Youth work today: A profile

Rob White
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YOUTH WORK TODAY:

A Profile

Rob White
Suzanna Omelczuk
Rod Underwood

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YOUTH WORK TODAY:

A PROFILE

By

ROB WHITE
SUZANNA OMELCZUK
ROD UNDERWOOD

This is a reprint of Technical Report No.25 with a new Technical Report number because it is now published under Edith Cowan University
PREFACE

In 1989 we received a research grant from the Western Australian College of Advanced Education to undertake a study of the legal issues that confront young people today and how these problems are being dealt with by youth workers. It soon became apparent that the types of problems that presented to youth workers were likely to vary according to the type of service in which they were employed. For example, an emergency accommodation worker may be confronted with legal issues related to tenancy agreements, whereas an employment worker may be concerned more often with issues of occupational discrimination.

We also recognised that the ways in which youth workers resolved issues of a legal nature for young people may be determined, at least in part, by factors such as their experience in the youth affairs field, or by their educational background. It was presumed that a youth worker who had a degree in youth work studies, for example, may respond differently than a youth worker who had no formal training.

Thus, to gain meaningful insights into the issues under investigation it was necessary to gather information that would describe the nature of the youth affairs field, in terms of the types of services available to young people, and the characteristics of youth workers providing these services, as well as the young people using these services.

The research consisted of a survey of over a hundred youth workers throughout Western Australia. The main elements of the survey included:

- a profile of the occupational characteristics of youth workers, and the social background of young people using youth services;

- a detailed investigation of the legal issues affecting young people using youth services, in such areas as criminal justice matters, administration of welfare services and benefits, and broad civil and human rights;

- an examination of the ways in which youth workers respond to the legal issues and legal needs of the young people using their services.

We decided that the information yielded by the investigation could best be disseminated in a series of reports that have a focussed presentation. For example, the first report presents a profile of the youth affairs field in terms of the characteristics of youth workers and the young people with whom they work. Another report examines the nature and frequency of legal issues that young people bring to youth workers. By taking this approach to publishing the results of the investigation we hope to deal with the complexities of the study in as comprehensive a fashion as possible.
The reports already published or in progress include:

1. Youth Work Today: A Profile
2. Young People, Youth Services and Legal Issues
3. Victims of Violence: The View from Youth Services
4. The characteristics of Youth Service Users
5. Defining the Nature of Youth Work
6. Issues Affecting the Health of Rural Young People
7. Legal Resources and Youth Work Practice
8. Legal Education and Youth Work

For further information about these reports contact:

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the co-operation and the support of youth workers in the field this study would not have been possible. We wish to extend our appreciation to all those workers who gave generously of their time to provide the information sought for the study. Nobody understands more the impossible demands that are made upon youth workers in their efforts to meet the needs of young people. The youth affairs field survives on the dedication of committed persons seeking to help young people find a better world. It is characteristic of youth workers that they give of their time unstintingly to researchers concerned with understanding the nature of issues confronting young people.

The researchers wish to acknowledge the support provided by the Western Australian College of Advanced Education (now Edith Cowan University) in undertaking the study. Over the years the College had a strong commitment to contributing to the well-being of young people in the community. This commitment was demonstrated in a variety of ways. The Associate Diploma of Arts (Youth Work), the first tertiary award of its kind in Western Australia, was established nearly seven years ago in response to approaches from the youth affairs field. Since that time the Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work) and the Graduate Certificate of Social Science (Youth Work) have been developed. Several years ago the then College made a substantial commitment to the International Year of Youth, and contributed research funds to other research projects concerned with the youth affairs field.

Thanks to Peter Austin who spent so much time developing a computer program to analyse the data gathered in the survey. Through his efforts the researchers have been able to carry out complex analyses of the data that simply would not have been possible otherwise.

Thanks are also due to Alan Salter for preparing the final copy of the manuscript.

Rob White
Suzanna Omelczuk
Rod Underwood

November, 1990
ABSTRACT

The youth affairs field has undergone a significant transition, in terms of the types of issues central to the field and the characteristics of people working in the field, in recent years. The purpose of this study is to identify the attributes of youth workers currently engaged in the field, the activities undertaken by those workers, and the social backgrounds of young people with whom they work. More than one hundred youth workers throughout Western Australia participated in the survey. The results of the investigation describe the educational background and occupational experience of youth workers, and the characteristics of the young people with whom they work in terms of age, gender, socio-economic and occupational status, and ethnic background.
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INTRODUCTION

The youth affairs field has undergone a significant transition, in terms of types of issues central to the field and the characteristics of people working in the field in recent years. The aim of this paper is to provide a profile of youth workers currently engaged in the field, to discuss the activities undertaken by these workers, and to describe the social backgrounds of the young people with whom they work. The findings presented in this paper are based on a survey of more than one hundred youth workers throughout Western Australia. Before discussing the results of the survey in greater depth it is first useful to clarify the approach that we adopted towards research in this area.

Undertaking a study of this nature required us to be sensitive to the broad range of issues involved in trying to determine who is a 'youth worker' and what kinds of activities can be included under the title of 'youth work'. (See Appendix 1 for a bibliography of publications broadly dealing with the nature of youth work in Australia). Unfortunately, there has been much confusion over the question of 'what is youth work', due partly to the historical development of this kind of work over the last century (Ewen, 1983; Maunders, 1984; Westhorpe, 1988; White, 1990a). The difficulty of defining youth work is also due to the apparent reluctance of many practitioners to stipulate a definition of practice simply because to do so inherently limits or restricts who is or is not seen to be involved in 'youth work'. One result of this has been that debates and discussions over the definition of youth work have generally been inconclusive. This is primarily because attention has tended to focus on the seemingly amorphous and notoriously transient boundaries differentiating youth workers from other people who work with young people, rather than placing greater emphasis on the core attributes of contemporary youth work practice. The very nature of youth work means that there will be slippage across any definitional boundary. Nevertheless, the establishment of the uniqueness or singularity of youth work in relation to other forms of practice is essential at an analytical level if we are to speak in more precise terms about 'youth work' as constituting a distinct form of social practice.

Any definition of youth work must contain elements of both 'exclusion' and 'inclusion'. That is, it requires a set of criteria that differentiates youth workers from others, whilst still allowing for divergence within the group defined as 'youth workers'. The actual practice of doing youth work lends itself to diverse interpretations of one's role and the particular social, political or economic needs a worker is attempting to address. In one sense it can be said that anyone who works with young people can be considered a youth worker. However, an all-inclusive characterisation such as this would mean that teachers, doctors, lawyers, parents and many others could be considered as 'youth workers' as well. It should be clear from this that the adoption of a definition of youth work which refers only to the relationship between adults and young people is not particularly helpful in assisting us to pin-point the main features of what may normally be considered 'youth work'. At
the same time, the criterion of age (whether seen in narrow or broad terms, but generally limited to over ten years and under twenty-five years) is central to the definition. It is on the basis of the age of the main target group, for example, that many former CYSS workers now do not see themselves as youth workers in that, under the aegis of the Skillshare program, the service cuts across age boundaries and in some cases may rarely involve young people individually, much less as a group.

