.6 | 2.3 |
| Save | 2 | 11.1 | 4.7 |
| Cigarettes/alcohol | 2 | 11.1 | 4.7 |
| books/school | 4 | 22.2 | 9.3 |
| Drugs | 1 | 11.1 | 2.3 |
| Other | 1 | 11.1 | 2.3 |
| Total | 43 | | 100.0 |

N= 18
Missing Responses = 2 (10%)

Most of the responses have to do with immediate household expenses such as food, bills, and clothes. The purchase of books and school-related items, and travel, indicate that a proportion of money is spent to enable the young person to participate in the worlds of education and work. Entertainment is also a significant item, which as much as anything

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reflects the commercial nature of most leisure and recreational outlets and pursuits today.

The young people were aware of various 'quick money' jobs in the local neighbourhood. Some of these included piece work, factory work, babysitting, pamphleteering, supermarket work, working at a fastfood outlet, fruit picking, cleaning and acting as a handyman.

In discussing alternative income sources, the young people were also asked about the types of illegal activity which they thought young people in their neighbourhood might engage in, as a means to make money. Their responses are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:
Interviewees' Perceptions of Types of Illegal Activity in Which
Young People Engage for Money

| Types of illegal activity | Response to each category | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Drug dealing | 12 | 60.0 | 36.4 |
| Burglary/robbery | 5 | 25.0 | 15.2 |
| Shoplifting/sale of stolen goods | 7 | 35.0 | 21.2 |
| Theft (other than shoplifting) | 5 | 25.0 | 15.2 |
| Mugging/jumping | 1 | 5.0 | 3.0 |
| Don't know | 1 | 5.0 | 3.0 |
| Other | 2 | 10.0 | 6.1 |
| Total | 33 | | 100.0 |

N=20

As can be seen in this table, the main ways in which to supplement income revolved around various kinds of property crime (such as shopstealing, theft, burglary), and involvement in drug dealing.

The main reason for the commission of these illegal acts was financial, although some young people also referred to excitement, peer pressure and drugs as contributing to the reasons why a young person might engage in these sorts of activities. The lack of options was stressed in several interviews. As one young person saw it: *'Because they need the money. Basically because of their financial situation I guess. I don't really know of anyone who does it to get kicks out of it.'*

Not all illegal activity is motivated by economic need, although it may be related to economic circumstance. Accordingly, the young people were asked about the kinds of activities engaged in by young people generally, but not for the purposes of money. Their responses are shown in Table 4.

Table 4:
Interviewees' Perceptions of Types of Illegal Activity (not for the purposes of money) In Which Young People Engage

| Types of illegal activity | Response to each category | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Car theft/joy riding | 5 | 26.3 | 14.3 |
| Drug use | 4 | 21.1 | 11.4 |
| Fighting/assaults | 9 | 47.4 | 25.7 |
| Vandalism | 9 | 47.4 | 25.7 |
| Stealing for own use | 1 | 5.0 | 2.9 |
| Don't know | 2 | 10.5 | 5.7 |
| Other | 5 | 26.3 | 14.3 |
| Total | 35 | | 100.0 |

N=19
Missing Responses = 1(5%)

What is notable about this list is the apparent level of aggression directed toward other people (e.g., fights) and property (e.g., vandalism) that is associated with illegal activity of this sort.

The main reasons given for engagement in these kinds of activities were peer pressure, boredom, fun and excitement, and simply showing off. The group nature of the activity, and the recognition that such activity is often closely related to peer pressures of some kind, are highly relevant in any discussion of youth gangs.

2.4 Youth Gangs

A series of questions were put to the young people about the nature and activities of 'youth gangs' in their neighbourhoods and schools. We started by asking them where young people hung out in the local area. The most frequent response was the shopping centres, followed by amusement centres, the street outside shops, recreation and sporting facilities and train/bus stops.

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that in general most of the young people spent most of their time at home or at a friend's house. This was the case for both their day-time and their night-time activities. The time spent in the public domains of the shopping centre and street, therefore, was much less than that spent at someone's house, including their own.

The young people were asked about the nature of the groups of young people who hang out on the street. For many, there was no basic difference between the various groups. Others spoke of different leisure interests, or different types of activities which formed the focus of each group's activities. These observations are reflected to an extent in Table 5, which shows the perceptions of the Turkish young people regarding what members of a group have in common with each other.

Table 5:
Young People's Perceptions of What Groups Have in Common with Each Other

| Aspects of group | Response to each category | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Ethnicity/culture | 5 | 26.3 | 15.6 |
| Same interests/activities | 6 | 31.6 | 18.8 |
| Image/dress/style | 6 | 31.6 | 18.8 |
| Music | 5 | 26.3 | 15.6 |
| Same school | 2 | 10.5 | 6.3 |
| Same area | 3 | 15.8 | 9.4 |
| Nothing in common | 2 | 10.5 | 6.3 |
| Other | 3 | 15.8 | 9.4 |
| Total | 32 | | 100.0 |

N=19

Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

The shared experiences of few employment options, and lack of local services for youth, was seen by some young people as a common condition.

