Australian Multicultural Foundation

Ethnic Youth Gangs in Australia
Do They Exist?

Report No. 4
Somalian Young People

by
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1999

Acknowledgements

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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.

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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 overwhelming 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:

Somalian Young People

2.1 Social History

Recent years have seen an increasing number of refugee families from the Horn of Africa re-settling in Australia (Ransley & Fotiadis, 1999). These countries include Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan. For the purposes of the present investigation, young people from Somalia were interviewed.

Somalia is situated on the Horn of Africa. The official language is Somali, complemented by Arabic and English. About 99 per cent of Somalis are Sunni Muslims. Somali communities are united into a larger social and political unit called a *rer*, each with its own elected leader.

Over the years, Somalia has been colonised by several different countries, including France, Italy and Britain. Despite the impact of these different colonial interventions, the Somali have maintained their specific cultural and religious characteristics.

In recent times various droughts, which have produced famine, have had a major impact on the health and well-being of the Somali population. Simultaneously, intense rivalries between various armed factions have resulted in a situation of bloody conflict lasting many years. Together these factors have contributed to the creation of large numbers of Somali refugees, who were joined by many refugees escaping from similar conditions in nearby Ethiopia. In 1989, there were about 350,000 Somali people seeking protection and refuge.

Many of the Somali refugees were women and children who were victims of abuses carried out by the warring militias of clan-based factions. In the course of these conflicts, thousands of Somalis have been killed, many others have been tortured, raped and mistreated, and children have suffered violence against them. As well, a large number have been left mutilated by the sentences of amputation handed down by the Islamic courts in Somalia. Many government institutions have been destroyed as a consequence of the civil war, which has further exacerbated the hardships faced by many ordinary Somalians (see Batrouney, 1991; Cox et al., 1998).

i.   *Migration*

Many Somali refugees have experienced confinement in refugee camps, and some but not all have been able to find asylum in other countries, including Australia. According to the 1996 Census, there were 2,045 Somali people living in Australia.

The majority of Somalia refugees (1,392 or 68 per cent) are located in Victoria. The next largest group is in New South Wales, while the remainder are spread across the other States (ABS, 1998). The number of Somali persons that settled in Victoria in 1996 represented an increase of 450.2 per cent since 1991.

Most of these migrants are males. This masculine migration is the result of several factors. For example, women in Africa are less mobile than men. This is because women refugees are more likely to have the responsibility for the children, and partly as a consequence of this, the selection process for resettlement tends to favour males (Batrouney, 1991). However, a significant number of migrants have been young people under the age of 24 years, and young African women who are single parents comprise a significant proportion of welfare and social service users from the Horn of Africa region (Ransley & Fotiadis, 1999).

In the last seven years, 820 persons born in Somalia have arrived in Australia under the Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program category. A further 275 Somalis have arrived in Australia under the Family reunion program. This is not unusual, as the initial refugee movements to Australia are usually followed by those entering under the family reunion program.

The occupational skill level for the Somalis has been lower overall than the skill level for all settler arrivals. The majority are semi-skilled or unskilled, and as a result there appears to be an above average level of economic disadvantage, and poverty, in the Somalia-born population residing in Australia.

Most Somalia immigrants are in the 25-34 age group. The groups either side of this range, namely the 20-24 and 35-39, are the next largest age groups. This, too, is not uncommon in most migration trends, given the tendency for young family groups and young single people to predominate in the immigration process. Overall there is a significant population of people in their teens and early 20s. This means that education is an important issue. Likewise, the entry of inexperienced persons into the workforce looms large as an issue for the community. Furthermore, since the migration of Somalians to Australia began, the overall number of Somali children seems to be increasing dramatically – which is not unexpected given the young age profile of the group.

Many young people have suffered disrupted schooling due to the conditions in their homeland, and to the migration process itself, and this can affect their experience of the educational system in Australia (Ransley & Potiadis, 1999). Schooling for these young people is thus a very important issue, as is acceptance by their peer groups (Cox et. al., 1998).

ii.   *Settlement experiences*

The evidence suggests that many of the settlers are experiencing considerable hardship and frustration. Inability to find employment, problems with housing, gaining income support, negative experiences with recognition of qualifications, language difficulties, and so on are problems shared by Somalians with a number of other recently arrived immigrant groups in Australia (Cox et al., 1998; Ransley & Fotiadis, 1999).

 In many cases the situation of Somalians is often worse than that of other Black African arrivals. Many arrived as illegal immigrants, or as visitors or students, and then have had to apply for a change of status. This usually entails a long wait (sometimes years) to have their situation determined. They are more likely to arrive alone, and to both need and want to sponsor relatives. Their English is less advanced than other migrants, and so they have a greater need for English language training. Ultimately, these refugee arrivals are more likely to find settlement harder than expected, and they are more likely to be dissatisfied or unhappy here (see Cox et al. 1998; Lampugnani, 1998).

