SECTION FIVE

FACTORS RELATING TO YOUTH VIOLENCE

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This section identifies a broad cross-section of factors relevant to youth violence in key research studies and inquiries commissioned by government. Many of these factors are interrelated and their relationship with violence is often complex. These factors will be considered by the Committee in addressing the Inquiry's final Term of Reference.

5.2 FAMILY-RELATED FACTORS

In 1990, the National Committee on Violence concluded that the family environment is the most important determinant of violent behaviour. The Committee also noted that aggressive behaviour manifests early and appears to be the best predictor of aggression in later life.

The research reviewed by the National Committee on Violence showed that there is considerable evidence to support the inter-generational transmission of violence, also referred to as the "cycle of violence". Children's aggression is strongly related to their parents' aggression at the same age, and can also be linked to rejection by either parent. Studies which support the cycle of violence have found that abused or neglected children are more likely to be violent in later life. However, childhood abuse or neglect does not necessarily result in later violent behaviour as the majority of abused or neglected children do not become violent offenders (Widom, 1993).

Similarly, even when the violence was not directed towards them, children from violent or abusive homes have been found to become involved in violent offending at a later age. Children from homes in which interpersonal conflict is common are also more likely to be bullies (Rigby, Black & Whish, 1993).

The National Committee on Violence also reported that disciplining children by physical punishment is widely accepted in Australian society. Children who have been physically punished are reported as being more likely to commit violence outside the family. The use of physical punishment can result in the child imitating

the aggressive actions of the parent rather than stopping the undesirable behaviour. The inconsistent use of physical discipline has also been found to be a direct cause of aggression in children.

The nature of Australian families has undergone considerable change in recent years. The rising rate of family breakdown has resulted in increasing numbers of single parent families. In addition, families where both parents work have become the norm.

Although research into the impact of parental separation is inconclusive, it appears that it is affected by a number of factors. These include the quality of the child's relationship with at least one parent, and the economic circumstances of, and the amount of social support available to, the custodial parent. The National Committee on Violence also cited research findings that boys with aggressive temperaments living only with their mothers from an early age are more likely to display aggressive behaviour than such boys living with two adults. Single parent families (mostly headed by women) are also among the most economically disadvantaged groups in society.

An Australian study comparing young violent offenders with young property offenders found that one of the few statistically significant differences between the two groups was that the violent group was less likely to have an adult present when they returned home from school or work (Vinson & Hemphill, 1979).

5.3   SOCIOECONOMIC DISADVANTAGE

While it is not clear if a causal relationship exists between socioeconomic disadvantage and an increase in violence, some researchers consider a statistical relationship to exist (National Committee on Violence, 1990; Devery, 1991). According to the National Committee on Violence, the majority of victims of violence, like perpetrators, come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds.

An important indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage is unemployment. Studies in Australia into homicide between adult sexual intimates (Easteal, 1993) and children who died as a result of deliberate abuse (Strang, 1993) have found that the majority of perpetrators were unemployed at the time of the incident.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, at June 1993 45,700 15-19 year olds and 54,000 18-24 year olds were looking for work in New South Wales. Anger, depression, anxiety, alienation, helplessness, guilt, loss of self-esteem and

boredom have been frequently associated with unemployment among youth (Eckersley, 1988). Even the prospect of unemployment has been associated with feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, emotional problems and delinquency among youth (Eckersley, 1988).

The length of time youth remain unemployed has also been identified as an important factor in the psychological impact of unemployment (Eckersley, 1988). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, at July 1993 the average duration of unemployment for 15-19 year olds was 30 weeks, and for 20-24 year olds it was 48 weeks.

Level of income is the fundamental indicator of socioeconomic disadvantage. Because of high levels of unemployment, many youth are dependent on income support payments which are at a rate below the poverty line established in the mid-1970s. Unemployment benefits to youth have also fallen in real terms relative to those paid to other unemployed people and relative to the poverty line (Eckersley, 1988).

The Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1992), in its recent report on the implications of sustained unemployment among youth, questioned the adequacy of current income support payments to youth. The Committee also noted that youth who are employed tend to be paid considerably lower wages than older age groups.

5.4 MARGINALISATION

The Senate Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training (1992) referred to the emergence of a new "underclass" of people who are dependent on welfare payments through succeeding generations. Members of this underclass are not only unemployed, they see themselves as never becoming employed. The Senate Committee expressed concern that the disenfranchisement of members of this underclass may lead to increased violence.

Violence has been linked to feelings of alienation or estrangement in marginalised members of society (National Committee on Violence, 1990). Many young people feel marginalised in Australian society, excluded from the mainstream and unwilling to abide by its rules and norms of behaviour. Growing youth homelessness is also reported as contributing to the increasing numbers of alienated youth who feel powerless to change their situation (Eckersley, 1988).