T9: 'They're all louts, they're all unemployed. Like I said, we're all on the same boat heading towards nowhere – out on the ocean; we don't know where we're going to.'

T14: 'There has to be (something that member of a group have in common) to form that bond.... When I came up to this area – pretty much a school boy, pretty much into school – it's just totally different. A lot of it's just a lot of adrenalin you know, nothing to do, nowhere to go but sit around bored and "what should we do, what should we do?"'

The Turkish young people were ambivalent about how or whether one can make a distinction between a 'group' and a 'gang'. In defining a gang, for instance, many referred to 'just a group of friends'. As one young person put it: 'A gang is a group of people who have made a commitment to stick together' (T4). By this definition, a gang is simply a group of like-minded young people who hang around together and provide each other support. When asked about the types of gangs in the area, there were 8 responses referring to friendship groups, but only 5 which identified groups of 'troublemakers'.

In relation to this latter group, other respondents said that a 'gang' is best characterised in terms of doing illegal activities and engaging in violent activities of some kind. In describing the local gangs, one person said: 'A bunch of guys that think they're tough. After school they haven't got anything else to do and they just hang around in the shopping centres' (T6). Another commented: 'A gang is like just say there's ten people like sticking up for each other no matter what, and just doing stupid things, like really aggressive. They want to prove themselves to people, they wanna like want people to know what they are. They start things because they want people to look at them, want people to respect them.' (T7).

For some, the dividing line between a 'group' and a 'gang' was how other people perceived particular groups of young people. Group connection, and commitments to the group, were seen as simply a normal part of life in the neighbourhood. However, group loyalty and defending members of a group were important parts of this social connection.

A myriad of reasons was put forward as to what gang members might have in common. These ranged from dress and style, to ethnicity, to socio-economic status through to simply having fun. The specific reasons why young people may wish to join a group identified as a 'gang' are outlined in Table 6.

Table 6:
Young People's Perceptions of Why Young People Join Gangs

| Common attributes of gang members | Response to each category | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Fun/excitement | 5 | 26.3 | 17.2 |
| Problems at home | 2 | 10.5 | 6.9 |
| Protection | 4 | 21.1 | 13.8 |
| Support/replacing family | 1 | 5.3 | 3.4 |
| Respect/power | 8 | 42.1 | 27.6 |
| Rebellion/showing off | 2 | 10.5 | 6.9 |
| Other | 7 | 36.8 | 24.1 |
| Total | 29 | | 100.0 |

N= 19
Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

It is significant that the idea that gangs give respect and power, as well as protection, featured highly in the responses. This is especially so, given the generally disadvantaged economic situation of most of the young people. In other words, issues of social status seemed to be crucial to the young people's understanding of youth gangs.

Related to social status issues is the issue of racism. The young people were asked whether or not racism had anything to do with gang formation or gang-related behaviour. Their answers varied. Some argued that racism, or at the least ethnic identification, is a major reason for gang membership.

T2: 'Because 'Turks' stick with 'Turks' and 'Lebos' stick with 'Lebos' and the Asians with the Asians. Because, it's like if you need some help, you can go to one of the gang members and get all of the group to come and help you with your situation.'

T4: 'A lot of for example 'wogs' don't like 'Aussies' or 'Nips', so it's like you've got something against them, but you don't even know why – just because they're different.'

T6: 'I suppose they all can't get along; Turkish can't mix with Australians and I don't know, they just want to see who's tougher.'

T14: 'Mainly Turkish – they're just in their packs out and about.'

T14: 'Racism could start in the playground at school – getting picked on by some other group and then running to the safety of a majority group.'

Other young people placed more stress on immediate local conditions and other forms of social connection (such as being unemployed, or drug users) as being the main reason for certain types of gang formation.

T9: 'Living in Broadmeadows and leaving school in year 10, it doesn't leave you much to do really.'

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T19: 'Mostly the people that are in the gangs are the druggies of the area; they all like to smoke together.'

T10: 'They're mostly friends, dropouts from the same schools who come together and do things together.'

T18: 'Kids in areas where unemployment levels are much higher than other suburbs; you know, hooligans hanging around the streets.'

Still others had the perception that regardless of present social circumstances, the issue of racism was no longer dominant in terms of how groups of young people relate to each other, or as the basis for specific group formations.

T18: 'I wouldn't say racism, because I haven't seen racism for years. Like, Broadmeadows years ago used to be full of racism, like "What are you doing 'wog' down the street, but not any more.'

T8: 'There used to be (gangs in the area) but not any more. Back in those days there used to be racism. When people like Turkish people, Lebanese or anyone that used to come from overseas, they used to get called like 'wogs' by Australians or the Asians were called 'Nippers' and they'd argue about it and they'll go into a gang to fight 'em and make sure they'd protect one another.'