In a recent study, Cox and associates (1998) indicated that the most disturbing finding was the extent of discrimination that Somalis and other Black Africans are experiencing as they settle into Australia. Approximately 7 out of 10 of the sample of 221 Black Africans reported experiences of racial or ethnic-based discrimination. The great majority of Black Africans surveyed said that this antagonism towards them was inhibiting and frustrating their settlement at virtually every turn. They felt that they were discriminated against in the employment market, even when they possessed Australian qualifications. They tended to

see themselves as discriminated against in their attempts to sponsor relatives to Australia. They experience discrimination when they seek out accommodation. And they experienced discrimination and prejudice when they pursued everyday activities like using public transport, as well as in their contacts with police (see Batrouney, 1991: 77).

It needs to be borne in mind that many Somalians have already undergone considerable trauma associated with famine and war in their homeland, and in the migration process itself. The problems they experience in settling into the Australian social and cultural environment adds yet another dimension to the burdens they are forced to endure as they attempt to re-build their lives, families and communities in this country.

2.2 Profile of Youth Interviewed

Twenty young people from the Somalian community in Australia were interviewed for this study. All of the young people had been born in Somalia. Most (12) had spent some time in Kenya before coming to Australia, 5 had been in Italy, 1 in Yemen and 1 person had come directly from Somalia.

Eight of the respondents were female, and 12 male. Their ages ranged from 12 to 26, but most of the young people were aged between 15 and 18 (12 out of 20). All of them were Muslim, in terms of religious orientation and affiliation. At the time of interview, they lived mainly in the Melbourne suburbs of Heidelberg, Preston, Carlton and Braybrook.

Each of the young people had the experience of leaving a home country. They began to arrive in Australia in 1988, with the majority (15) coming between 1992 and 1995. According to the young people, they entered the country under three types of programme: migrant (6), refugee (7) and family reunion (7).

The migration experience has been an uneasy one. Many of the young people referred to the war in their home country, and how they felt safer here. Nevertheless, it was often very difficult for them to adjust to Australian conditions. For instance, there were language barriers, they had to meet new people and make new friends, and the lifestyle and general culture were very different to what they were used to. On the other hand, they uniformly said that being able to participate in formal education was a real plus, and they enjoyed the prospect of learning new things.

When they first arrived, the Somalian young people were put into different types of accommodation. These included:

• Migrant hostel

• Resettlement flat

• Relatives/family friend

• Private rental

Most of the young people and their families stayed in these residences only temporarily. After the first period of settlement, they have tended to move into better housing, including government housing, which offered more room for the families. The type of living quarters was evenly split between houses, and units/flats.

A majority of the young people lived with both their parents, or with their mother. Somali was the main language used at home for 17 out of the 20 young people. Only 2 spoke English at home, with the other speaking dual languages. With their peer groups, however, 10 spoke English as the main language, 7 alternated between the two languages, and only 3 spoke Somali.

The socio-economic situation of these young people was generally poor. Only 3 of the mothers, and 2 of the fathers were said to be in formal waged employment, and even then the work available tended to be casual in nature. Of the mothers, 1 was deceased, and 2 were overseas. Of the fathers, 4 were deceased, and 3 were overseas. In general, the families were reliant on government social security benefits of some kind, including unemployment and single parent.

Only 1 person in the sample had not gone to school in Australia. As indicated in Table 1, education and schooling generally was basically regarded in a very positive light.

Table 1:
What Young People Like/Liked about School

Positive aspects about school	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Learning/education	19	95.0	73.1
Friends	2	10.0	7.7
Teachers	1	5.0	3.8
Some subjects	1	5.0	3.8
Opportunities for the future	2	5.0	7.7
Other	1	5.0	3.8
Total	26		100.0

N= 20

The enthusiasm which these young people have for education is captured in the following quotations. They were asked what they liked about schooling:

> S6: *'Increasing your knowledge; learning more and more everyday.'*
>
> S7: *'I think school...is the main things... I mean, there's nothing I can do without studying. It might allow me to go high places, to have a better life.'*
>
> S13: *'It's great, because I get to learn a lot. Every year I learn more and I'd like to keep going.'*
>
> S14: *'Education, and you learn a lot of new things, and it's good for your future.'*
>
> S17: *'Oh (laughing) that is a hard question. Well, what do I like about school is, you know, is, is got socialising you know, with your friends; spend time with your friends. Well, teachers – they're, some of them are nice and some of them aren't that nice. And also, you know, I like learning things. Yeah.'*
>
> S18: *'Learning; about knowing new things.'*
>
> S19: *'They teach us things and you get a good education.'*

The positive outlook to education was also reflected in the answers to what the young people did not like about schooling. Here a handful of respondents mentioned 'homework', but a similar number also said 'nothing'. Education seemed to be valued in its own right, as well as being a potential stepping stone to future employment or further study.