A study in the United States found that, although young violent offenders had been socialised, they did not believe that they could put this into practice in appropriate social settings (Davis & Beverly, 1991). The researchers suggested that their violent behaviour compensated for feelings of powerlessness associated with not being valued by society.

Aboriginal people have significantly higher rates of unemployment than other groups and many Aboriginal people also feel culturally alienated. This marginalisation has been linked to their relatively high rate of perpetrating violence (Tatz, 1990). Particularly high rates of alleged violent offending by youth are evident in Far West New South Wales, which has a relatively high proportion of Aboriginal people compared to other areas of the state (see Section 4.7).

5.5 GENDER

The relationship between gender and violence requires a consideration of the social construction of masculinity and how it relates to violence generally. It has been argued that there are several constructions of masculinity and that these have different relations to violence (Connell, 1991).

How a society defines masculinity is important because it affects the way in which males are socialised. The popular construction of masculinity in Australian society involves males who are strong and tough and there is an acceptance of the use of violence in certain circumstances.

A study of juvenile homicide in Australia found that virtually all of the incidents involved threats and challenges to masculine honour or reputation in front of male peers (Polk, 1993). A recent study of youth in Melbourne found that young men's involvement in violence was often associated with codes of toughness and establishing dominance over other young men (Bessant & Watts, 1993).

Studies examining the relationship between men, women and violence indicate that males use violence to maintain and reinforce their power over women (Alder, 1991). A survey of Australian secondary school students' perceptions of "wife" abuse found that 40% of male students and 27% of female students considered that hitting a "wife" was acceptable under some circumstances (Rigby, Black & Whish, 1993). This attitude is reported as being a strong predictor of actual physical abuse of female partners in the home.

5.6 RACISM

The National Inquiry into Racist Violence defined racist violence as a specific act of violence, intimidation or harassment carried out against an individual, group or organisation (or their property) on the basis of race, colour, descent or national ethnic origins, and/or support for non-racist policies. Some have also argued that the racism inherent in Australian society's structures and institutions is a form of racist violence (Nugent, Wilkie & Iredale, 1989).

The majority of evidence to the Inquiry concerned harassment and some verbal abuse. Submissions and evidence also indicated that violence and abuse directed towards Aboriginal people is a constant problem in their lives (Wilson, Nugent & Iredale, 1989). Aboriginal people were considered to be particularly vulnerable to racist violence because of their socioeconomic disadvantage, the relative isolation of Aboriginal communities and the general environment of discrimination against them.

There is a lack of official statistics on racist violence. Many incidents are not reported to police (Nugent, Wilkie & Iredale, 1989). Most of those reported do not have their racist component documented because police record violent offences according to the nature of the offence, rather than the motivation behind it.

The extent to which racism contributes to violent behaviour by youth is not clear, although racism (usually name calling) can be the trigger for violent incidents involving youth (Foote, 1992; Bessant & Watts, 1993; Polk, 1993). Media reports of national conflicts can also trigger racial conflicts in school playgrounds, as in the recent case of the Gulf War. Other conflicts among youth which are not based in racial tension can escalate along racial lines when friends become involved.

5.7 HOMOPHOBIA

Since 1990, there have been 13 gay/hate related murders in New South Wales (NSW Attorney General's Committee, 1993). Of the 19 offenders convicted for these murders, 11 were of school age at the time they committed the murder.

In a study of homophobic violence in inner Sydney, victims reported that more than 80% of perpetrators were aged between 16 and 25 years, and that the average number of attackers was four (Cox, 1990). More than three-quarters of the victims reported the motivation for the assault as being homophobia, particularly because

the assailants often used anti-gay/lesbian taunts. The study also found that about half of the victims did not report the incident to the police.

It appears that many youth who commit homophobic violence do not perceive it as unacceptable (Brown, 1993). Police have commented that many youth arrested for "gay bashing" have been genuinely surprised to find that their actions are not socially condoned.

5.8   THE MEDIA

Violence is portrayed in a variety of media, including television, videotapes, films and computer games, all of which are very popular among youth.

The media often portrays lifestyles beyond the means of many people, particularly the unemployed. It has been argued that these portrayals are more likely to lead to violence and crime than violent programs, by encouraging materialistic attitudes and reducing tolerance to delays in gratification (National Committee on Violence, 1990). In contrast, media coverage of youth unemployment, rather than motivating youth to try to obtain employment, has been found to produce feelings of hopelessness and bitterness (Eckersley, 1988).