Youth work is perhaps best defined in terms of target group (young people), specific ways of working with young people (content of practice), and the self-identity of practitioners (consciousness of a specific field of practice).

The content of youth work practice has varied over time in terms of predominant focus, and, at present, varies considerably in terms of specific types of service provision. For instance, in the early part of the century the primary objective of youth work was to provide recreational outlets for young people. This work was carried out mainly by organisations such as the YMCA, the YWCA, the Scouts and the Girl Guides. In the 1940s, much youth work reflected a concern with questions of juvenile delinquency and the need for welfare provision. Over the last twenty years or so it has concentrated on issues relating to such things as youth unemployment, homelessness and poverty. Today, the position of youth work under the broad 'welfare' umbrella in essence precludes teachers, parents and the uniformed youth organisations from being seen as 'youth workers' at a broad social intervention level, although certain individuals within these categories may in fact adopt a youth work orientation in their work with young people. That is, the content of practice has shifted over the years, reflecting changes in the circumstances of young people, and changes in the relationship between the welfare state and those individuals and groups working with these young people.

One consequence of changing material conditions and shifts in state policy has been a redefinition of 'youth work' in accordance with the practices of contemporary social welfare systems, rather than through reference to traditional leisure and recreational agencies and activities. While occupationally youth work exists within the context of the welfare system, as evidenced by current funding arrangements and state policy priorities, the practice of youth work is often associated with community development concerns, as well as more narrow forms of 'welfare work' (Omelczuk, 1987; White, 1986). This is illustrated by the fact that in terms of content of practice there is a strong view among practitioners that while the target group can be reasonably easily identified and specified, the approach of youth workers is not specific but generalist in nature. Recreation workers and youth trainers (e.g., Skillshare workers) may thus not always be considered to be youth workers in so far as youth work attempts to consider the multiple needs of the young person rather than concentrating on any one aspect of their experience. This is the case even where a particular service may be organised around a specific function (e.g., accommodation, drop-in), since the notion of service provision usually extends beyond the immediate raison d'etre of a particular agency.
A key distinguishing feature of current youth work - both in terms of other occupational and community groups, and in relation to historical precedent - is the identification of workers with a specific field of practice. This has been fostered by the relatively recent setting up of 'youth affairs' field structures. Some of these, such as the various Youth Affairs Councils, trace their origin to government sponsorship and official state recognition and financial support. Other bodies and institutions which have helped to solidify a distinct 'youth work' identity include youth work training councils, industrial awards for youth workers (e.g., in Victoria), and during the last decade the emergence of a number of academic courses oriented to the training of youth workers (with qualifications ranging from associate diploma through to honours degrees).

The basis for a definition of contemporary youth work can thus be summarised in terms of the age and circumstance of the target population, the 'welfare' context and orientation of youth work practice, and the development of a shared identity via the emergence and consolidation of relevant training, industrial and academic bodies in the youth affairs field.

Within the parameters of this general description of 'youth work' there are of course considerable variations in terms of the profile and activity of practitioners. In addition to differences between workers according to criteria such as age, income background, gender, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, experience and educational background (and the distribution of people within youth work in accordance with these personal characteristics), there are marked differences in terms of:

- *work situation* e.g. - government or non-government agencies; doing paid or unpaid work; secure agency funding and job positions or short-term funding arrangements and job contracts.

- *work location* e.g. - metropolitan or country; different venues or sites of youth work activity (e.g., clubs, centres, offices).

- *work focus* e.g., street work, accommodation projects, drop-in centres, research and report writing.

- *ideologies* e.g. - conservative, liberal, radical; professional, career oriented or activist

- *processes* e.g. group work or individual case work; informal and formal meetings and groups; co-operative or hierarchical work and service arrangements

- *aims* e.g., self development, character building, political education pertaining to young people; campaigns, advocacy and lobbying in reference to youth and social issues
* young people  e.g., court ordered or voluntary involvement; homeless, unemployed, etc. or cross section; young women and/or young men; young people from different ethnic and cultural groups; young people with disabilities; rural and/or city young people; students, workers, the poor.

For the purposes of this study our concern was to develop a working definition of 'youth work' in order to examine issues centring on the relationship of youth workers and young people to legal processes and the legal system. A critical examination of this relationship provides us with insight into the substantive practice of youth workers as this relates to a specific facet of their daily tasks. In the process of devising definitional boundaries of youth work practice for the purposes of our research however, we have become even more aware of the pressing need for further research and theory on the political, ideological and economic role and position of youth workers in Australian society (van Moorst, 1984; Westhorpe, 1988; White, 1990 a b). A body of literature on these questions is slowly starting to emerge in this country (see Bibliography), but it is clear that much more work needs to be done in this area.
5.

THE STUDY

For the purposes of our research a questionnaire was developed on the basis of an earlier study by O'Connor and Tilbury (1986) which examined the legal needs of young people. The questionnaire was divided into three sections (see Appendix 2). In Section One information was obtained on the characteristics of the youth workers who participated in the survey, including years of experience in the field and qualifications; the type of service in which they worked and its location; and characteristics of young people using the services (e.g., age, sex, employment status, ethnic background, and socio-economic status). The data obtained in Section One of the questionnaire is analysed and discussed in the present report.

In Section Two quantitative data was obtained on the types of legal issues that young people bring to youth workers, the frequency of occurrence of different types of legal issues, and the patterns of referral by youth workers. Section Three of the questionnaire was designed for the purposes of gathering quantitative and qualitative information on the problems young people and youth workers experience in dealing with the legal system. In the third section information was also collected on the resources available to youth workers in assisting young people to cope with problems of a legal nature, as well as information on the areas of training and education that youth workers believe would be of benefit to them. The analysis of Sections Two and Three of the questionnaire will not be discussed here, but will be the subject of further reports.

In the initial phase of the research a pilot study was undertaken. The questionnaire was administered to a small number of youth workers selected from a range of services available to young people. On the basis of the information yielded by the pilot study the questionnaire was refined slightly. Further, however, the pilot study established that the aims of the study were viewed by youth workers as providing information on issues of central concern to the field. The mail-out technique of gathering information was trialled. However, it was found that this approach was not successful in terms of response rate and the quality of the information obtained. It was resolved, therefore, to conduct a series of face-to-face interviews with the youth workers.

We decided to interview as many youth workers as possible within the youth affairs field in the metropolitan area and selected country centres focussing primarily, although not exclusively, on non-government agencies and projects. This was because the majority of workers who meet the definitional criteria outlined above tend to be in the non-government sector, rather than directly employed by the State. The non-government youth affairs field in Western Australia is made up of agencies in the areas of emergency accommodation, drop-in centres, street work agencies, juvenile offender programs, employment oriented agencies and health programs.
Street work agencies in Western Australia have been developed to establish contact with young people who generally do not use established youth programs. Hence, the activities of street workers are focussed in those areas where young people are found to congregate.

Accommodation agencies provide emergency as well as medium to long term services. Emergency accommodation services provide short term accommodation to young people visibly in crisis and in need of emergency shelter. Medium to long term services provide less intensive support and provide accommodation for up to twelve months. These services are often externally supported.