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. Only 2 of the young people were employed at the time of interview (1 full-time, 1 part-time). Of the 8 young people who had at one time worked, no one had spent more than 6 months in the job (5 had only worked between 1 day and 1 month). Nine of the respondents had undergone some type of job training or work experience, with 4 doing so under the auspices of Department of Social Security training requirements.

Youth unemployment was seen to be prevalent in the local areas in which the Somali young people lived. Not surprisingly, they saw casual and part-time jobs, and state benefits, as major sources of income for young people in their areas. For themselves, the sources of income rarely involved paid work. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2:
Sources of Income for Young People Interviewed

Sources of income	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Unemployment/DSS benefits	4	20.0	20.0
Austudy	7	35.0	35.0
Family	4	20.0	20.0
Work	1	5.0	5.0
Casual/part time job	2	10.0	10.0
No income	2	10.0	10.0
Total	20		100.0

N=20

Given their family situations, and the economically disadvantaged nature of their living circumstances, the young people appeared to play an important financial role in sustaining their households. Table 3 provides details of how they spent their money.

Table 3:
Ways in which Young People Spent Their Money

Ways in which money is spent	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Rent	8	42.1	21.1
Food/bills	14	73.7	36.8
Entertainment	5	5.3	13.2
Travel	2	10.5	5.3
Clothes	4	21.1	10.5
Family	1	5.3	2.6
Books/school	2	10.5	5.3
Other	2	10.5	5.3
Total	38		100.0

N= 19
Missing Responses =1 (5%)

In addition to making financial contributions – to rent, food, bills, travel, among other things – a majority (13) of the young people also helped out doing unpaid work for friends or family. Most of this consisted of domestic labour and chores around the house, and also childcare. They did not do this type of work for 'favours', but as simply part of the household routine.

Again, reflecting the generally disadvantaged situation of their immediate families, the young people were fairly reluctant to go to their parents when experiencing their own financial problems. Only 8 of the respondents said they would approach their parents in such a case. The next highest response (6) was 'DSS' [Department of Social Security], followed by 'go to other relatives' (3).

The Somalian young people were then asked what young people in general did for money involving activities of an illegal nature. Their responses are presented in Table 4.

Table 4:
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	15	75.0	46.9
Shoplifting/sale of stolen goods	8	40.0	25.0
Theft (other than shoplifting)	4	20.0	12.5
Mugging/jumping	2	10.0	6.3
Don't know	3	15.0	9.4
Total	32		100.0

N=20

As seen here, the two key areas for possible criminal involvement were identified as drug dealing, and property theft. The main reason why young people might engage in these activities was simply, they need the money. Peer pressure and excitement were also mentioned, but by far and away gaining additional income was seen as the primary motivating force.

Questions were also asked regarding illegal activity that was not done simply or solely for the purposes of gaining money. The responses are shown in Table 5.

Table 5:
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	3	15.8	12.0
Drug/alcohol use	6	31.6	24.0
Fighting/assaults	4	21.1	16.0
Vandalism/graffiti	2	10.5	8.0
Stealing for own use	3	15.8	12.0
Don't know	6	31.6	24.0
Other	1	5.3	4.0
Total	25		100.0

N=19
Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

The main reasons for these kinds of activities were pursuit of fun and excitement, dealing with boredom, peer pressure and showing off, and problems at home. The notion of gaining status was mentioned by one young person: *'With graffiti, they probably do it to make a statement and say that they exist in the world. It's a trademark or whatever. And fights, I don't know, to prove themselves' (S13).* For another, the problem was seen to stem from how the young people were brought up by their parents: *'Maybe lack of good upbringing, lack of religious beliefs; things like that' (S16).* More generally, the basic feeling was that young people engage in such activity as a means to break from the normal routines and pressures of everyday life.

2.4 Youth Gangs

A series of questions were put to the young people about the nature and activities of 'youth gangs' in the neighbourhoods. We started by asking them where young people hung out in the local areas. The most often referred to places were recreation and sporting facilities. After this, they mentioned places such as shopping centres, the street outside shops, friends' houses and commercial venues such as cafes and clubs.

The Somalians agreed that young people do tend to hang around in groups, especially the young men. When asked what young people's groups have in common with each other, a variety of responses were given. These are shown in Table 6.