While a causal link between media violence and violent offences has not been established, many researchers are convinced that exposure to excessive media violence increases the likelihood of at least some people behaving violently (Wilson & Nugent, 1987). The National Committee on Violence concluded that the consensus of opinion at that time was that television plays a relatively minor role in producing violent behaviour. A minority report prepared by NSW representative, Peter Quinn, expressed a strong contrary view. The Committee also noted that it is generally accepted that viewing television violence may change attitudes, provide justification for violence and may also suggest that problems can be resolved through aggressive behaviour.

Some have argued that televised violence desensitises people to violence which may weaken restraints over aggressive behaviour, or that it leads to violent behaviour being imitated (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

Some research has shown that the relationship between television viewing and violence is bi-directional (National Committee on Violence, 1990). In other words, viewing violence can contribute to aggressive behaviour, and those who are predisposed towards aggression are more likely to view violent programs. This

relationship appears to be affected by the frequency and the seriousness of the violence viewed, whether the violence is or appears to be realistic, and whether it is portrayed as or is perceived as being justified (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

Several studies have shown that people's views are more likely to be influenced by real, as opposed to fictionalised or "unreal", televised violence (Sheehan, 1991). A study carried out for the Inquiry of the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal into the portrayal of violence on television (among other issues), found that violent material which is both explicit and realistic has the most impact on viewers' emotions (Sheehan, 1991). This suggests that news programs may be of particular concern because they necessarily televise actual events and hence real and explicit violence.

Australian research is also consistent with overseas findings that the television viewing habits of parents are a better predictor of their children's aggressiveness than the viewing habits of the children (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

The National Committee on Violence also concluded that a bi-directional relationship may also exist for videotapes and films. A study of popular videotapes available in Australia found that depictions of aggression were relatively frequent and severe (Brooks, Fox, Nugent & Wilson, 1987). Over half the aggressive scenes were contained in the PG and M rated videos which are readily accessible to youth under the age of 18 years.

Because of their recent introduction, there has been no Australian research into the effects of violent video and computer games on behaviour. However, there is public concern that the interactive nature of these games might have an even greater effect on behaviour than other visual forms of media. This concern is such that violent video and computer games are currently being investigated by a Senate Select Committee.

5.9   SPORT

The sporting field, like the home, is often viewed as being subject to different rules of behaviour to other forms of social interaction (Tulloch, 1993).

Research on the effect of viewing sports-related violence is not conclusive. However, most of the research evidence suggests that it increases the propensity

of spectators for violence through imitating behaviour displayed on the playing field (Schneider, 1991).

While viewing violence in sport may contribute to violent behaviour, participation in sporting activities has been associated with a reduction in assaults committed by Aboriginal youth (Tatz, 1990).

In 1990, the National Committee on Violence was informed that violence in sport had decreased in recent years. However, the Committee noted that any level of violence in sport is cause for concern, particularly because of the influence of sporting heroes on children. The Committee also noted that recent technological developments now allow for aggressive acts on the playing field to be repeatedly broadcast.

Aggression on the sporting field is frequently equated with toughness and masculinity and viewed as character building (Tulloch, 1993). A study of secondary school students' reactions to televised sports violence found that while younger students took it seriously, older students (particularly males) did not perceive it as violence but as toughness or even as funny (Tulloch, 1993).

The increasing commercialisation of sport has also been linked to violence because of the over-emphasis on winning (Schneider, 1991).

5.10 USE OF WEAPONS

In 1988, it was estimated that there was one gun to every four people in Australia (Chappell, Grabosky, Wilson & Mukherjee, 1988). The report of the National Committee on Violence reported that while there has been little research examining the relationship between firearms and violence, possessing a firearm may enhance the aggressiveness of some people who are stimulated by weapons.

It has also been suggested that access to firearms is relatively easy in Australia, particularly as the lack of uniform gun control legislation between states means that if a gun cannot be obtained in one state it can be obtained in another.

In 1990/91, about 23% of all murders in Australia reported to police were committed with firearms and about 33% were committed with knives and other sharp instruments (Chappell, 1993). The death rate for victims assaulted by guns is several times that for those assaulted by knives or other weapons (Chappell, Grabosky, Wilson & Mukherjee, 1988).

Official police statistics show that about 6% of robberies committed by 10-17 year olds and 27% of robberies committed by 18-24 year olds in 1992 involved the use of a firearm (see Sections 4.3 and 4.4). Other data indicate that knives are used in about 14% of robberies (Chappell, 1993).

Because violence committed by juveniles often occurs in groups and tends to be spontaneous rather than premeditated, firearms are not commonly used. However, the probability of violent incidents involving youth and which result in death might be greatly increased if guns were more readily available (Polk, 1993).