In the case of young women, their participation was primarily seen to stem from 'relationships', rather than from other causes, although young women could also find joining a gang a source of respect, power and excitement.

While the Turkish young people were ambivalent about how to define gangs, and whether or not they existed in practice, they were more definite in their views regarding what gang behaviour consists of. Their perceptions of gang-type behaviour are shown in Table 7.

Table 7:
Young People's Perceptions of the Kinds of Activities in Which
Gangs get Involved

| Kinds of activities | Response to each category | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Fighting | 12 | 60.0 | 27.9 |
| Having fun | 4 | 20.0 | 9.3 |
| Drug dealing | 3 | 15.0 | 7.0 |
| Stealing/mugging/robbery | 11 | 55.0 | 25.6 |
| Unspecified illegal | 1 | 5.0 | 2.3 |
| Vandalism | 3 | 15.0 | 7.0 |
| Drinking/drug use | 1 | 5.0 | 2.3 |
| Sport | 3 | 15.0 | 7.0 |
| Other | 5 | 25.0 | 11.6 |
| Total | 43 | | 100.0 |

N=20

The issue of street violence featured strongly in the discussions of gang activity. With respect to this, mention was made of a wide range of weapons which were perceived to be used by

gang members: mainly knives and baseball bats, but also including guns and whatever else was at hand. While some young people saw weapons as essentially part of street posturing ('They don't actually use them, they just try to scare off other members' - T10), others expressed a concern over apparently recent trends: 'There used to be no weapons at all, but now, as days go past, people are pulling out more weapons, more people are getting hurt, mainly stabbings' (T8). Importantly, however, the broad perception was that weapons were only used for the purposes of gang fights, or only in emergencies and for self defence. Only occasionally were they mentioned in relation to robberies or muggings.

Gang fights were seen as largely consisting of conflicts between different ethnic groups. This is indicated in Table 8.

Table 8:
Young People's Perceptions of the Different Groups that
Get Involved in Gang Fights

| Types of groups | Response to each category | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Anglo against other Ethnic | 11 | 55.0 | 34.4 |
| One ethnic against 'different' Ethnic | 12 | 60.0 | 37.5 |
| Ethnic amongst 'similar' Ethnic | 2 | 10.0 | 6.3 |
| Ethnic within Ethnic | 1 | 5.0 | 3.1 |
| No particular/many different combinations | 4 | 20.0 | 12.5 |
| Not based on Ethnicity | 2 | 10.0 | 6.3 |
| Total | 32 | | 100.0 |

N=20

The main reasons cited for these fights were power struggles over territory; racism; and someone acting or talking smart. Each of these was largely constructed in terms of specific ethnic groups, and specific ethnic identifications with certain territories and communities.

T12: 'In their local area, they don't want other gangs. Like, in Broadmeadows, if there was a Turkish gang, they don't want another gang; they only want the area to belong to them.'

T13: 'They want to show their power against other nationalities.'

T17: 'Maybe the Australians think they, you know, own this country and the other 'wogs' shouldn't be there.'

According to the young people, gang related activities primarily centre on property crimes, some of which involve violence, and fighting. Gangs, therefore, are primarily seen as anti-social groups, which break the law, and which engage in aggressive behaviour towards others. There is an element of physical threat associated with groups defined as gangs. As one young person commented: 'All they think about is fights and fun, fun, fun; that's it' (T7).

Similar themes were apparent in the answers to a question about gangs in schools. Table 9 indicates the types of concerns regarding gang activity within the educational sphere.

Table 9:
Young People's Perceptions of How Gangs are a Problem in School

| Type of Problem | Response to each category | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Scare/pick on students | 7 | 38.9 | 31.8 |
| Start fights | 4 | 22.2 | 18.2 |
| Racism | 2 | 11.1 | 9.1 |
| Bad influence | 3 | 16.7 | 13.6 |
| Problematic for teachers | 4 | 22.2 | 18.2 |
| Don't know | 1 | 5.6 | 4.5 |
| Other | 1 | 5.6 | 4.5 |
| Total | 22 | | 100.0 |

N=18

Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

Not Applicable = 1 (5%)

Interestingly, the young people had a lot to say about gang type behaviour in the school context. Some of their observations include:

T1: 'If someone has a fight with one person in a gang, the whole gang turns on that person.'

T6: 'There are other kids that want to study and be straight and because of them, (gangs) they can't.'

T7: 'Most of the schools here have Turkish people and if you're not Turkish and you're just walking around the school somewhere, you could get like hit or if you looked the wrong way but you really didn't mean it, you could get bashed.'

T11: 'Students are afraid of them; they're scared that gangs or gang members might do something to them. They're scared to go next to them or even talk to them.'

T12: 'Sometimes they scare you 'cause they want money from you...and you have to pay someone every week. They go "you have to pay us a sum of money to us every week. If you don't pay us, we'll bash you or do this and that." They try to sell you marijuana and smokes.'