Employment oriented agencies include workers from non-government 'job' related agencies that provide the means for gaining paid casual work experience for unemployed young people. It also includes government workers, namely Youth Access Officers based in some local Commonwealth Employment Service offices.

Drop-in centres include non-government workers based in facilities that provide a venue for young people living in areas that generally lack relevant services. A variety of social, recreational and educational programs are run from these centres.

Local or Juvenile Offender programs are designed for repeat offenders. These programs are staffed by non-government workers in local areas, and also by social workers from the Department for Community Services whose main focus is acting on departmental policy in relation to juvenile justice.

A complete list of all agencies represented in the survey is contained in Appendix 3. It should be emphasised that information reported here does not represent the views of those agencies, but rather is based on the data provided by individuals employed by the agencies.

The metropolitan area of Perth has a population of just over one million people living in suburbs within a radius of forty kilometres from the city centre. Nearly one hundred thousand people are aged between fifteen and nineteen years (ABS, 1987). Less than two per cent of the population are of Aboriginal descent (ABS, 1988).

The three non-metropolitan centres selected for the study were very different in character. Northam is a small country town with a population of 6 000, located about 100 km from Perth. It serves as the economic centre of a wheat and sheep farming region. In recent years a number of incidents regarding the behaviour of young people living in Northam have received the attention of the media. Deliberate efforts have been made by the State government to provide services for Aboriginal young people in the community.

Albany, located about 500 km south of Perth with a population of 13 000, is a port town serving a rich agricultural hinterland. Albany also has a significant tourist industry.
In the past twenty years a number of towns in the north-west of the state have either
grown significantly, or been established, as a result of a booming mineral industry.
Youth workers were interviewed in three towns of the Pilbara region - Karratha,
Roebourne and Port Hedland. These towns, which are in relatively close proximity,
are located approximately 1500 km from Perth.

Table 1. A Profile of Service Locations (Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1988).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Location</th>
<th>Total Pop.</th>
<th>Population (15-19yrs)</th>
<th>Aboriginal Pop.</th>
<th>Unemploy. (%)</th>
<th>NESB (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>13,258</td>
<td>1,236</td>
<td>395</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>8.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northam</td>
<td>6,377</td>
<td>477</td>
<td>316</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedland</td>
<td>13,241</td>
<td>937</td>
<td>1479</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roebourne</td>
<td>16,704</td>
<td>1,121</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>15.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perth City</td>
<td>77,785</td>
<td>5,997</td>
<td>572</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>25.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The three non-metropolitan towns were selected to provide preliminary information
on the youth affairs field as it functions in country towns. We thought that the legal
issues presented to youth workers by young people living in country towns may be
different in nature to those issues confronting metropolitan youth workers. This
aspect of the study was an exploratory undertaking, in the sense that if differences did
become apparent then we intended to undertake a more comprehensive investigation
of the legal issues confronting young people in country towns.

For the purposes of this paper Non-English Speaking Background (NESB) is defined
as those people who speak a second language, in addition to English, at home. The
NESB figures contained in Table 1 reflect this definition. According to the Australian
Bureau of Statistics (1988) just over seventy per cent over people living in Western
Australia speak only English at home. Hence, we felt it was important to ascertain
the extent to which youth workers work with young people who have a non-English
speaking background.

The questionnaire was administered to 111 youth workers who worked at least twenty
hours per week in an agency. The youth affairs field, of course, has many people
who work on a part-time basis, either in a paid or voluntary capacity. We believed,
however, that the information being sought could be more reliably provided by those
persons with a greater involvement in the field. In all, workers from 56 agencies in
metropolitan and country centres participated in the survey.

In general, the procedure entailed one of the investigators interviewing workers on a
one-to-one basis. Using this approach enabled us to obtain a good deal of qualitative
information on the issues being studied. However, in some instances it was necessary
to conduct group interviews with up to four workers in a session. The interview
usually took about an hour to complete. Notes were taken of comments, explanations
and added information that did not fall directly into specific questions in the
questionnaire itself, hence adding to the body of qualitative data collected.
In terms of the design of the study we do not claim to have drawn upon a statistically representative sample of youth workers from the different types of services in which the respondents were employed. Nor, as indicated above, can we purport to have sampled the rural youth field in any statistical sense. However, the study has accumulated sufficient data to enable us to identify issues in the delivery of services to young people that need to be taken into consideration in the development of youth policy. In some instances, it is clear from the results of the investigation that further research is warranted.
PROFILE OF YOUTH WORKERS AND YOUTH SERVICES

The survey gathered information on the years of field experience and educational qualifications of youth workers. The data is analysed in terms of the type of service in which the respondents are employed, e.g., emergency accommodation programs, drop-in centres, etc., and the location of those services.

A total of 110 questionnaires are included in this analysis. As is often the case in studies of this type not all items in the questionnaire were answered in such a way as to permit an appropriate analysis. Hence, the number of responses, in some instances, will be less than the total number of respondents.

The three towns - Hedland, Karratha and Roebourne - are located in the East Pilbara region. For the purposes of this paper the three towns will be referred to collectively as 'Pilbara'. Our use of the term should not be equated with the region generally referred to as the Pilbara which covers a broad area of the north-west of Western Australia.

Respondents

The survey respondents are described in Table 2 according to the type and location of the service in which they are employed. Youth workers from within the 'city' region were selected from a range of services including three accommodation agencies, one drop-in centre, one health service, two drug and alcohol related programs, a street work program, and two local or juvenile offender programs.

Suburban youth workers included one street worker, workers from ten accommodation agencies, eight drop-in programs, eight job-related programs, and seven local or juvenile offender programs. Three metropolitan high school chaplains were also included in the survey.

Rural youth workers were selected from four drop-in programs (including two street workers), three accommodation agencies, one local or juvenile offender program, one community police officer, and one agency providing a range of different services to the community.

Nearly half the respondents (47 per cent) were employed in emergency accommodation services; other service areas significantly represented in the survey include local offender programs and drop-in centres (14 per cent), street work (10 per cent), and employment-related programs (7 per cent).
Table 2 No. of Respondents according to Type and Location of Services.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>No of Respondents Located at</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetwork</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Offender</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of survey participants worked in the suburban areas of Perth (65 per cent), with 15 per cent of workers employed in inner-city programs. Almost 20 per cent of the sample were working in non-metropolitan centres. Thus, sufficient data was gathered across the range of services and from different geographical regions to permit meaningful between-group comparisons.

Field Experience

The data obtained from the survey indicates that there is a substantial number of experienced youth workers engaged in the provision of services to young people (see Table 3). For example, only one of the street workers had less than two years experience in the field. Obviously this type of work demands substantial experience on the part of the workers in order to cope with the problems with which they are confronted on a daily basis. Again, more than sixty per cent of the respondents working in youth refuge centres had more than two years of youth work experience. For a field that was once characterised by a high turnover of staff (see Quixley & Westhorp, 1985) these figures may indicate a consolidation of employment prospects in the field, a general improvement in working conditions, movement towards a longer term career structure and career ideology, a reflection of general pressure to secure work in a period of high unemployment, or some combination of these factors.

Respondents indicated that their field experience comprised voluntary and part-time work as well as full-time employment. A more in-depth analysis of the field experience of workers would be able to address other issues such as the length of tenure in the current and previous positions, and length of experience in different types of youth services.

