

Step Up

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report presents the findings of research undertaken by Multicultural Youth South Australia Inc (MYSA) in partnership with the Department of Justice, the South Australian Police (SAPOL), the Family Conferencing Team, Families SA (Refugee Services), the Legal Services Commission and the Adelaide City Council. The research aimed to quantify and qualify the nature and extent of problem behaviour among young refugees and migrants on the city streets late and night in order to inform response strategies.

Methodology

The study employed ethnographic techniques, including observation and time-sampling, to quantify and qualify the behaviour of refugee and migrant youth on the city streets on weekend nights. Ethnography has been defined as a method that allows the researcher to obtain an insider's view through observation and participation "in social settings that reveal reality as lived by members of those settings" (Baker, 2006, p. 172). Ethnographic approaches typically employ observational techniques to research behaviour in natural environmental settings, which is characteristically specified but uncontrolled (Cohn, 1996). With respect to the present research, through defined observation of environments identified as popular settings for refugee and migrant young people, the study collated insights into youth behaviour.

For each observation session, the researcher utilised a data collection sheet and a behavioural inventory designed specifically for the study. The data collection sheet was utilised to record the occurrence and nature of behaviour observed among the target population at the designated locations at each sample point. The behavioural inventory contained a coding system that classified each behavioural category. An ethnicity code sheet was developed to record the ethnic background of the target populations. The researcher used a stopwatch with seconds displayed to time the fifteen-minute sample points.

During each observation session, the researcher collected data while located on the streets and in clubs identified as popular 'hot spots' for refugee and migrant youth on Saturday nights. The hot spots were identified through consultations with refugee and migrant young people and steering committee members. Previous research undertaken by MYSA also informed the current research with respect to frequently accessed city locations. On the basis of information obtained from these sources, the identified hot stops included Hindley Street, Rundle Mall, Waymouth Street and the "Crib" and "Red Square" nightclubs on Hindley Street.

Summary of Key Findings

Young People's Use of the City

- The number of young people observed on the streets of Adelaide during the eight observation sessions varied across the week of observation. In week one, across the four hours of observation, 343 young people were observed at the designated hot spots on Friday night. In week two, the observation session was undertaken on a Saturday night and the number of young people observed at the designated hot spots was 1500. This indicates that Saturday nights tend to be more popular than Friday nights. In week three, the number of young people observed was 215. The reduction in numbers may have been due to the extremely hot weather on this night. In addition, it was noted that there was an increase in the number of cars moving through Hindley Street, indicating that young people may have preferred to spend this Saturday night 'cruising' in cars rather than out on streets and in nightclubs. Also, the reduction in numbers may have been due to the start of the new school term during this week of observation. From weeks four to eight, limited traffic had access to Hindley Street due to road blocks, resulting in a gradual but substantial increase in the presence of young people on the streets. In week four, 774 young people were observed on the city streets. In week five this increased to 925, and in week six it increased again to 1700. The majority of young people were observed on Hindley Street. In weeks seven and eight, between 800 and 850 young people were observed, with the majority frequenting Hindley Street.

Refugee and Migrant Youth Behaviour

- Young people, particularly young females, tend to roam the streets of Adelaide alone. Young people move from one club to another throughout the night and early morning. This behaviour increases the possibility of young people being exposed to unsafe and dangerous situations without support from friends or relatives.
- Young people often engage in physical violence on the streets of Adelaide. This behaviour was observed among young males and females aged between 19 to 22 years and often included physical as well as verbal aggression. Such behaviour increases the risk of physical harm and also endangers the safety of bystanders and other city users.
- Young females, particularly the under-aged, tend to dress in highly revealing and provocative clothing which may place them at risk of physical or sexual harm, particularly when walking the streets alone.
- Both males and females experience emotional distress and relationship breakdowns on the streets of Adelaide. Due to their young age and limited psychological maturity, this distress may impair their decision-making and lead to inappropriate coping strategies such as increased alcohol intake. This in turn can lead to physical and psychological harm.
- Young people, including the under-aged, engage in sexual behaviour in public places. This may increase the likelihood of sexual exploitation and sexually transmitted diseases due to unsafe sexual practices.

- Young people, including the under-aged, tend to consume alcohol on the streets and inside nightclubs. Many young people were observed severely intoxicated and roaming the streets alone. Inside clubs, alcoholic drinks are often left unattended and young females accept drinks from much older, unknown males. This places young people at increased risk of spiked drinks.
- Young people were observed being arrested by the police for possession of illegal drugs.
- Under-aged young people are gaining entry to city nightclubs, increasing the likelihood of alcohol consumption and placing them at increased risk of physical and psychological harm.

Recommendation

On the basis of the findings of this study it is recommended that a culturally appropriate and relevant education program be developed and implemented to encourage safe partying practices among refugee and migrant youth who frequent the city on a regular basis. The program should target all cultural groups and all age levels. It should not be limited to holiday periods but rather be continuously promoted throughout the year. The program should address the following areas:

1. Substance use:
 - Safe alcohol consumption
 - Risks associated with binge drinking (short and long term consequences)
 - Risks associated with spiked drinks
 - Risks associated with illegal drug use (short and long term consequences)
2. Relationships:
 - Nature of friendships, going out with friends, supporting friends on a night out
 - Safe sexual practices
 - Managing peer-on-peer conflict
 - Anger management
 - Managing youth-police relations
3. Transport:
 - Dangers of driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs
 - Importance of having a designated driver
 - Ensuring transport home is safe

While the program should target young people from all cultural backgrounds, it is important that it take into consideration the special needs of new and recently arrived young refugees who need to be educated and supported to make safe choices given their increased vulnerability to potentially harmful influences. Young refugees are vulnerable for a number of reasons. Not only do they have to contend with many difficult issues including learning a new language, adjusting to a new culture and its systems, making new friends and, for many, helping parents and caregivers cope with the resettlement process, but most have also experienced multiple losses including home, country, culture and friends. Some have also lost their parents and other family members through death, disappearance and separation. Former boy soldiers have lost their childhood. Add to this the usual difficulties associated with adolescence, unfamiliarity with Australian culture and systems, and a

lack of adequate support and positive role models, and it is not difficult to see why young refugees may be more vulnerable to potentially harmful influences.

References

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2. Cohn, J. M. (1996). Ethological and experimental approaches to behavioural analysis: Implications for ecotoxicology. *Environmental Health Perspectives Supplements*, 104, 89-99.