T17: 'Probably within a classroom, if there's 20 people, there might be, for an example, 4-5 gang members in the room. Those gang members being there, screaming out, you know, it stops other people from studying.'

Gangs in schools were seen to be highly disruptive to the learning process, and to be a disturbing aggressive force which permeated the schooling experiences of many students. In general the young people we interviewed did not like gangs, whether in school or on the street. However, few expressed the sentiment that they were actually afraid of the gangs, although they certainly were wary of certain groups.

In discussion, the young people said they could understand the positive aspects about being a member of a gang. In particular, they saw gangs as a means of protection, a way of getting a partner or friends, a source of fun and excitement, one way to replace the family for support, and as getting known and respected in one's peer or local community.

Conversely, being a gang member could also foster illegal activity, negatively affect a young

person's future, give them a 'bad' reputation in the community, and lead to greater levels of contact with the police. It was pointed out that it can serve to limit social connection, as well as to constitute a form of social connection. Thus: *'People single you out. You can get respect, but on the other side, people probably don't want to talk to you, or you know, don't want their friends or families to associate with you; they're afraid of you'* (T14).

The young people felt that if gang members were not in a gang, then they would get more out of school. They thought that the young people involved would lead more productive lives, and have better relationships with friends, family and other groups of young people. They could have different kinds of fun in which to engage.

2.5 Problems & Solutions

The young people who participated in this study were very critical of media representations of 'ethnic youth gangs'. They overwhelmingly felt that media reports were biased and only showed the bad side of groups. The reports were seen as exaggerated, and as giving all Turkish young people a bad reputation: *'They show them being bad, always causin' trouble. I admit, they do, but they base it on the whole, on a whole basis, whereas when you look, there's only like, not even 10% of most of the ethnic people cause trouble. There's only that small 10% which puts the rest of the youth ethnic people down'* (T19). Interestingly, the media coverage was also criticised for specifically 'picking on Asians'.

The preferred way to deal with youth gangs was not the coercive approach favoured in many media stories and portrayals. To the contrary, the young Turkish people tended to see responding to the perceived gang problem in proactive, social developmental terms. For example, many spoke of providing gang members more support, help and direction. Others suggested simply leaving them alone and not doing anything. Only a handful thought that gaol or juvenile training programmes was the solution. These perspectives are represented in the following quotations:

T5: 'There's nothing that can be done because you don't know if they're a gang or if they're just a group of mates hanging out.'

T6: 'Police should put a stop to it.'

T3: 'They should be spoken to about the bad things about being a gang member.'

T14: 'Awareness; make them aware that it really ain't cool you know, the tough image really doesn't stick. I mean, if you're young and you're out there and you're tryin' to act tough or be in a gang, all high and mighty and that, you know, you could put yourself in a predicament where you may have the bark but you haven't got the bite behind you and get yourself in a bit of trouble. So, in that sense, it may be unhealthy.'

T15: 'Tell them that gangs are only good for nothing, just a waste of your time and just show them that instead of wasting two-three years of time, everybody's got some ability or something they've got, (something) they can do instead of being in a gang. They don't need that person, or ten-fifteen people telling them that they're better; everyone's got individual things, good in them, and everyone's got to find the best out of each other.'

The proposals for positive interventions, or no interventions, in relation to dealing with youth gangs stem in part from the experiences of the Turkish young people directly. For

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instance, most (15) of the young people felt that there were insufficient activities for young people in their local area. They wanted places which young people could go to that did not cost a lot of money. They wanted more facilities and services which would cater to the needs and desires of young people, especially when it came to recreation and leisure pursuits, sporting activities and youth centres. Most of the young people complained of being bored often.

Simultaneously, the young people also felt restricted in what they could or could not do. This was due to a combination of reasons. For example, there were clear gender differences in what was deemed as appropriate or suitable behaviour for young men and young women. This is seen in Table 10.

Table 10:
Young People's Perceptions of Gender Differences in the Activities
of Young Men and Women

| Types of differences | Response to each category | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Girls into shopping/clothes | 4 | 26.7 | 22.2 |
| Girls help at home more | 6 | 40.0 | 33.3 |
| Guys play games/pinnies more | 3 | 20.0 | 16.7 |
| Don't know | 4 | 26.7 | 22.2 |
| Other | 1 | 6.7 | 5.6 |
| Total | 18 | | 100.0 |

N=15

Not Applicable = 5 (25%)

Young women experienced more restrictions on where they could go and what they could do because of family pressures, concerns about safety, and broad cultural factors. These gender differences are evident in the following quotations:

T5: 'Definitely when it comes to Turkish people, because the guys, 'cause they're boys, they can go out more. They've got much more freedom than what girls have. It's because of the world, because you don't see guys getting raped, but girls always do; so I guess parents are just scared.'

T10: 'Women usually go to school, whereas young men hang around with the boys.'

T12: 'Women (Turkish) mostly stay at home because of their religion, 'cause they're not allowed to go out. The men usually go to coffee shops with their friends to play cards.'