5.11   USE OF PUBLIC SPACE

There is a perception in the community that youth who congregate in public places - shopping centres and "on the street" - pose a threat to personal safety. Many shopkeepers also perceive youth as a potential threat to themselves and their business (Foote, 1992).

Youth are making increasing use of public space largely because of a lack of readily available, low cost venues where they can meet, have fun, participate in recreation activities and pass the time. Associated with youth's increased use of public space have been increased efforts to monitor and regulate youth's behaviour (White, 1990).

Some of the violence committed by youth, particularly juveniles, is reported as occurring in these open and public spaces (Polk, 1993). A study of juvenile homicide in Australia found that incidents often occurred between groups of youth as they came in contact with each other in search of social and recreation activities (Polk, 1993).

5.12   THE POLICE

Youth are a particularly visible section of the community because of high youth unemployment and the fact that they often congregate in public places. Their high visibility has been linked to youth attracting the increased attention of the police (White, 1990; Alder, O'Connor, Warner & White, 1992).

The visibility of Aboriginal youth in public places and the tendency of Aboriginal people to live together in identifiable communities may make Aboriginal youth particularly vulnerable to police attention. This has been cited as one of the main

reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal youth in the criminal justice system (Youth Justice Coalition, 1990). The same argument could be applied to youth of particular ethnic backgrounds.

A recent study in Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, about perceptions of the treatment of juveniles in the legal system, found that a high proportion of youth had been stopped and spoken to by the police (Alder, O'Connor, Warner & White, 1992). This usually happened when they were on the street "hanging out" or "walking". The study found that Aboriginal youth, young men and unemployed youth were most likely to be stopped.

The same study also found that some police officers are violent toward youth. Of those youth taken to a police station, the majority reported that they were "yelled at" or "sworn at", just over half said they were "pushed around", and 40% said they were "hit" by police officers.

Most police officers also reported that they had applied force to a young person at some time. The officers usually explained using force as a form of self defence or as a response to the young person resisting arrest. Virtually all of the police officers who participated in the study said that they had been assaulted or harassed by youth in the course of their work, although just over half reported that this did not happen very often.

Most police officers said that generally they did not find youth difficult to deal with, and that most young people respect the law and its officers. However, many did specify that "street kids", "gangs" and Aboriginal youth were particularly difficult to deal with.

A study of homeless youth in Melbourne found that more than half reported having been assaulted by police on at least one occasion (Alder & Sandor, 1990). The researchers commented that youth's descriptions of these incidents did not suggest that they were exaggerating or being malicious. Police assaults were seen as justified because of the young person's behaviour towards the police, or accepted as a normal feature of police-youth relations.

5.13 GANGS

There has been a tendency by the public and the news media to label any group of youth as a "gang". Consequently, groups of youth have become a source of fear for many people who now associate them with gangs and, by implication, violence.

However, forming groups is a normal part of adolescence and can be important in providing youth with a sense of belonging and social worth.

There has been little research in Australia on gangs (particularly youth gangs) and their involvement in violence. In 1993, the NSW Police Service reported the existence of 50 street gangs made up of approximately 1,500 members. Police also advised the National Committee on Violence that in 1987/88 only 8% of serious assaults in New South Wales were attributed to gangs.

While some violence in Australia may result from youth engaging in group activities, it does not resemble the gang violence found in some parts of the United States (Polk, 1993). Police interviewed on radio have reported that many so-called street gangs are no more than groups of teenagers who occasionally commit petty crime. Others have suggested that the majority of these groups commit minor vandalism and petty theft as a response to being bored and frustrated. However, it is the violent gangs who receive media coverage, confirming public perceptions that all groups of youth are lawless, unpredictable and violent.

5.14 INSTITUTIONALISATION

Research into the cycle of violence (see also Section 5.2) has found that of children who experienced parental abuse and neglect, those who were institutionalised in childcare institutions were more likely than those who were not institutionalised to become involved in later violent offending (Widom, 1993).

A report recently released by the NSW Office of Juvenile Justice states that many juvenile offenders re-entered juvenile justice centres on violent offences after serving custodial terms for non-violent offences. The report goes on to question the ability of juvenile justice centres to "prevent or minimise exposure to the more experienced and the more violent criminal elements they house" (Cain, 1993: p.36).

5.15 DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

5.15.1   Alcohol

Experimental use of alcohol is very common among youth. While a 1989 survey of New South Wales secondary school students found an overall decline in alcohol use since 1983, it also found that there had been an increase in the prevalence of

regular drinking among 16 and 17 year olds (NSW Directorate of the Drug Offensive, 1990). Of concern was the occasional heavy drinking (more than five drinks at a sitting) or "binge" drinking practised by about 40% of 16-17 year olds.