Table 6:
Interviewees' Perceptions of What Young People's Groups
have in Common with Each Other

Aspects of Group	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Ethnicity/culture	2	10.0	5.9
Same interests/activities	5	25.0	14.7
Problems at home	1	5.0	2.9
Image/dress/style	11	55.0	32.4
Music	8	40.0	23.5
Same school	1	5.0	2.9
Nothing in common	3	15.0	8.8
Don't know	2	10.0	5.9
Other	1	5.0	2.9
Total	33		100.0

N=10

In this account, it would appear that the key distinguishing characteristics of groups are those associated with subcultural preferences in image, dress, style and music. The role of ethnicity is not seen as particularly significant in terms of the membership of specific groups of young people. This only applies, however, insofar as we are talking about activities and group formation within a particular community.

For instance, when questions were asked about the ethnic minority population as a whole, in relation to other ethnic groups, clear social differences emerged. This is demonstrated in Table 7, which deals with perceived differences in the activities of young people from different ethnic backgrounds.

Table 7:
Interviewees' Perceptions of Ethnic Differences
in the Activities of Young People

Types of Differences	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Religious/cultural	8	53.3	36.4
Recreational	5	33.3	22.7
Somalian people spend more time with their family	3	20.0	13.6
Don't know	6	40.0	27.3
Total	22		100.0

N=15
Missing Responses = 2 (10%)
Not Applicable = 3 (15%)

What this seems to indicate is that there are certain *commonalities* amongst Somalian young people in terms of, for example, religious commitments. Simultaneously, they exhibit *particular differences* according to factors such as musical taste and manner of dress. The shared experiences of the Somalian young people tended to be associated with religious prescriptions and proscriptions, as well as general recreational preferences.

> *S4: 'Young Muslim people, they're meant to be spending their time going to the mosque and learning some Koran.'*

> *S13: 'It depends on the actual ethnic group, because different people have different focuses in their lives. The religious thing as well will stop you from doing a lot of things if you're from one ethnic group to another.'*

> *S16: 'Like for female Somalis, it's a lot harder to maybe be involved in other communities, or other activities, so most of our life's more constricted 'cos a lot of things we're not allowed to do. So, we spend most of our time with other people from our society. I think different (ethnic) members, they tend to associate with their own members and their own groups and just spend it doing different things.'*

> *S17: 'Well, us for example, us Somalians you know, some of my friends, they're not Somalians, they might go and enjoy themselves at nightclubs, but us Somalians, you know, we don't go there.'*

> *S18: 'Like us, we like, we can't take off our scarves, so (we) can't wear like short stuff, go play sports against the boys. We have to stay home.'*

> *S19: 'Somalian kids, they play basketball. The Aussie kids usually play football and cricket.'*

> *S20: '(Somalian people) read the Koran.'*

Ethnicity is, however, only one of the key points of demarcation between different types of groups of young people. In addition to differences within a community (based upon popular culture and personal taste), and differences between communities (based upon religion and broad cultural interests), there is then another type of distinction that was identified. This is the distinction between 'groups' and 'gangs'.

For example, Table **8** provides insight into how difference is constructed in how young people use the street.

Table 8:
Interviewees' Perceptions of the Main Differences Between the Groups which
Hang Out on the Streets

Group differences	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Ethnicity	3	15.0	11.5
Clothes/style	1	5.0	3.8
Leisure activities	3	15.0	11.5
Fun groups vs troublemakers/criminals	8	40.0	30.8
No difference	3	15.0	11.5
Don't know	4	20.0	15.4
Other	4	20.0	15.4
Total	26		100.0

N=20

It was recognised by the Somalian young people that young people may hang out on the street for different reasons. What really distinguished the different groups of young people was whether or not they engaged in illegal or criminal activity, although even this was ambiguous. As one young person observed: *'Not really much difference. They do the same things, but I guess they don't have the gang security and the membership' (S16).* In general, however, the key characteristic of 'gangs' was seen to be crime.

> S3: *'Groups are people who get together and gangs are a group of people who get together to commit crimes. They are thieves.'*

> S7: *'A gang is mainly criminals, that's how I would describe it. They always do criminal activities and stuff like that. And groups only for going somewhere together, having fun and all that – no criminal activities.'*

> S11: *'Gangs, they sell drugs. It's a group who hang around together. They'll be doing the same things as other groups, but these groups have knives, guns, sell drugs in the street; stuff like that.'*

> S19: *'Well, a group of kids is like, they don't do bad things, they just hang together. But with a gang, they like, they do crime.'*

Gangs were also defined in terms of a propensity to engage in fights, and to use more extreme forms of violence.

> S12: *'A gang is people that wanna have fights with other people, but a group of friends means just play around – basketball.'*

> S17: *'Yeah, of course. Well, a gang's you know, different. Group of young people, they might be just you know, they're friends, they having fun you know, they're not doing something illegal. They would be going just maybe to the movies, having fun. But the gangs, they go and rob, hurt people, drugs and other stuff.'*

> S5: *'The gangs are the groups who attack people and the groups are just the people – friends go together.'*

> S14: *'A gang is a group of kids hang around each other and do bad stuff like drugs and*

alcohol and bash other kids.'