T1: 'Because I'm female; it would be different if I was a boy.'

T6: 'Because of my culture; there's the view that women shouldn't go out too much – stay home and look after the kids, cook, clean.'

T7: 'Strict parents; you don't want to put them down, go to the wrong place. If you come home with a black eye or something, your parents would freak out, so you stick to the good places, think before you do something.'

T15: 'General safety concerns.'

For young men, who do have greater opportunity to spend time outside the parental home, the issues pertaining to feelings of restriction are quite different to those of their female counterparts. For instance, when asked about the trouble which groups experience on the streets 14 respondents said 'police harassment', and half this number referred to 'fighting'. This can have an impact on how young people use public spaces, and where they spend most of their time.

Eleven of the young people had had direct contact with the police. Most described the experience as generally bad. One had been helped by the police when they were a victim of a crime. Otherwise, the young people had had a bad experience consisting of one of two kinds of interaction. First, a number said that they were hassled, searched on the street or threatened by the police. They did not think that this was fair.

T10: 'Every time we hang around with groups they try to disperse us and treat us as if we're just nothing. One day we were hanging around at the shopping centre with friends and talking there and one of the shop owners must have complained and the cops came and just kicked us out of there.'

T14: 'Not knowing what the police is going on about and just keep interrogating you for some reason where you get 'pissed off' and you're like "What are you asking me for? What's the problem, what's the drama?" And then when the police 'arse' up a bit and then the situation could get out of control you know, which depends on you know, what you're feeling at the time – whether you want to put up with it, just co-operate, or whether you really don't want to co-operate and feel that your rights are being impeded on.'

Secondly, five of the respondents had been caught by the police while committing a crime or associating with someone else who was committing a crime. The issue here was not the police intervention per se, but how the police intervened.

T8: 'Four of my mates and I went to a shopping centre and one of my mates stole something and the police got all five of us and we were all charged for that. Most of the police treat people bad like us. If you look like a gang member, if your looks is different to other peoples', like if you've got a long hairstyle or you've got a beanie on top or your hair's different, you don't look like, you look like a street kid, what they'll do is, they'll treat you like a street kid. They won't treat you like a normal human. They're abusive; they swear, – they're not meant to swear – but what can you do? When you're in the room with a police officer and you're just a street kid, or you just hang around, the police are more higher than you and you can't do nothing about it. Physically, they will usually hit you and kick you, but leave no bruises on you so you can't charge them for none of that; usually (they'll abuse you) with telephone books.'

T9: 'When you're in the police station, you've got no such thing as rights; they treat you like an animal. They're not meant to hold you for more than four hours, (but) they'll hold you for six or eight hours, they'll hold you for ten hours. What can you do about it? Once you go into Dimboola road, you don't come out without being touched.'

T18: 'The cop that took me to County Court (abused me), not physical-wise, like not in hurting me wise, but mentally, like the way he talked to me, charged me, the way he was harassing me during the court case "You're gonna go to jail, that's it." He was laughing at me.'

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The issue here is less that of the police doing their job, and rightfully enforcing the law, than that of not treating the young people with respect and dignity in the course of performing their legal duties.

When answering a question about what the police can do about gangs, most of the young people responded that the police cannot do much anyway. Some said that they should stop hassling young people, others suggested that the police get to know the young people better. A strong message was that the police should maintain a public presence in the local area, but they should undertake their duties in a more youth-friendly fashion.

Even more of the young people (14) had had contact with security guards, both within shopping centres and at nightclubs. They were evenly split, however, in how they assessed the nature of this contact.

A number of the young people were friends with security guards, had been helped or protected by them, or been let into clubs or discos by them. Most of these experiences related to nightspots.

T14: 'A lot of it's respect. You know, like, if you walk up to a security guard and just show him that, you know, you're an alright type of bloke or that you're not there to cause any trouble, you're just there to have a good time and you let him know that straight up, you know, everything sort of goes smoothly. Even if it does get a bit outta hand, you say to the bloke " Look, I'm here for a good time, you know, look after me" and maybe just tell him " Look I'm here for a good time, for a long time, you know, I may drink a bit, get a bit outta hand, but you know, I'm gonna be OK. "'

T15: 'It's been good when I've been outnumbered and they've (security guards) helped us, kicked the other people out instead of us, 'cause we've been less majority of us, so they've protected us in that way.'

Alternatively, those who did not like security guards and who had had bad experiences referred to being kicked out or moved on from public spaces, being hassled or being subject to physical violence. Most of the bad experiences were associated with the shopping centres.

T2: 'We went to the shopping centre with 5 of my girlfriends and the security guard sort of came up to us and asked us what we were doing at a shopping centre. Maybe he thought we looked suspicious – not that we did anything or anything.'