Table 3. Experience of respondents according to type of service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Less Than 2 years</th>
<th>Between 2-5 yrs</th>
<th>More than 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street Work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Offender</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>39</strong></td>
<td><strong>38</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Interestingly, the youth workers in rural locations did not differ significantly in terms of experience with their metropolitan counterparts (see Table 4). In fact 62 per cent of rural respondents had more than two years youth work experience compared with 72 per cent of metropolitan workers. This may suggest that the rural work force is no less stable than in the metropolitan area, although it is not possible to determine from the survey if the experience of rural youth workers was always gained in country towns.

Table 4. Experience of respondents according to location of service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Service</th>
<th>Less Than 2 years</th>
<th>Between 2-5 yrs</th>
<th>More than 5 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner City/Metropolitan</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Educational Qualifications

Table 5 describes the qualifications of youth workers according to the type of service in which they are employed. Forty five per cent of respondents have no formal tertiary qualifications. Youth work qualifications include a range of awards such as one year certificates, two year diplomas and degrees obtained locally and overseas. Twenty-four per cent of respondents had completed a youth work course offered by a tertiary institution. Only seven of the respondents had a social work qualification. Other qualifications included welfare studies, child care studies, psychology, residential and community care, and general liberal arts and social science courses.

It is not clear why there is a significant number of workers without qualifications employed in the youth emergency accommodation services. Proportionately, the emergency accommodation services and the drop-in centres, employ significantly less workers with qualifications in youth work or social work than the other services. This factor should be taken into consideration in any evaluation of those services.

Table 5. Qualifications of respondents according to type of service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>No Quals.</th>
<th>Youth Work</th>
<th>Social Work</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street Work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-In Centre</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offender</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another interesting feature arising out of the survey, but not apparent in Table 5, is the fact that none of the respondents with formal youth work qualifications are employed directly by the Department for Community Services.
Figure 1. Experience of respondents according to qualifications.

Figure 1 describes the experience of youth workers according to their qualifications. Several interpretations can be placed on the fact that respondents with qualifications in youth or social work have more field experience than other workers. For example, it may be the case that unqualified people entering the field subsequently acquire relevant qualifications. On the other hand, it is possible that unqualified persons tend not to remain in the field as long as their qualified colleagues.

There were no social workers who participated in the survey with less than two years experience in the field. It appears that social workers are becoming less directly involved with young people in particular areas of work, e.g., street work and emergency accommodation services. It may be hypothesised that with the introduction of a tertiary youth work course the agencies are tending to employ graduates from such courses. Further research is required to clearly understand this issue.

It is of no surprise to find that the preponderance of qualified workers are based in the inner city/metropolitan services. Only 33 per cent of rural workers who participated in the survey had a tertiary qualification compared with 60 per cent of inner city/metropolitan workers (see Table 6). The issue of attracting qualified personnel to rural areas is one that needs to be dealt with in all human services, including youth work.

Table 6. Qualifications of respondents according to location of service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>No Quals.</th>
<th>Youth Work</th>
<th>Social Work</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner City/</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The other issue arising out of this data is the provision of courses for non-metropolitan workers. There is no doubt that these workers, particularly in Western Australia, are disadvantaged in terms of the availability of educational and training opportunities. In the past tertiary institutions have been reluctant to provide human service courses in the distance education mode on the grounds that such courses include a significant component of interpersonal studies which cannot be effectively delivered to external students. However, recent advances in communications technology has diminished the validity of this argument. Furthermore, the provision of a Youth Work Studies award in the external mode by the WA College of Advanced Education (as of 1989) has created more opportunities for academic study by country-based workers.

Summary

Clearly, the study has not revealed a comprehensive picture of the attributes of youth workers. To do so would have required a much more fine-grained analysis in which factors such as the age and sex of workers, and their occupational and social background, would have to be examined. As this was not the primary purpose of the survey it was not appropriate to attempt such an analysis.

In interpreting the results of the survey it is important to emphasise the fact that only those people who are employed by an agency for at least twenty hours per week were interviewed. As mentioned earlier, we appreciate that many people provide effective services for young people on a purely voluntary basis, or work only a few hours each week.

The investigation has served to highlight a number of issues. It appears that the workforce does have many people who have acquired substantial experience over a period of years in working with young people. That is, the turnover rate is not as high as may have been thought to be the case in the past. There are differences between the metropolitan and rural workers which need to be addressed. Differences also exist between the various types of services in terms of the qualifications of the workers.
CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE USERS

Agency workers were asked to provide information on the age and sex of the number of different young people with whom they worked during a normal month. Data was also collected on the occupational and residency status, the socio-economic level and ethnic background of service users as perceived by the respondents. Again, the results of the survey are analysed in terms of the type and location of the service employing the respondents.

Number of Service Users

The number of different young people that the respondents worked with in a normal month according to the type of service is shown in Table 7. It is worth noting the sex differences that are apparent according to the different types of services. Street workers have a predominantly male clientele (60 per cent); as would be predicted more than 70 per cent of young people attending local offender programs are also male. Again, more than 60 per cent of young people using drop-in centres are male. Slightly more males (56 per cent) use job centre services, but no gender differences were apparent according to respondents working in emergency accommodation agencies.

Table 7. Average No. of Different Young People according to Sex and Type of Service seen by Youth Workers in a Month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Mean No. Youth</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>Mean Percentage Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streetwork</td>
<td>60.6</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>38.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>16.0</td>
<td>49.4</td>
<td>50.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>109.1</td>
<td>123.4</td>
<td>63.6</td>
<td>36.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>76.9</td>
<td>79.3</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Offender</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>42.3</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>22.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>114.3</td>
<td>99.1</td>
<td>52.1</td>
<td>47.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These data need to be interpreted with some caution. Several respondents indicated that while they may, for example, work with equal numbers of young people of either sex, they may see members of one sex much more frequently than the other. The survey did not attempt to ascertain the total number of young people that respondents worked with over a given period of time. That is, a worker who reported seeing sixty different young people in a normal month may have worked with any of those young people on repeated occasions throughout that period of time. Nor did this investigation attempt to measure the amount of time a worker spent with any individual person.

The reasons why young people use these services is a further dimension that was not examined in the present study. For example, why are young people using emergency accommodation services? Is it because they are escaping from a violent family situation, have they been rejected by their parents, or have they arrived from interstate and are unable to find employment? To understand fully the nature of youth work a more detailed study of these sorts of variables is required.
Age Characteristics of Service Users

Table 8 contains data on the number of young people using different services in a normal month of operation according to age. From the survey it appears that the only service used by children under twelve years of age is the drop-in centre. It appears that street workers do see some young people in this age group. However, the numbers are relatively insignificant. Not surprisingly, most of the young people with whom youth workers come into contact are between the ages of 12 and 17 years.

Table 8. Average No. of Young People in Different Age Groups According to Type of Service seen by Youth Workers in a Month.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>&lt;12 Yrs</th>
<th>12-17 Yrs</th>
<th>18-24 Yrs</th>
<th>&gt;24 Yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streetwork</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>38.7</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offender</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, the investigation did not attempt to address issues such as the frequency of usage of services by young people. Thus, it is not possible to answer questions such as how often young people use drop-in centres, emergency accommodation services or other facilities. Only a comprehensive evaluation of the different services would be able to provide the appropriate data on these issues.