S20: 'Young people are friendly, gangs are violent.'

S20: 'I think the gang is a group of people and they fight another group of gang and have knives -something like that- to kill people or to hurt people.'

While the Somalian young people had a conception of what 'gangs' were in abstract or theoretical terms, there was less certainty when it came to identifying gangs in their own local areas. For example, in response to a question on types of gangs in their area, the biggest response was that there were simply 'just groups of friends'.

Later, when asked about how the young people felt about gangs in their local area, the responses were most interesting, as shown in Table 9.

Table 9:
How Young People Felt about Gangs in Their Local Area

	Assessment	Response to each category	
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Don't like them	4	21.1	21.1
There are no gangs	11	57.9	57.9
Don't know	2	10.5	10.5
Other	2	10.5	10.5
Total	19	100.0	100.0

N=19
Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

Whether or not there were gangs was partly a matter of how the young people defined gangs and gang-related behaviour. Not all groups were seen as gangs. And not every young person who engaged in illegal activity or crime was considered a gang member. As one young person expressed it: *'Well, we've got some teenagers, they hang around and you know, they smoke and they do drugs. So, I don't know if they're a gang' (S16).*

Membership in 'gangs' tended to be seen in terms of specific institutional sites (such as schools), or in relation to specific types of activity (such as responding to racism), or in relation to specific groups of other young people (such as 'Asians').

Gangs were seen to share common interests. But these 'common interests' were variable, ranging from excitement and protection, to gaining social respect. They also appeared to be contextual, in the sense of being tied to particular situations and circumstances. For example, the young people were asked about racism as a reason for gang formation.

S5: 'It's possible, because they might feel needed, or they might feel hope or protection between the friends or the gang.'

S6: 'Probably some Asians or other colour people you know, attack you, and that would cause you to have gangs and create more violence.'

S11: 'You see some people calling you "Asian that" and "Black this," so you want to get them. They called you that, so you argue with them, so fights start; you're gonna get your friends and all that.'

> *S12: 'Because some white people might be saying "Oh, we hate black people." They join a gang of whites so they can get all black people.'*

> *S13: 'If you feel that you're not equal in one society, you join a gang – a group of your own people, rather than a minority...another race.'*

> *S16: 'It could be racism. It could be that they don't have, like I said, a good family upbringing. They don't have maybe places they can turn to if they're in need, so they find security in gangs.'*

One of the messages which came through in the interviews with the Somalian young people was that very few of the interviewees had had much direct contact with 'gangs' or gang-related behaviour. For example, few respondents had a clear idea as to why some young people might be more likely to join a gang than others. Similarly, they really did not know why young men, and young women, might join a gang.

The young people were aware of other groups of people in public places such as shopping centres and the streets. Whether or not these groups constituted 'gangs', however, was somewhat contentious. When asked about what kinds of activities gangs get involved in, the emphasis was on certain types of illegal behaviour. This is shown in Table 10.

Table 10:
Young People's Perceptions of the Kinds of Activities
Gangs get Involved In

Kinds of activities	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Fighting	2	10.0	4.5
Having fun	1	5.0	2.3
Drug dealing	7	35.0	15.9
Stealing/mugging/robbery	13	65.0	29.5
Unspecified illegal	2	10.0	4.5
Vandalism/graffiti	1	5.0	2.3
Drinking/drug use	4	20.0	9.1
Sport	3	15.0	6.8
Don't know	4	20.0	9.1
Other	7	35.0	15.9
Total	44		100.0

N=20

These activities were generally seen as providing gang members with a sense of excitement and of being 'tough'. Whether or not they were exclusive to gang members is, of course, highly debatable.

One aspect of street life that the Somalian young people were very conscious of, but not necessarily directed engaged in, was fighting. This involved different groups of young people, usually Anglo Australian youth pitched against other ethnic groups *('Mostly Vietnamese against Australians')*, or particular ethnic minority groups in conflict with other ethnic minority groups (*'I've seen Somalian with Vietnamese fighting in groups with knives'*). These fights were perceived

to often involve weapons, such as knives, guns, baseball bats and the like. However, the use of weapons was always tied to 'gang fights' and 'only in emergency and in self defence', rather than for other purposes (such as crime).

The main reason cited for the street fighting was 'racism'. This was sometimes linked to 'talking smart' or trying to establish one's area as their 'territory'.