T7: '[Particular regional area] has got no billiard joint, community areas or game centres where people can go and waste their time and the only place there was the shopping centre. Back a year ago the shopping centre said no more louts, no more little Turkish people or Lebanese or whatever – they're not allowed to go to the shopping centre any more. So, what they (security guards) do when we go there, they'll call the police and the police will come and abuse us. But, now the centre have found an idea of putting Turkish security guards there and Muslim security guards, so they can communicate with us and tell us and we'll listen to them all.'

Aside from difficulties linked to state police and private security guards, the young people also spoke about the impact of family problems. Most of the young people saw the family as being of great importance in their lives. However, over half of the young people were also experiencing family related problems. Many of these revolved around issues relating to excessive control and restricted freedom (a particularly important issue for the young

women), culture clashes, and to parental perceptions of 'undesirable' friends. Specific issues, such as alcoholism, were also mentioned in particular cases.

When experiencing family problems, the young people would turn to their friends or partners, other relatives, or their parents to try to work things out. They would also keep things to themselves. A number of the young people had also sought advice, information or support from local welfare agencies. Beyond this, their only real contact with government agencies was for the purposes of money, or assistance in looking for work.

The young people were asked what a variety of agencies and institutions might be able to do about youth gangs. In most cases, they were somewhat cynical that anything constructive could be done, or they simply did not know what could be done. They did have more definite ideas when it came to what schools ought to do. On the one hand, they offered the suggestion that schools should teach gang members about the consequences of and alternatives to gang life. On the other hand, there were calls to expel them, or at the least, to separate them from the rest of the student body. Some of their observations and suggestions included:

T2: 'Teachers aren't there to deal with gangs, they're there to educate the youngsters.'

T14: 'Educational videos or something, or just knowledge...show them the effects of gangs, maybe the aftermath of gangs, some big guns that have ended up in hospital, things like that. Just show them the ugly side of it. Me, myself, I've seen the ugly side of it where at the start I thought "Yeah, this is cool, this is great", until I've seen some pretty heavy casualties, where I've thought maybe this isn't so cool and that maybe sometimes it just goes over the line.'

T17: 'During the day it helps you, because you're there, you know, and you know their rules, like you can't do anything wrong and you're in their grounds so you know, you can't practically get up to much mischief. But, when you get out of the school, that's where the problem is; that's where the gang problem is, not really in school.'

T18: 'Have a special class once a week or something saying that if you get into this sort of, not just in gangs, like when you talk gangs, you talk drugs as well. Maybe get a mixed subject going showing like the effects of all these gangs, like getting into drugs, this and that, talk about the drugs, talk about the jail terms, all these offences you could cop. Make them aware of everything that could, outcomes of being involved in a gang.'

T19: 'Educate students more about racism.'

Social services and migrant services were seen to have a limited role in responding to the youth gang phenomenon. However, as indicated in Table 11, the government was seen to have a role in improving life opportunities for young people.

Table 11:
Young People's Perceptions of What the Government Can Do about Gangs

| Type of action | Response to each category | | |
|---|---------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| | Number | Percent (respondents) | Percent (responses) |
| Education/training | 2 | 10.5 | 8.7 |
| Employ outreach workers | 1 | 5.3 | 4.3 |
| Provide free hang out places for young people | 3 | 15.8 | 13.0 |
| Provide more jobs | 4 | 21.1 | 17.4 |
| Provide more funding for young people | 1 | 5.3 | 4.3 |
| Deal with them more harshly | 3 | 15.8 | 13.0 |
| Can't do much | 5 | 26.3 | 21.7 |
| Don't know | 1 | 5.3 | 4.3 |
| Other | 3 | 15.8 | 13.0 |
| Total | 23 | | 100.0 |

N=19

Missing Responses =1 (5%)

The need for concerted government action was recognised, as was the urgency for government action now.

T15: 'Funding; if it's financially backed (programs to tackle gangs), of course it could be done. There's no such thing in Australia that it can't be done. Australia is starting to get a taste of gangs and before it gets big, established, they can stop it if they really wanted to.'

T17: 'The government, yes, for sure, if they wanted to. Like I said, the problem is when they leave school. If they could get into every suburb and have like a community centre where everyone could just go around and where they don't have to pay to play billiards...where they can go there and have a free coffee, sit down, associate with people, like be around their own group as well, it keeps them off the street, out of trouble and they get good ideas of the future, not bad ideas where they could get out on the street and come across the worst things.'

T18: 'Start doin' some projects, like sport stadiums, anything you know. A bit of entertainment – that's pretty cheap you know 'cause all of them, they're unemployed you know, what can you do?'

T19: '90% of the people who are in gangs are unemployed. If they can do something for the unemployed, they'll do something for gangs. But, in my thoughts, not with this government.'

In the end, it was acknowledged that dealing with youth gangs will require a multi-pronged strategy. There could be no 'quick fix' solution. Rather, commitment was needed across a range of policy and institutional areas. As part of this process, the needs and opinions of young people themselves would have to be an important component if constructive social change is to occur.

2.6 Conclusion

This study has been based upon interviews with 20 young people associated with the Turkish community in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. From the point of view of social resources, most of the young people interviewed did not have much money, and few had paid employment. Most came from families which were similarly financially disadvantaged.