The comparison between inner city and metropolitan services in terms of the numbers of young people in different age groups is interesting because the numbers in each group are approximately the same (see Table 9). It does not appear that significant numbers of young children under the age of twelve years are being attracted to the inner city area. Or, if they are, they are not attracting the attention of inner city youth workers. An analysis of the urban/rural dichotomy does not reveal significant differences, although there are significant differences between the different non-metropolitan centres. For example, youth workers in Northam report seeing more than twice as many young people in the 12 to 17 year age group than do their colleagues in Albany or the Pilbara. This is interesting given the fact that Northam has the smallest population of the three centres (see Table 1).

Table 9. Average No. of Young People in Different Age Groups seen by Youth Workers in a Month According to Location of Service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Service</th>
<th>&lt;12 Yrs</th>
<th>12-17 Yrs</th>
<th>18-24 Yrs</th>
<th>&gt;24 Yrs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner City</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>34.6</td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>35.9</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilbara</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>21.1</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northam</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>45.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Occupational Status

Not surprisingly, the respondents indicated that they generally worked with unemployed young people (see Table 10), although a significant number of employed youths, and a smaller number of students, use youth refuge services. Nearly half the drop-in service users are students. Again, caution should be exercised in interpreting the survey data because of terms such 'employed youths' and 'students'. From the interviews it became apparent that the phrase 'employed youths' could not be applied consistently. It clearly connoted situations other than a nine to five job for five days a week to many respondents. Hence, those people described as employed (4.3%) who are attending a Job Centre may have some type of part-time employment.

A number of respondents commented on the fact that many young people have difficulty obtaining employment because of a lack of formal education, and that others have difficulty in keeping a job because of a lack of family support. Several workers reported young prostitutes and drug dealers as 'unemployed', but see them as employed, although not legally.

Again, the term 'students' lacks a certain degree of precision. For example, it is clear from the interviews that some respondents applied the term to young people who, for all intents and purposes, had dropped out of school and yet legally should have been attending school. Other respondents used the term 'students' to include young people attending high school, as well as TAFE colleges and tertiary institutions. Thus, many of the 20 per cent of young people attending a Job Centre are most likely attending TAFE courses as part-time students.

Table 10. Percentage of Young People According to Occupational Status by Service Type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Percentage Employed</th>
<th>Percentage Unemployed</th>
<th>Percentage Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street Work</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>47.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Offender</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>23.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>53.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Variations in occupational status also occur as a function of service location (see Figure 2). As would be expected, inner city workers report working mainly with unemployed young people (76.4%) and, compared with other locations, relatively fewer young people identified as 'students'. On the other hand, the fact that workers in the Pilbara indicated that nearly twenty per cent of their clientele are employed suggests that the nature of the services provided in the region has a different focus to other locations. Similarly, in Northam the activities of respondents are more directed towards the needs of students than in other centres.
In the current economic downturn the issue of youth unemployment has become even more critical. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics the number of young people between the ages of fifteen and nineteen years in Western Australia seeking employment rose to nearly 10,000 in April, 1990 (A.B.S., 1990). This figure comprises 16.6 per cent of the age cohort and represents a fifty per cent increase in officially unemployed young people compared with April, 1989. Such an increase must have a significant impact on youth services.

Residency Status

Data on the percentage of young people who have a permanent address according to respondents in different services is presented in Table 11. While the data are consistent with the expectations of the investigators in terms of the service and the young people they work with, nevertheless the fact that only 16 per cent of young people seeking assistance from youth refuge services have a permanent address is of concern. It is interesting to note that the highest percentage of service users with a permanent address are participating in the local offenders programs. This fact raises the question of whether there is a bias operating in the selection of participants for these programs.
Table 11. Percentage of Young People with a Permanent Address According to Service Type.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Permanent Address (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street Work</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>68.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>79.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offender</td>
<td>80.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, it is clear from the interviews that the term 'permanent address' is somewhat ambiguous. Some respondents applied the term to young Aboriginal people who moved from one household to another, and yet remained within the family milieu. Other respondents only used the term to describe the situation where young people had no fixed place to call their home.

Accommodation in the Pilbara region is a significant issue for many young people according to several respondents. The majority of houses in these towns are owned by the government or the mining companies. Other accommodation is so expensive that young people cannot afford to live in the region.

Table 12 indicates the number of young people who have a permanent address according to the location of the service. The data on young people living in rural towns needs to be examined further. In two country centres only slightly more than one third of young people have a permanent address. While this is more than the number of young people in the inner city area, it is probably lower than would have been considered to be the case by most practitioners working in the area.

Table 12. Percentage of Young People with a Permanent Address According to Location of Service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location of Service</th>
<th>Permanent Address (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inner City</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>45.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pilbara</td>
<td>36.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>36.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northam</td>
<td>95.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, the figures contained in Tables 11 and 12 highlight the issue of the youth homelessness. It is clearly a significant social problem requiring urgent attention. The lack of satisfactory accommodation for significant numbers of young people must inevitably jeopardise the well-being of those people (see Burdekin, 1989).
Socio-economic Status

The popular wisdom of practitioners would suggest that the young people with whom youth workers are involved come from low income households. To a degree this is confirmed by the results of the survey (see Table 13). However, it is important to recognise, for example, that 30 per cent of young people that street workers meet are described as coming from middle income households. Across all services there are a significant number of young people described as coming from a high income household.

Table 13. Household Income of Young People According Type of Service

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Low Income(%)</th>
<th>Middle Income(%)</th>
<th>High Income(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Street Work</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>67.3</td>
<td>27.2</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>26.2</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young Offender</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>70.6</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 shows that there are significant differences in the household incomes of young people according to the location of service. For example, nearly 75 per cent of young people come from low income households according to respondents working in the metropolitan area, while only 60 per cent of young people are seen to be in the same income level by inner city workers. Significant differences also exist between the different rural centres. Further research is needed to understand the needs of young people in the rural areas of Western Australia.
It should be noted that while workers described some young people as coming from households with 'middle' or 'high' incomes this does not necessarily reflect their current circumstances. That is, young people who have been forced, or have chosen, to leave their family home may be as devoid of economic resources as their low-income counterparts.

**Ethnic Background**

Figure 4 identifies the percentage of Aboriginal young people and young people from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB). The percentage of Aboriginal young people that survey respondents work with is far in excess of the proportion of such people in the community. For example, in the rural centres included in the survey the proportion of Aborigines ranged from three per cent of the total population of Albany through to eleven per cent in Port Hedland. Far less than one per cent of the population of the metropolitan area are Aborigines.

However, as is well known, it is the Aboriginal young people who are most frequently dealt with by the justice system.

For example, 76 per cent of young people in custodial centres run by the Department for Community Services are Aboriginal (Barrett, 1989). It appears that youth workers are effectively ensuring the accessibility of services to Aboriginal young people, although the content and type of service offered needs further evaluation (See Wright and Wright, 1988). Obviously, in at least one rural centre the youth workers are focussed almost exclusively on Aboriginal young people.