Alcohol use is frequently linked either with young offenders or with violent behaviour. A study of young offenders in Adelaide found that nearly three-quarters were categorised as having an alcohol-related problem (Putnins & Harvey, 1992). According to a video recently released by New South Wales police, 40% of serious assaults are alcohol-related. Alcohol use has also been associated with violent behaviour by both Aboriginal people (Tatz, 1990; Easteal, 1993) and homeless youth (Alder & Sandor, 1989).

It has also been argued that alcohol use is causally linked to "juvenile delinquency". This argument was based on the significant increases recorded in juvenile crime following the lowering of the legal drinking age in various Australian states (Putnins & Harvey, 1992).

While a close association has been documented between alcohol use and violence, the research also indicates that this relationship is complex (National Committee on Violence, 1990). The National Committee on Violence concluded that the effect of alcohol use on behaviour is the result of the interaction of psychological, social and cultural factors rather than the pharmacological properties of alcohol.

The physical setting and type of social gathering may also facilitate or inhibit violence (National Committee on Violence, 1990). Research into violence committed around hotels, clubs and other drinking venues in Australia found that it was more likely to occur in the busy periods (late at night or around closing time) and towards or during the weekend (Tomsen, Homel & Thommeny, 1991). Violence has also been found to be associated with groups of male strangers, low comfort levels, high levels of boredom (no entertainment), high levels of drunkenness, and with aggressive and unreasonable staff (Tomsen, Homel & Thommeny, 1991).

5.15.2   Illicit drugs

The National Committee on Violence concluded that almost all drug-related violence in Australia is associated with the trafficking and distribution of drugs, rather than their use. According to police, 80% of all armed robberies in New South Wales in 1987/88 were committed by drug users trying to obtain the resources to pay for illicit drugs (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

A survey in New South Wales found that drug use among youth in juvenile justice centres was much higher than among school students (CEIDA, 1991). Anecdotal evidence suggests that amphetamines are the current drug of choice for youth. After consideration of a wide range of drugs, the National Committee on Violence concluded that the use of amphetamines was cause for concern because it is more common for amphetamine intoxication to be accompanied by violence than other illicit drugs.

Mixing drugs is also relatively common by most young drug users. A survey of 16-21 year old illicit drug users in New South Wales found that 94% also used alcohol and that heavy drinking was relatively common (CEIDA, 1991). The combination of amphetamines and alcohol can also result in paranoid reactions which can produce violent behaviour (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

5.15.3   Prescription drugs

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the non-medical use of prescription drugs (particularly benzodiazepines) is relatively widespread among youth using illicit drugs in inner Sydney. One of the reported adverse effects of benzodiazepine use is aggressive behaviour (National Health and Medical Research Council, 1991). Of particular concern is that prescription drugs are often mixed with other drugs (usually alcohol) which can compound the adverse effects of the prescription drug. Tranquillisers taken with alcohol have been reported as resulting in violent behaviour (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

5.16 SCHOOL-RELATED FACTORS

There are a number of school-related factors which have been linked to youth violence generally, as well as to school violence.

Apparent retention rates in NSW schools (from Year 7 to Year 12) have increased from 33.7% in 1981 to 68.5% in 1992. Because of high unemployment, educational qualifications are becoming more important in obtaining employment. Students are under increasing pressure to perform well and there is also increased competition for limited tertiary places (Eckersley, 1988).

Many Australian students who are unlikely to undertake tertiary study feel that the subjects currently available are not particularly relevant to obtaining employment and others find them uninteresting (Eckersley, 1988; Brown, 1993). A study of

interpersonal relations among South Australian school students found that one of the factors associated with bullying was a dislike of school (Rigby & Slee, 1993). Another study found that students with less interest in school were more likely to commit school-based offences (Carroll, 1987). Delinquent and criminal behaviour has also been linked with low achievement levels and poor behaviour at school (National Committee on Violence, 1990).

Most violent behaviour by younger people occurs in groups and the influence of peers appears to be a factor (National Committee on Violence, 1990). Although most peer interaction among youth occurs at school, the National Committee on Violence concluded that peers and the school environment appear to reinforce aggressive behaviour rather than instigate it. This conclusion was reached because aggressive behaviour precedes both school attendance and involvement in groups.

A study of bullying among South Australian school students found that support for victims diminished with age. The researchers found this to be consistent with the view that schools tend to instil stereotypically male values in students where it is desirable to be dominant, aggressive and never to show emotional weakness (Rigby & Slee, 1991).