The young people lived in an area which appeared to lack adequate services, employment opportunities and leisure facilities for the local youth population in general. When asked about any ethnic differences in activities in the local area, for example, one young person pointed out that:

T19: 'In this area I don't think so, 'cause we've got a large mixture of ethnic people here – we've got Chinese, we've got Turk, we've got Vietnamese, we've got Australian – and if it's not the 'nips' smoking marijuana at the community centre, it'll be the Australians, if it's not the Australians, it's the Turks, if it's not the Turks, it's the Vietnamese. They all do basically the same thing because as a whole, there is nothing else to do; there is no football grounds, there is no soccer grounds. The closest soccer ground's like a 45 minute walk down the road; guys aren't going to walk that far just to play soccer.'

A commonality in circumstance, however, did not necessarily translate into a common identity. There appeared, for example, to be substantial differences and conflicts between different groups, frequently based upon ethnic background.

On the specific issue of gangs, the study revealed several propositions regarding the nature of 'youth gangs' in this local area:

- It was very difficult to separate out 'gangs' from 'groups' of young people, and in many cases the *notion of gang was disputed* by participants in this study, although conflict between different ethnic groups was evident
- *Gang behaviour* was generally associated with those groups which engaged in illegal activity, such as property crime, and which indulged in aggressive, violent behaviour, such as street fights
- *School gangs* were identified, and these consisted of groups of young people whose activity generally revolved around physical intimidation of other students (and in some cases teachers) and which was disruptive of schooling in general

It was recognised that most young people were in some way or another associated with a larger group. This was seen as perfectly normal, and not as indicating gang membership as such.

The rationale for most of the youth formations was social, rather than criminal. Many of the young people in this study spent time with friends from similar backgrounds (e.g., sharing a common home language, and religion). There were major gender differences in how the young people spent their time, with whom and in which places. Young men tended to have greater freedom from parental control, although most of the sample group remained living at home after completion of schooling. Young women, on the other hand, were more restricted in their movements and activities, due to parental controls and cultural prescriptions regarding appropriate roles and behaviour.

Most of the young people had a vision of an ideal future in which money and being financially better off were key goals. When asked what they would like to be doing in 5 years time, a majority of respondents mentioned 'working', and the second highest response was 'tertiary education'. While family and friendship relationships were important, social well-being was also intimately related to attaining paid employment and gaining financial security.

Gang behaviour was linked to disadvantaged socio-economic circumstances in several different ways. For example, the situation and experiences of unemployment and lack of income security were mentioned as reasons for criminal and anti-social behaviour. So too, however, was the notion that, lacking the social status that comes with employment or educational achievement, some young people turned to gang membership as a means to assert their identity and worth at the local community level. Another factor influencing gang-like behaviour was the nature of the relationship between groups of young people from different ethnic backgrounds. Racism was a factor here as well.

Whether a member of a 'gang' or not, or whether engaging in illegal or legal behaviour or not, the young Turkish people we spoke to had a strong desire to be respected and to be treated in a dignified and fair manner. They also wanted to make something of themselves in the context of their own community, their local area and the wider Australian society. They were trying to do so, however, in a social climate within which the meeting of their needs, desires and aspirations is becoming increasingly difficult.

2.7 Recommendations

i. Canadian Gangs and Ethnicity

In the study of youth gangs in Vancouver, Gordon and Foley (1998: 127) make the observation that:

while the number of individuals involved in organizations, gangs and groups is small (tiny might be a better adjective) immigrants who are from visible ethnic minorities are significantly over-represented. This may be a function of ethnic and economic marginality. The lack of language, and a lack of both money and the means to obtain money and material goods legitimately may result in individuals clustering in supportive groups where they are understood and can make money, albeit illegally.

The report goes on to note that it appears that settlement services are not reaching some individuals and families, and that there is a need for more social workers who understand the structures, customs, values and norms of particular immigrant cultures and who can speak the languages of newly arrived individuals and families.

The report recommends that the ethnic minority families and young people would benefit from some or all of the following (Gordon & Foley, 1998: 127-128):

- Education about Canada and the Canadian way of life prior to leaving the country of origin
- Opportunities to discuss Canada and the Canadian way of life, and the probable impact on the family unit, before leaving the country of origin
- Access to adequate settlement services immediately upon arrival, and for an extended period thereafter

- ESL [English as Second Language] classes for adults that are free and available during the day, in the evenings and at weekends
- ESL classes for children that are free and available outside regular classroom time
- Access to community kitchens and similar programmes that address the problem of family isolation
- Programmes specifically designed for immigrants from war zones to help reduce the long term effects of exposure to violence
- Access to 'buddy' systems whereby support can be provided for individuals and families during their first few years of life in Canada

It is further recommended that there be additional programming for immigrants aimed at assisting individuals to find rewarding employment, especially young adult males who are at risk of drifting into criminal activity.

ii. Public Spaces and Ethnicity in Australia

The most sustained analysis of how young ethnic minority people actually use public space – which has obvious implications regarding gang-related perceptions and activities – has been a study undertaken in four local government areas in Sydney (Pe-Pua, 1996). A wide range of issues relating to the lives of 100 street-frequenting non-English speaking background young people were investigated. The discussions and interviews covered topics such as family issues, housing and accommodation issues, social and recreational needs, financial needs, employment issues, educational and training issues, physical and mental health, legal issues and youth services.