Perhaps the most interesting data contained in Figure 4 is the relatively small percentage of NESB young people that are served by youth workers. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1986 Census the proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home ranges from eight per cent in Albany through to twenty-five per cent in the City of Perth.

The 1986 Census revealed that 27.5 per cent of Western Australia's population was born overseas, with 16.6% born in English-speaking countries and 10.9 per cent born in non-English speaking countries (Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission of Western Australia, 1988). According to the Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission (1988, p. 5):

- the overseas born population comprises 21-36 per cent of each metropolitan local government area (LGA); this distribution points to an absence of large concentrations of migrants in any particular LGA;

- Non-English migrants comprise 6-20 per cent of each metropolitan LGA, with highest proportions found in Fremantle (20 per cent), Perth (20 per cent), Bayswater (19 per cent) and Cockburn (16 per cent).
The data obtained from the survey are open to a number of interpretations. Perhaps, as has been suggested, some migrant communities tend to provide strong family environments for young people and the services of youth workers are not required. A number of migrant communities have established organisations specifically to meet the needs of their young people, e.g., the Chinese Youth Association, the Greek Orthodox Youth League, the Ukrainian Youth Association. On the other hand, it may be that because the workers do not possess appropriate language skills and community networks they tend not to become involved with this group of young people (see Delahunt, 1988). This issue requires further research.

![Figure 4. Percentage of Aboriginal Young People and Young People with a Non-English Speaking Background according to Location of Service.](image)

An analysis of the numbers of Aborigines according to the type of service provided indicates some interesting phenomena (see Table 14). First, the high percentage of Aboriginal young people using drop-in centres (almost fifty per cent of all young people) stands out. No doubt this figure is an artefact of the fact that the drop-in centres tend be located in areas where there are significant numbers of Aboriginal young people living, such as Coolbellup, Kwinana and Lockridge.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Service</th>
<th>Percentage Aboriginals</th>
<th>Percentage NESB</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Streetwork</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Refuge</td>
<td>6.6</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drop-in Centre</td>
<td>47.7</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Centre</td>
<td>30.2</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local Offender</td>
<td>44.8</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Second, is the fact that very few young Aboriginal people seem to use emergency accommodation services. This is somewhat surprising given the fact that a recent survey of the Women’s Emergency Services Program (McFerran, 1987) found that thirty per cent of all women using such services were Aboriginal. One likely explanation for this finding is the fact that there are a number of agencies which provide emergency services for Aboriginal young people. These agencies were specifically not included in the survey.

Third, the percentage of Aboriginals (30 per cent) and NESB young people (six per cent) using the job centres suggests that these services are reasonably accessible, but as evidence shows these categories of young people are also the most likely to be unemployed and hardest hit by poverty and discrimination (Collins, 1988; Lever-Tracey, 1988; White, 1989a, 1990a).

Summary

The analysis of the characteristics of young people using youth services is based upon the perceptions of workers. In some cases these perceptions are based upon empirical data in the form of agency records, other workers responded on a more impressionistic basis. Thus, the investigation does not purport to present an analysis of service users as such - a different research methodology would have been required for such a task.

To an extent the analysis can be seen as confirmatory in nature. For example, we expected that street workers would work with more males than females, that male young people would use drop-in centres more than females, and that programs for young offenders would consist mainly of males. However, the results also serve to remind us of the complexities associated with the provision of services for young people. Youth unemployment, for example, is clearly a critical social issue, but providing a solution to this problem alone will not totally redress the needs of young people. Employed young people need emergency accommodation from time to time, street workers are dealing with significant numbers of students, other issues confront Aboriginal young people. Education and training programs are only part of the answer.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper has been to explore at a descriptive level the social characteristics of youth workers and the nature of the agencies within which they work, and to provide a profile of the sort of young people with whom youth workers are in contact on a regular basis. We pointed out at the beginning of the paper that 'youth work' can perhaps best be described in terms of the age of the target group, specific ways of working with young people, and the self-identity of practitioners. The adoption of such a definition allowed us to set rough boundaries on the 'subjects' of our study. While for the purposes of the study the stipulation of exclusion/inclusion criteria is essential (that is, if meaningful results are to be obtained), the issue of 'what is youth work?' does not, of course, rest there. For example, questions could still be asked regarding the 'institutions' of youth work (e.g., clubs, centres, outreach, informal and formal groups), the 'processes' of youth work (e.g., education, social activity, self-esteem training), the 'aims' of 'youth work' (e.g., self-development, religious conversion, building of character), the 'client group' of youth work (e.g., different age ranges), the 'nature of the provider' (e.g., the personal qualities of the youth worker), the 'reasons' why young people use youth services (e.g., court ordered, voluntary), and so on. While the debate over the nature of youth work will undoubtedly continue for quite some time, nevertheless, the findings of this study do highlight certain aspects of youth work practice that warrant our immediate and close attention.

First, the quantitative nature of the study is useful in putting numbers on such things as the educational qualifications of youth workers, the main 'client' groups of particular types of agencies, and the differences and similarities between various youth services. As we point out in several places, however, there is a real need to gain additional information as to why certain groups use particular youth services and why others do not. Here we need to know whether the variations in service use are due to local or regional factors, the pool of young people in a particular area, the practices of youth workers and/or how particular types of agencies are viewed by young women and young men from different income and ethnic backgrounds. For instance, are gender differences in the use of drop-in centres attributable to the actions of the main users of the centre (i.e., young men), or do they stem in part from the sexism ingrained in the practice of some youth workers? (see Nava, 1984). Similar questions can be asked with respect to the 'race' and ethnic background of service users.

Related to these concerns, we also encountered considerable variations in how youth workers interpreted terms such as 'permanent address', 'student', 'employed', and 'ethnic background'. From these observations it would seem that there are other definitional issues (beyond that of 'what is youth work?') that require closer scrutiny as well. This is especially so in light of the fact that how a young person's situation is defined by practitioners very much influences how they respond to that person's apparent needs.
Secondly, it is clear from our findings that the 'target group' of the respondents to our survey did not represent a cross-section of young people in Australian society. They tended to be predominantly poor, subject to violence in the home or on the street, very often homeless or transient, and unemployed. This puts paid to both the notion that 'youth' can be considered as a simple, homogeneous category in terms of life experience, and that youth work of the kind that we have described can have any real substance outside of the context of a 'welfare' type of provision. The social backgrounds of most youth workers - the majority of whom have either not grown up under the same type of conditions as those young people they work with, or who have managed to achieve a measure of educational or occupational success for themselves - means that the character of youth work intervention will be shaped by the knowledge base of the worker and/or their political orientation to the tasks at hand.

In the first instance, the key issues relate to hands-on knowledge of the social and cultural milieu of the young people using a particular service. The second point alludes to what to do with specific young people once they have presented themselves to a youth service.