> S4: *'That's the way they trick us, because they (Asians) call us "Black bastards" and whenever they call us black, then we'll fight them back because we're black.'*

> S10: *'Some are black, some are white, some are yellow, and the culture is different.'*

> S12: *'Racism by Australians, (who) don't want Chinese or Vietnamese to be here.'*

> S13: *'Through prejudice, or discrimination or racism.'*

> S15: *'Because they do drugs, and because of racism.'*

The status of groups in the public domains of the street is somewhat ambiguous, especially given that certain types of provocation leads to certain types of violent group behaviour.

Similar sorts of conflicts and problems were also identified in relation to the school. Here certain groups of young people were clearly identified as being troublesome for the other students. As one young person put it: *'The gangs at school – always fighting. They have a problem, they take it to school all the time. They're fighting for the group and the teachers always have a problem. They can't play together basketball, they can't do nothing (like) study together' (S15).*

The specific problems identified with the activities of some young people within a school setting are shown in Table 11.

Table 11:
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	5	25.0	18.5
Start fights	7	35.0	25.9
Bad influence	5	25.0	18.5
Problematic for teachers	2	10.0	7.4
Deal drugs	3	15.0	11.1
Don't know	2	10.0	7.4
Other	3	15.0	11.1
Total	27		100.0

N=20

In discussion, the young people identified 'drugs' and 'fighting' as among the most disturbing aspects of gang-type behaviour in the school.

> S1: *'They deal drugs and they don't listen to the teachers.'*

> S2: *'They bring drugs into school, weapons and knives and fighting. Coming a group of them (into the school) and bashing us.'*

S3: 'Because they fight with others.'

S6: 'They come to school uninvited and terrorise other students.'

S8: 'They smoke, they bring drugs into school.'

S11: 'They cause trouble. They don't fight one on one, they fight as a group. More groups come down, they carry knives around.'

S16 : 'I think more and more they're becoming a problem, yeah. Because people form these little groups – in gangs, and they maybe neglect their studies and what their gang thinks is probably more important than their academics.'

S17: 'They might hassle the girls at school. Yeah, they might you know, they do a lot of things: hassle the girls, use drugs, you know, break things at school: the windows, the doors, you know, damage the school's property.'

It is interesting to note here that when asked about the good things about being a gang member, a number of interviewees referred to 'protection'. One young person commented: '*If you have a fight-on, or someone calls you a racist name, teases your colour, the gangs can help you, because racism is not allowed' (S12)*. It appears that some groups, or 'gangs', therefore emerge out of the perceived or real threats by other young people. In this regard, *'The good thing is that you know you are protected; you have other kids to protect you' (S14).*

However, whether a 'gang' forms out of the need for mutual protection, or because it is related to criminal activity of some kind, the perception and presence of gangs implies a number of negative things as well. For example, the Somalian young people spoke about how it can create a bad reputation for the young people in the community, and how it can make the person a target for, and enemy of, other gangs. It would also propel young people into committing illegal acts, as well as mean more likely contact with the police.

If young people were not in gangs, it was believed that they would have a better life and engage in more productive pursuits. They would spend more time at home and with their family. They would do better in school and work environments. They would be wasting less time.

2.5 Problems & Solutions

The Somalian young people were asked a series of questions regarding their activities and where and what they do with their time. About half of them said that there was insufficient activities for young people in their neighbourhoods, and one mentioned that there was sufficient to do depending upon money. Most of the young people thought there should be more sporting facilities, recreational and leisure activities, and support and skill providing activities.

The young people spent most of their time at home, at their friends' places or at school. Schooling and sport, as well as visiting with friends, were the main daytime activities. At night, the overwhelming response was to stay home or go to a friend's house. The reasons why Somalian young people felt restricted in where they go provides some insight into the home-based nature of many of their activities. These are shown in Table 12.

Table 12:
The Reasons why Young People Felt Restricted in Where They Can Go

Types of Restrictions	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Racism	2	16.7	14.3
Age	1	8.3	7.1
Safety concerns	6	50.0	42.9
Religious/cultural	5	41.7	35.7
Total	14		100.0

N=12
Missing Responses = 1 (5%)
Not Applicable = 7 (35%)

S2: 'Because you know if you go there, something might happen to you, or you might get in trouble, so you would know that you wouldn't cross that line.'

S5: 'Because you might not feel comfortable if you go some places where different peoples are. They might treat you differently.'

S11: 'It's too violent, too dangerous.'

S12: 'Because there might be some places that I might not go, like where bad people hang around.'

S13: 'Yes, because of my religion, I'm restricted in the places I go, and my own beliefs. I wouldn't go to these places.'

S14: 'Because some places are dangerous.'

S16: 'In a lot of ways I am. And maybe it's because of the community I come from, things like that: religion, community, colour; things like that.'

S17: 'Yeah, religion, the culture you know. Yeah, you might have a bad reputation you know, if you go somewhere like that (a nightclub), so we don't want a bad name.'