Many Australian students are dissatisfied with the authoritarian nature of schools which do not provide opportunities to participate in making decisions which affect them (curriculum planning, school rules etc) (Eckersley, 1988; Brown, 1993). This is reported as creating feelings of frustration, resentment and alienation.

Other aspects of schools which have been cited as being important in school-based violence include the size of the school and the size of classes (Schneider, 1991); the nature of leadership and discipline (Wayson, 1985; Challinger, 1987); skills of teachers, particularly behaviour management (Challinger, 1987; Martin, 1993); and the physical design of the school (Schneider, 1991).

5.17 BIOLOGICAL FACTORS

The report of the National Committee on Violence included a review of research carried out on the relationship between biological factors and violence. The Committee found that violent behaviour does not appear to be an inherited characteristic.

Some minor physical abnormalities (inherited or from perinatal trauma) were found to correlate with later violent offending. However, this finding only applied to

children raised in unstable, non-intact families which suggests that the effect of these abnormalities on behaviour can be offset by a stable family environment.

Some violent offenders, particularly so-called psychopaths, have differing physiological reactions to threatening situations than other people, showing lower levels of response to stimuli. These individuals may actively seek risky situations to compensate for this lower level of response. However, many people with low response levels are not violent criminals, suggesting that other factors are involved in the relationship between this condition and violent behaviour.

The National Committee on Violence noted that men are much more likely than women to commit violent offences and that this indicates sex-based differences in violent behaviour. Research suggests that hormones, particularly testosterone, may contribute to violent behaviour. As mentioned previously, men are much more likely than women to display aggression which produced physical pain or injury. However, there is relatively little difference between men and women in terms of the level of aggressive behaviour which produces psychological or social harm.

Age has also been postulated as having a biological link to violent behaviour because most criminal violence is perpetrated by those in a particular age group (15 to 30 years).

5.18 PERSONALITY FACTORS

A review of research carried out for the National Committee on Violence found that personality factors which have been associated with violent behaviour include:

- risk-taking, thrill seeking, or sensation seeking

- lack of empathy or regard for the feelings of others

- impulsiveness, or the inability to defer gratification

Extreme violence has been also linked to individuals with unusually strong internal controls, referred to as the "over-controlled personality".

5.19 MENTAL ILLNESS

Prediction of violence in people with mental illness is regarded as extremely difficult. However, some forms of mental illness (in particular paranoid schizophrenia) may occasionally result in violent behaviour.

A study of homicides in New South Wales found that the incidence of mental illness among offenders was no higher than in the general population (Chappell, 1989).

The National Committee on Violence noted that while there may be a statistical relationship between mental illness and violence, it is not a powerful explanatory factor. The Committee warned of the danger of fostering public attitudes and policies towards people with mental illness which would stigmatise and discriminate against them.

SECTION SIX

GOVERNMENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The Committee has been asked to examine the response of government to youth violence. Accordingly, this section discusses government policy and programs. Information on the Youth Affairs Policy is provided along with the various state government initiatives and services currently in place to meet the Policy's objectives. The future plans of various state departments and agencies are also reviewed. Examples of relevant policies, services and programs at the Federal level that impact upon the state's youth are also identified.

Key NSW Government agencies that deal with youth issues were requested to provide information for this Section. Information was also obtained from relevant Commonwealth Government agencies. Wherever possible the agency responsible for a program has been identified.

6.2   YOUTH AFFAIRS POLICY

The Youth Affairs Policy states that the Government is committed to enhancing the capacity of all youth to:

- reach their full potential

- exercise their freedom to choose

- participate in making decisions which affect their lives

- accept personal and social responsibility for their decisions and actions.

This is being achieved by providing a broad range of opportunities for youth.

Youths aged between 12 and 24 years are major users of Government services. In 1993-94, 293 initiatives assisting youth were identified by 56 government agencies in the Youth Budget Statement, involving expenditure totalling $2.57

billion. This represents more than 15.2% of the State's recurrent Consolidated Fund.

The issue of youth violence is specifically addressed in the Youth Affairs Policy which includes a Youth Vision calling on society to:

> actively support the right of all citizens to be free from physical, emotional or threatened violence (p.21).

It is recognised that a complex array of factors can contribute to acts of violence by, or against, youth. Involvement in violence by youth, either as victims or as perpetrators, can adversely affect their ability to participate fully in society.

The provision of opportunities through a broad range of services and programs implicitly aims to reduce the likelihood of youth being vulnerable to involvement in acts of violence, either as perpetrators or victims.