In both cases it is essential to recognise that the social background of the young people is crucial to our understanding of the nature of youth work and the wider role of youth workers in society. It has been pointed out for example that:

> Within youth work it is not possible to wish away or lightly ignore questions of class, gender and race and elements of division. These must always be acknowledged and recognised as forming the backcloth for any analysis of practice. (Jeffs and Smith, 1988: 12)

Our research has indeed reaffirmed that the 'backcloth' of much contemporary youth work practice in Australia is that of class, gender and 'race', as evidenced in the characteristics of the young people using youth services. But terms such as 'class', 'gender' and 'race' do not simply refer to the empirical characteristics of specific categories of young people. They also, and more fundamentally, are concepts which signal a particular kind of society, a particular type of social system, particular sorts of social relationships.

Thus, to gain an understanding of and empathy with these young people is only part of what youth workers require. For the perceptions and character of youth work intervention will be crucially determined by how the empirical realities of poverty, homelessness, and abuse are interpreted; by whether or not these interpretations are linked to the 'deep structures' of sexism, racism, and class struggle which constitute the basis of oppression, exploitation and disadvantage; and by how recognition of the causes of 'youth problems' can be translated into appropriate strategies at the level of day-to-day youth work practice. In a nutshell, our research inevitably leads to questions concerning the ideological and political basis of contemporary youth work, and once again illustrates the need for ongoing debate and discussion over the aims and objectives of different kinds of youth work practice.
Thirdly, any discussion of 'youth needs' (as indicated by user population and type of service provision) and 'youth work practice' (as shaped by 'welfare' concerns and the consciousness of youth workers regarding the nature of their interventions) must also take into account the impact of state funding and policy on youth service provision. Our research appears to show that, within the context of existing government guidelines regarding priority targeting (i.e., young women, non-English speaking migrants, Aborigines), these particular categories of young people are being excluded or have lower participation rates depending on the service provided. Again, qualitative research is needed in order to determine whether or not this is due to factors such as the type of youth work undertaken (which is also influenced by the quality and quantity of training available) and/or whether it is due to the general constraints of restricted funding, inadequate administrative support, and poor working conditions and wages in the non-government youth field, all of which can affect the capacity of youth workers to broaden out and adequately work with particular groups of young people.

More generally, questions can be asked as to how state economic and welfare policies, as well as those regarding youth service provision, are influencing the orientation and content of Australian youth work (White, 1989b, 1990b). Further to this, consideration must be given to both the economic role of youth workers in a period witnessing major financial stresses on the welfare system as a whole (i.e., cost savings to the state in the form of low paid and volunteer welfare workers, greater selectivity in welfare payments, etc.), and the social role of youth workers given their target group and state concerns to render 'youth issues' less visible to the public eye (i.e., by keeping these young people preoccupied and off the streets, or by offering minimal welfare and accommodation support).

In conclusion, this study has attempted to identify certain characteristics of youth workers, the nature of the services they provide, and the young people who use those services. Arising from the descriptions provided in this paper are a number of issues which deserve further research and further analysis. Each of these issues directly or indirectly revolve around who it is that youth workers actually work with, the substantive content of their practice, and the self-identity and self-consciousness of youth workers as they participate in broad welfare and community development types of activities. It is our hope that the findings and concerns presented herein will be useful in further developing creative and critical discussion on the nature of Australian youth work today.
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APPENDIX TWO

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE
As you are aware, youth workers are sometimes confronted with young people coping with problems of legal nature. The purposes of this survey are to:

1. Ascertain the types of legal issues that young people bring to youth workers;
2. Determine the frequency of occurrence of different types of legal problems;
3. Identify the problems young people may experience in dealing with the legal system;
4. Seek information about the resources available to youth workers to assist young people with legal problems;
5. Gain insights into how youth workers deal with the legal problems of young people.

The information collected will be disseminated to relevant youth work agencies and organisations.

In most questions you are asked to indicate your answer by placing a tick, or by writing a number in the appropriate box. For the remaining questions, you are invited to write brief comments.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CO-OPERATION
SECTION 1:

1. How many years have you worked with young people? (Please TICK [ ] appropriate box)
   - Less than 2 years __
   - Between 2 and 5 years __
   - More than 5 years __

2. Do you have educational qualifications in youth work? YES __
   NO __

If YES please specify: ________________________________________________________________

3. Indicate the type of service you work at: Streetwork __
   Youth refuge/shelter __
   Skillshare __
   Information/referral/advocacy __

[Please specify type of service] ______________________________________________________

Drop-in centre __
Training/job centre __
Department for Community Services __
Other [specify] __

4. Where is the service located? Perth city __
   Perth metropolitan __
   Rural __

5. How many individual young people do you work with in a normal month? __

6. Estimate the percentage of young people you work with who are:
   - male __
   - female __

7. Estimate the percentage of the young people you work with who are:
   from non-english speaking immigrant backgrounds __
   Aboriginal __

8. Estimate the percentage of the young people you work with who are from:
   low-income households __
   middle-income households __
   high-income households __

9. What percentage of young people you work with have a permanent address? __
10. Estimate the percentage of the young people you work with who are:

Employed ____

Unemployed ____

Students ____

11. Estimate the number of young people your agency works with in a normal month in the following categories:

Under 12 years ____

12 to 17 years ____

18 to 24 years ____

25 years and over ____

12. Estimate the number of young people your agency works with in a normal month who have legal problems in the following categories:

Under 12 years ____

12 to 17 years ____

18 to 24 years ____

25 years and over ____

SECTION 2:

With regard to the following problems, please consider:

Issue 1: How frequently in an average month do you deal with young people who face these problems?

Issue 2: How frequently do you refer young people with these problems to solicitors?

In answering these questions please use:

N : to indicate NEVER referred, or

M : to indicate times PER MONTH, (for example, 15M = 15 times per month), or

Y : if you see such problems less than once a month, indicate occasions PER YEAR, (for example, '2Y' to indicate twice per year).

Tenancy/Housing

13. Renting a house/flat or room in a boarding house ____ ____,

14. Trouble with landlord about bond or rent ____ ____,

15. Eviction ____ ____

Comments: ____________________________
16. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (e.g. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

Income Security

17. Difficulties over eligibility for Social Security benefits and pensions

18. Appeals to Social Security Appeals Tribunal or Administrative Appeals Tribunal

19. Problems with Education Department allowances

20. Other (please specify)

21. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (e.g. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

Criminal Offences

22. Criminal charges

23.1 minor traffic

23.2 property-related

23.3 assault

23.4 serious crime

23.5 other simple offences

23.6 other (specify)

23. Police Questioning
39. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victims of Crime</th>
<th>ISSUE 1</th>
<th>ISSUE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25. Incest victims</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26. Assault by parent(s) or sibling(s)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27. Assault by spouse or de facto spouse</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>28. Assault by non-family member</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29. Complaints about treatment of young people by police</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

30. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Child Welfare Matters</th>
<th>ISSUE 1</th>
<th>ISSUE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>31. Conflict between Dept for Community Services and young person</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32. Serious conflict between young person and parent or guardian (except DCS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33. Suspension or expulsion from school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Law</th>
<th>ISSUE 1</th>
<th>ISSUE 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>35. Dispute over custody/access of young person's child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue 1</td>
<td>Issue 2</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37. Young person not complying with the conditions of:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>37.1 probation order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.2 parole</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37.3 community service order</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

38. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1</th>
<th>Issue 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39. Hire purchase difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40. Purchase of faulty goods</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41. Personal debt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

42. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1</th>
<th>Issue 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>43. Dismissal from job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44. Payment of under award wages</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45. Unsafe or poor working conditions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46. Injury at work and/or Workers' Compensation difficulties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

48. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue 1</th>
<th>Issue 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47. Sexual harassment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Discrimination

49. Victim of sex discrimination

50. Victim of race discrimination

51. Victim of other discrimination (specify)

52. Which young people that you work with experience these problems most frequently? (eg. males/females; income; ethnic background; employment, education status.)