S18: 'Yeah, sometimes I think. At school, we can't like go swimming, because we can't wear the bathers...so we can't go swimming.'

In addition to concerns stemming from fears about personal safety, religious prescriptions, gender-based preferences, and various cultural and social differences, there may be another factor which could affect what the young people do outside the parental home as well. This relates to the trouble experienced by groups of young people when they do venture on to the street and into shopping areas.

Table 13:
Young People's Perceptions of the Trouble that
Groups Experience on the Streets

Types of Trouble	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Police harassment	9	47.4	37.5
Fighting	4	21.1	16.7
Trouble with shopkeepers	1	5.3	4.2
Public disapproval	2	10.5	8.3
Don't know	6	31.6	25.0
Other	2	10.5	8.3
Total	24		100.0

N=19
Missing Responses = 1 (5%)

S7: 'If someone saw you in a group, they might think you are a gang or something, then you always have someone wishing you bad things and you always have trouble. If the police think you're a gang, then there's trouble.'

S11: 'If you hang out on the streets, anything can happen. Trouble starts, cops would be hassling you 'cos you're groups.'

S12: 'Sometimes, when something happens, the police will even, may pick on you when you walk on the street.'

S13: 'Discrimination from other people, because if you're hanging out on the streets, it's a sign of trouble to police; that's how you're discriminated or stereotyped.'

S16: 'A lot of discrimination. People on the streets aren't respected. People escape – like watch out for them. So they're discriminated by police, and just general members of the community.'

While the young people highlighted 'police harassment' as the key problem groups experience on the streets, it is notable that only 6 of them had had direct contact with the police. Of these 6 people, the group was evenly split over the nature of that contact was generally bad or good. For those who had no problems with the police contact, the overall impression was that they had been treated well when stopped by the police. Alternatively, others felt that they had been unduly hassled or threatened, or been subjected to some kind of racism, at the hands of police officers.

Similar findings were found in relation to contact with security guards. Again, the small number (7) who had had direct contact with security guards had mixed feelings and experiences. On the positive side, security guards had made some feel more secure by their presence:

'A good experience with security guard – I'm now living here (in a) flat in Fitzroy. They have a security and always, sometimes I want to go down maybe milkbar, whatever, everything at night, they walk me down always to watch me – see what time I go, what time I come back, and looking after me. First week when I moved this flat, I noticed them. They talked to me and gave me the telephone number for security; 24 hours. They care for me, always

> *asking me 'If you have a problem, just call straight away this number.' The security guards, they're the best to care for me' (S15)*

On the negative side, one person was to comment:

> *'It's been bad, same as the police. At the commission houses, where the flats are, we're always hanging around on that corner, just talking, and they just came up to us and said "you're not supposed to be sitting here. Go somewhere else." Before that, other kids from other ethnic – white people and other kids- they just pick us on colour' (S2)*

The general impression of harassment and negative relations has to be tempered, therefore, by acknowledgement of relatively little direct contact between the young people and police and security guards. It also has to be put in the context of very mixed reactions to this contact, depending upon the individual and the circumstances.

Ambivalent feelings toward authority figures was also evident in the young people's responses to a question about what the police can do about gangs. These are shown in Table 14.

Table 14:
Young People's Perceptions of What Police Can Do about Gangs

Type of Action	Response to each category		
	Number	Percent (respondents)	Percent (responses)
Get to know them/talk to them	4	20.0	17.4
Maintain a presence	1	5.0	4.3
Stop hassling them	2	10.0	8.7
Prosecute/put them in gaol	5	25.0	21.7
Can't do much	2	10.0	8.7
Don't know	3	15.0	13.0
Other	6	30.0	26.1
Total	23		100.0

N=20

In discussion, the young people said that they wished the police could be less discriminating toward gang members and be more civil toward them. However, they also wanted active intervention, to stop the more extreme elements from continuing to disrupt community life.

In general, however, the biggest response to youth gangs was to give them greater degrees of support, help and direction. In other words, the young people tended to favour a positive, developmental form of intervention, to one relying mainly on coercion and the full weight of the criminal justice system. As one young person observed: *'Talk to them, give them advice, tell them what to do. Young people, they don't know what's right and wrong, so if some young people are telling them gangs is good, if no-one told them gangs (are) bad, they wouldn't stop' (S4).* Even when direct criminal justice intervention was called for, this was intertwined with a developmental perspective, as indicated in the following comment: *'They should be arrested and we should look after them for a while until they change their behaviour' (S6).* The emphasis, therefore, was on education and teaching young gang members about more positive ways to behave.