6.3 NSW GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

6.3.1 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Identifying Issues and Coordinating Responses

The Youth Affairs Policy states that:

> The Government is committed to increasing consultation with and participation of youth and the youth sector, which includes those working with youth through community organisations, government agencies and industry, to identify issues and coordinate responses in order to meet the total needs of the young person, and ensure that money allocated to youth services is most effectively and equitably used for the benefit of youth.

● **Relevant programs and services**

In establishing mechanisms to achieve this objective, the Government hopes to ensure that issues such as youth violence are addressed in a coordinated, consultative manner.

Examples of where this has occurred include:

- widespread public consultation on the recommendations in the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council's Green Paper on Future Directions for Juvenile Justice in New South Wales

- Youth Sector Seminars, including topics on youth as victims of crime and the Juvenile Justice Green Paper

- coordination of agency information on youth violence through the Inter-Departmental Committee on Youth Affairs

- Chief Secretary's Standing Committee on Underage Drinking, bringing together representatives of relevant State Government agencies, youth, industry and the Liquor Administration Board

- the Community Youth Support Taskforce, which considered, amongst other things, the issue of youth violence.

● **Future Directions**

The Department of Community Services will be reviewing its "youth" policy and consideration of the Department's response to issues such as youth violence will be included in that review.

6.3.2 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Increasing Education Opportunities

The Youth Affairs Policy states that:

> The Government is committed to increasing education opportunities to enable youth to realise their full potential.

Specific policies have also been developed by the Department of School Education to address the issue of youth violence, for example the 1992 Anti-Racism Policy Statement.

● **Relevant programs and services**

A variety of curriculum and student welfare programs in schools seeks to prevent violence in schools. Where students are identified as having behaviour disorders, specialist intervention is provided wherever possible.

The Personal Development, Health and Physical Education key learning area provides the curriculum context for the development of violence prevention programs. For example, students learn the skills of communication and conflict resolution as well as how to evaluate different view points and solve problems.

As part of its student welfare policy, each school has a fair discipline code which consists of practices to commend good behaviour, to prevent inappropriate behaviour and to deal with unacceptable behaviour. The codes are developed in consultation with school communities and reflect the fact that home, school and community have complementary roles to play in setting and maintaining an acceptable standard of student behaviour.

Violence by students against other students or staff is not acceptable under any circumstances. The suspension, exclusion and expulsion procedures have been strengthened to support Principals in protecting the vast majority of students who want to learn without being disrupted by unruly classmates. Regardless of age, students who behave in a threatening or violent way will be subject to expulsion by the Minister, following recommendation by the school Principal. Principals are able to use their discretion in deciding whether to ban potential weapons from the school.

School Principals have the power to declare vacant the place occupied by a non-serious student on the grounds of a record of poor attendance and non-compliance with school requirements. They also have the right to refuse the enrolment of a student of post-compulsory age on the grounds of previous violent behaviour.

Some examples of preventative programs which seek to counter violence are described below:

- ■ Peer Support Programs provide "buddy" systems for protection, friendship and advice and actively teach the skills of friendship and leadership

- ■ Conflict Resolution Programs teach both staff and students how to reduce anger and find positive ways to resolve conflict

- Child Protection Curriculum Materials support teacher training and curriculum implementation which develop students' ability to express their feelings and seek support and protection from abuse

- Student Representative Councils operate in most high schools and many primary schools. They provide a forum for students to discuss issues such as violence and anti-racism. Skills incorporated in this program include: leadership training; effective communication; decision-making; negotiation skills; self-esteem and a sense of purpose and belonging

- School Parliaments involve active participation by students through the democratic process. They provide real life experiences in school governance and promote the right of all students to have a say and be represented

- Anti-Racism Programs/Prejudice Projects reject racism in all its forms. The associated grievance procedures provide clear directions for resolving racist complaints. Support materials assist schools in combating prejudice in schools

- Time Out, a pilot program based on cooperative action between local schools and funded community organisations to address the needs of chronic truants and behaviour-disordered students (Office of Youth Affairs)

- Koori Youth Program, a pilot program which assists young Aboriginal people who have left school early and are unemployed, or who are at risk of leaving school early (Office of Youth Affairs)

- Helping Early Leavers Program (HELP) provides funding to community organisations to conduct basic literacy, numeracy and self-esteem courses for youth who have left school early or who are at risk of doing so (Office of Youth Affairs)

- Circuit Breaker assists youth in Years 9-12 of non-English speaking backgrounds at risk in their transition from school to further education, training or work. It assists them to gain entry to the labour market after leaving school by providing activities such as industry visits, work experience and job search training and assistance (Office of Youth Affairs).