With respect to the specific issue of public space use, the study found that (Pe-Pua, 1996: 115):

The activities associated with street-frequenting ranged from illegal activities to fun activities, socialising, fighting or stirring up trouble, smoking and others. The reasons for street-frequenting were boredom, family-related, for economic or moral support, because of the freedom it provides, and others. The perceived benefits were: widening one's social network; having fun; learning experience; freedom and a sense of power; escape from problems; economic gains, and others. The perceived disadvantages were related to problems with the police; a negative image or bad treatment received from others, especially adults; getting into trouble or being involved in fights; health or drug and alcohol problems; lack of adequate shelter or food; financial worries; emotional burden; and general safety.

On the basis of the study's findings, a number of recommendations were put forward, some of which are relevant to the present study. These include (Pe-Pua, 1996):

- that different strategies for disseminating information on the background and needs of street-frequenting young people be undertaken, to be targeted at different groups
- that the culture or practice of service provision (e.g., police, youth and community, health) be changed to have a more effective ethnic minority youth focus, while maintaining a high level of customer service and professionalism

- that youth services incorporate a mobile outreach and street-based service delivery model to access street-frequenting young people
- that a multi-skilled, multi-purpose type of structure for a youth centre be set up
- that more street workers be hired, or street and outreach work be strongly encouraged as part of youth work, provided adequate funding support and human resources are made available
- that the recreational needs of these young people be addressed by making alternative forms of recreation available

Pe-Pua (1996) concludes that the key to providing for the needs of ethnic minority street-frequenting young people are education and employment opportunities. Changes to existing services would be a step in the right direction, and assist in developing further these opportunities.

iii. Recommendations Arising from the Present Study

The key issues arising from this study relate to the nature of group formations involving young people from distinctive ethnic minority backgrounds, the tensions between different groups of young people in schools and on the streets, and the socio-economic circumstances of specific ethnic minority youth.

Following from the perceptions of the young people themselves, and the findings of this and other reports, the following recommendations appear warranted:

- *Specific spaces and facilities should be reserved*, perhaps at designated times, exclusively for certain young people (e.g., swimming pools, rooms that could be used for prayers), in order that religious and cultural practices be acknowledged and respected in a dignified and inclusive manner
- It is essential that young people in general be provided with *education in cross-cultural issues* in order that the backgrounds, cultures and patterns of life pertaining to specific ethnic groups be better understood by all concerned
- Attention must also be directed at the provision of *anti-racist education*, so that issues of discrimination, prejudice and unequal power relations be analysed and discussed in an enlightened, informative and empathetic manner
- Following the example of the City of Adelaide (see White, 1998: 47), there should be developed at the local, regional and state levels a series of *youth reconciliation projects*, that will promote the diversity of cultures among young people, aim to reduce violence between them, and give young people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds the practical opportunity to get to know each other at a personal and group level
- Concerted action is needed on the specific issue of school bullying so that appropriate *conflict resolution and anti-violence strategies* be put into place in order to reduce the number of such incidents and to reassure students of their safety and security within the educational institution
- *Special provisions* are needed for those young people who, due to their bullying or gang-related behaviour, might normally be excluded from school, but who still require

community support and appropriate educational programmes to ensure that they have the chance to contribute positively to society, rather than to be marginalised even further from the mainstream

- Strategic action is needed in the area of *youth unemployment* and in the creation of jobs for particularly disadvantaged groups and communities, especially since there is increasing evidence that certain neighbourhoods are likely to become ghettoised if sustained intervention on these matters is not undertaken
- The levels and types of *income support* for young people needs to be increased and made relevant to the real needs, living costs and spending patterns of young people, as well as taking into account their contributions to the household income
- The media need to be strongly encouraged to review *programme and reporting content*, with a view to providing greater information and more rounded accounts of specific ethnic minority groups, and so that the use of gratuitous images and descriptions based upon stereotypes be monitored and actively discouraged.

If we, as a society, are to tackle issues surrounding 'youth gangs', then, as a society, we must also recognise our responsibilities in creating the conditions which generate the perceptions of, fear of, and negative responses to such phenomenon. In the context of the present report, this means that many more community resources need to be directed toward the youth population. These are needed in order to better educate young people generally about the diverse nature of the Australian population; to provide them with creative leisure outlets, and safe and secure schools and public spaces; and to engage with them about how best to deal with issues of violence, racism and social conflict involving different groups. The time to provide such community resources is now.

2.8 References

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