When asked about the specific ways in which schools, social services and migrant services might be able to intervene to deal with gangs, the responses were basically the same as above (aside from the many who responded that they did not know what could be done). That is, the main strategies mentioned were to provide gang members direction and positive activities in which to engage, to offer assistance with money and education, and to offer a wider range of services and facilities. In the case of schools, some young people also talked about expelling or separating off the troublemakers from the rest of the student body.

The importance of healthy social connections was also reflected in the young people's appraisal of the importance of family and friends. When asked what made them feel happy, the young people referred to their relationships with others: their family and friends. Money and having nice things was only mentioned once. The young people uniformly saw their family as of great importance in their lives. They saw the family as the central source of support, love, friendship and strength, and of basic 'blood' connection. Very few of the young people were experiencing family problems, and the kinds of problems that were mentioned were fairly 'normal', as in the case of occasional arguments. When they needed help, it was parents, friends and other relatives who were the main people who were approached for advice and assistance.

In terms of their longer term plans and aspirations, the young people spoke about making money, having a job and successful career, doing well at school and, given their social history and personal background, enhancing world peace.

Regardless of generally good educational participation and performance, and strong family relationships, the young people were nevertheless finding it difficult to take full advantage of their opportunities. This is demonstrated in their responses to questions about which agencies have assisted them, and why. Few of the young people (3) had sought help from school, welfare agencies and the police. Where assistance was provided it tended to be information and support. On the other hand, a majority (12) had received help from a government department. Money was the key support received in all cases, with a couple of people also mentioning training programmes and assistance with looking for work.

The young people were very commitment to the notion of enrolling in tertiary education, and in finding paid work. Toward these ends, they were prepared to study hard, and to work hard. They had very definite ideals of where they wanted to be in five years time. And they were prepared to do the things which would best maximise their chances of reaching their personal goals.

2.6 Conclusion

This study has been based upon interviews with 20 young people drawn from the Somalian community in Melbourne. The young people interviewed had all experienced the disruptions and adjustments of immigration. In this case, the migration process was heavily shaped by both conditions of war, and famine, in their country of origin, and the different language and culture of their country of destination.

The young people had generally strong ties to their parents and families. Most spoke Somali at home, and all were Muslims and identified strongly with their religion.

Almost all of the Somalian young people were engaged in some type of schooling or education, and moreover, were expressly thankful for, and committed to, education generally.

The majority of the young people and their families were experiencing considerable hardship. Most of the parents were reliant upon state benefits of some kind, as well as a majority of the young people directly at some time or another.

On the specific issue of gangs, the study revealed three major types of group identity and formation:

- Groups that were defined on the basis of *common traits or characteristics* (such as language, religion, culture, appearance) which broadly distinguished some groups-in-general from other groups-in-general (e.g., Somalian, Vietnamese)

- Groups within these broader categories, which were defined in terms of *particular cultural and recreational preferences* (such as choice of music, style of dress), and which therefore denoted differences within the Somalian youth population as a whole

- Groups that were defined on the basis of engagement in *legal or illegal behaviour*, the latter usually being seen, not simply as individual acts of crime, but as collective acts of violence or criminality (such as fighting)

The young people had relatively little direct experience of 'gangs' as such. However, some had been involved in fights with other ethnic minority youth, and most were conscious of various kinds of racism in their lives.

A central aspect of the study is that a major source of conflict on the streets, and in the schools, appeared to be related to racist name-calling and related harassment. It is notable that many of the young people felt restricted in where they could go, at certain times of the day, because they did not feel safe. In many cases, this was directly linked to racism.

Where direct threats or violence did occur, the indication was that the young people would support and protect each other. They also understood that the reason why some young people might join a gang was due to the apparent protection offered by such a youth formation.

All in all, this group of young people were remarkably law-abiding and committed to mainstream institutions, such as education. They had suffered enormous hardships in their country of origin, and as part of the migration and re-settlement process. Yet, they still maintained a generally optimistic and healthy outlook on their social relationships and future prospects.

This translated into a positive and developmental approach to how best to deal with youth gangs. Such youth formations were seen to be due to lack of opportunities, difficulties in family situations, bad peer influences and not enough adult guidance. Where coercive force or social segregation was called for (e.g., use of criminal justice measures), these were generally framed in terms of allowing for a more concentrated effort on the part of the state to assist the young gang members.

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 by 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 inter-ethnic relations involving ethnic minority groups, as well as Anglo Australian young people; and the impact of racism and/or the threat of violence on young people's use of public spaces and educational institutions.

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

- There is a need to provide more in the way of a social and economic infrastructure to assist recent immigrants as part of the *re-settlement process*, especially given the difficulties experienced by some young people because of language differences, lack of immediate employment opportunities, the effects of war-related trauma and so on

- *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

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 about the diverse nature of the Australian population; to provide them with creative leisure outlets, and safe and secure 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.

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