53. In the light of the above questions we would like you to estimate again the number of young people who have legal problems in the following categories:

Under 12 years ___
12 to 17 years ___
18 to 24 years ___
25 years and over ___

SECTION 3:

54. If you do not refer young people to solicitors regarding these issues, are there other people to whom you refer them for legal advice?

(Please TICK [ ] appropriate box)

YES _
NO ___

If YES please specify:

55. Which lawyers do you refer young people to?

Youth Legal Service __
Legal Aid Office __
Aboriginal Legal Service __
Community Legal Centre __
Public Defender __
Other [Specify] ___

55.1 List in order of frequency those agencies you use.
56. Have you ever experienced difficulty obtaining the services of a lawyer for a young person you are in contact with?

(Place a TICK [ ] in the appropriate box)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comment: ____________________________

57. Have you generally been satisfied that the lawyer to whom you referred, dealt with the matter effectively and appropriately?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Comment: ____________________________

58. What types of problems would the young people you work with be likely to encounter in gaining access to legal services? How frequently would these problems occur?

(Place a TICK [ ] in the appropriate box corresponding to the rating selected for each characteristic below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>LIKELIHOOD OF OCCURRING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Often</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

58.1 Characteristics of clients

. cultural background
. mystified view of law
. lack of faith in the legal system
. physical handicap
. psychological barriers eg. low self-esteem
. lack of information
. financial constraints

Other (specify)

58.2 Characteristics of legal service

. legal services fail to advertise their presence
. legal services are too formal or threatening
. legal services seem to discourage types of problems young people experience
. legal services fail to operate on an outreach basis
. legal services out of touch with the reality of young people's lives

Other (specify)
59. Do you have any other comments on the accessibility or appropriateness of legal services for youth?

Comment: __________________________________________________________

60. Have you ever consulted a solicitor yourself about a young person’s problems?

Often Sometimes Never

61. Do you know a solicitor you can consult with informally?

YES ______ NO ______

62. Have you ever made a submission to the clerk of the court regarding a fine or a warrant of a young person?

Often Sometimes Never

63. Have you ever appeared in a court or tribunal as a witness for a young person?

Often Sometimes Never

64. Have you ever prepared a report on a young person before a court or tribunal?

Often Sometimes Never

65. Have you ever recommended to the court dispositions or sentences for a young person? (e.g., Admonish and discharge, fine, jail)

Often Sometimes Never

66. Are you aware you could assist young people in courts and tribunals in the ways indicated above (i.e. Questions 62 to 65)?

YES ______ NO ______

67. With reference to Questions 62 through Question 65 which courts or tribunals have you assisted young people in?

Children’s Court ________________________________
Magistrates Court ________________________________
Social Security Appeals Tribunal __________________
Police Complaints Tribunal _________________________
Other [specify] ________________________________

Often Sometimes Never

68. Have you ever accompanied a young person who was being questioned by the police?

Often Sometimes Never
69. Have you ever worked in co-operation with the following people on a young person's problems?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Welfare Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Welfare Officer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicitor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Police</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Court Counsellor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation Officer</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

70. Have you ever referred a young person to, or used on behalf of a young person, the following services:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ombudsman</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Claims Tribunal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Rights Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comments: __________________________________________________________

71. Where can young people obtain legal aid services?

Youth Legal Service __
Legal Aid Office __
Aboriginal Legal Service __
Private Solicitor __
Community Legal Centre __

Other (specify) ______________________________________________________________

72. Do you think young people need information on the law?

(Please circle number corresponding to rating selected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>Disagree</td>
<td>Strongly Disagree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What sort of information?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
73. Where do young people currently get information on the law from?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

74. Do you want information/training on the law?

What sort?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

What format?

Lectures _
Printed material _
Workshop _
Video _

75. Where has your information on the law come from?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

76. Are you confident in working with young people with legal problems?

(Please circle number corresponding to rating selected)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Confident</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

77. What would assist you in this work?

Information on the Law _
Skills for Handling legal problems _
Resources and contacts _
Information on legal aid agencies _
Other [specify] _

78. Any further comments on this survey?

__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________________

LR/0953C THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE
APPENDIX THREE

AGENCIES IN WHICH SURVEY PARTICIPANTS ARE EMPLOYED
ACCOMMODATION AGENCIES

Armadale Youth Services Accommodation  
Chesterfield House  
Cockburn Housing Action Project for Youth  
Fremantle Externally Supported Housing Programme  
Fremantle Youth Accommodation Service  
Fremantle Youth Service -Supported Households  
Hedland Community Youth Service - Supported Housing  
House 64 - Hedland Community Youth Service  
Youth Accommodation Karratha  
J.P.I. City Youth Centre  
Jesus People Inc. - Women's Refuge  
Perth Inner City Youth Service - Household Network  
Ravenhill Accommodation Centre  
Young Single Women's Refuge  
Swan Emergency Accommodation Inc  
The Prom  
Victoria Park Youth Accommodation Service  
Wanneroo Youth Accommodation Service  
Young House: Albany Youth Crisis Accommodation

DROP-IN CENTRES

Albany Drop-In Centre  
Bassendean Youth Drop-In Centre  
Cloud Nine - Whitfords Youth Centre  
Greenwood Drop-In Centre (Mobile)  
Karratha Drop-In Centre  
Kwinana Youth Drop-In Centre  
Langford Drop-In Centre  
Lockridge Youth Drop-In Centre  
Ngurin Drop-In Centre  
Northam Youth Outreach - 'Pad Basic 348'  
Rage Zone Youth Centre  
Rockingham Drop-In Centre  
The Quarry Drop-In Centre  
YMCA StreetsYde  
YMCA Mobile Youth Drop-In  
Youth Action Scheme - Fremantle

STREETWORK AGENCIES

Balga Detached Youth Work Project  
PICYS Streetwork Project
EMPLOYMENT RELATED PROGRAMMES

Armadale Aboriginal Job Link
Armadale Job Link
Commonwealth Employment Service
  Fremantle
  Mirrabooka
  Rockingham
  Victoria Park
Employment 2000

YOUNG OFFENDERS PROGRAMMES

Department for Community Services
  Albany
  Armadale
  Midland
  Mirrabooka
  Perth
  Rockingham
KGB Youth Project
Spearwood Local Offender Programme
WorksYde
Young Offenders Programme, Armadale

OTHER

Albany Community Police
Chaplain, Hamilton Hill Senior High School
Chaplain, Lynwood Senior High School
Chaplain, Thornlie Senior High School
Hedland Youth Involvement Committee
JPI The Bridge
PICYS Drug Support Program
Southern Suburbs Aboriginal Progress Association
Youth Health Services
TECHNICAL REPORTS


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