With the implementation of the Schools Renewal Strategy, schools have been encouraged to develop initiatives at the local level which involve community groups and other government departments. This ensures that the programs target local needs and that there is local community ownership of the programs. It also means that the specialist expertise of all government departments and agencies is coordinated and focused and maximises the possibility of successful outcomes.

Specialist staff provide a range of programs to support students in government schools. Some of these staff have a largely preventative role while others work with students already identified as having behaviour disorders and requiring highly specialist intervention. Some key specialist staff are listed below:

- Itinerant Support Teachers (Behaviour) provide support and assistance to class teachers in developing individual behaviour management plans for students with behaviour problems. They also provide staff development

- Behaviour and Attendance Teachers design and implement innovative programs to address behaviour and attendance problems. Some programs successfully utilise strategies such as camps or one-day each week cottage programs to develop student skills

- School Counsellors provide individual and group counselling of students and also work with parents. They are involved in developing specialised educational programs for individuals and groups of students, whole school prevention programs and critical incident response management

- Community Liaison Officers (Language backgrounds other than English) encourage the participation of parents and ethnic communities in education and assist schools in meeting the specific needs of students with language backgrounds other than English

- Regional Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers promote stronger links between schools and Aboriginal communities. They assist regions to promote policies and practices which will enable teachers and parents to meet the needs of Aboriginal students

- Aboriginal Education Assistants provide school-based support to teachers and schools with Aboriginal student enrolments and provide links between the school and community

■ Home School Liaison Officers support and maintain school attendance using a variety of student welfare initiatives and assist in a variety of the special programs listed above.

● **Future Directions**

The Department of School Education has already provided a significant level of resourcing to counter violence. In the 1992-93 financial year this has exceeded $19 million. These provisions will continue and will be supplemented by additional funding for a range of initiatives that will provide further resources in both primary and secondary schools. These will support the development of carefully planned and targeted preventative programs, as well as providing resources to address the needs of students already identified as behaviour disordered. Wherever possible, these programs will be developed in consultation with other government departments and local agencies.

6.3.3 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Assisting Youth with Further Education, Training and Employment

The Youth Affairs Policy states that

The Government is committed to increasing training and employment assistance to provide youth with skills which lead to worthwhile and satisfying jobs.

● **Relevant programs and services**

Students of the NSW TAFE Commission are admitted subject to Departmental Instructions regarding student conduct, enrolment requirements and student occupational health and safety. TAFE Commission's support services include a Counselling Service to provide advice on course choices and assistance with personal problems, finances and work.

The NSW Government also provides programs and services to assist youth to improve their education and employment outcomes. These programs and services include:

- Labour Market Programs, focusing on courses and programs relevant to labour market skill development, both pre-employment and retraining (TAFE and DIRETFE)

- Aboriginal Access Courses for adult Aboriginal people who have been educationally disadvantaged (TAFE)

- Outreach Courses for people who have experienced barriers to learning or have limited access to education (TAFE).

● **Future Directions**

The NSW TAFE Commission identified a number of strategies planned to address the problem of youth violence:

- TAFE colleges are developing "rights and obligations" guidelines for students

- a Prevention of Harassment policy is being developed which will cover both students and staff and will relate to harassment and/or assault based on factors that include a person's gender, race, disability and sexual preference

- TAFE's Counselling Division is developing a draft management of suicidal clients policy setting out procedures/guidelines for dealing with potential suicidal clients.

6.3.4 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Providing Transport for Youth

The Youth Affairs Policy states that

The Government is committed to providing effective transport for youth to ensure they have access to education, training employment, health, welfare, leisure, recreational and entertainment facilities and a range of other services.

● **Relevant programs and services**

The NSW Government has implemented a variety of initiatives to improve the safety of passengers utilising public transport. These include:

■ Nightride, a bus service which replaces trains between midnight and dawn

■ continued close liaison with the Police Service on issues such as patrolling of trains and stations by Police

■ the provision of two-way radios as standard equipment to guards and other staff linked with a communications network providing back-up support as required

■ the establishment of "help points" and closed circuit television systems at critical railway stations

■ improved lighting on stations and the elimination of dark obscured areas through rebuilding and refurbishment

■ publication of a number of pamphlets by the SRA on safety on trains and stations.

● **Future Directions**

The Department of Transport reported that the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics has indicated that a study of crime statistics on public transport is to be conducted in the near future. The focus of the study will cover the major forms of public transport, with particular emphasis on assaults, robbery and sexual offences.

The State Rail Authority proposes to provide train guards with training in security conducted by the Police Service. It is expected that the training will be completed by the end of December 1993.

6.3.5 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Assisting Youth with Accommodation

The Youth Affairs Policy states that

The Government is committed to providing for the accommodation needs of youth, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and ensuring that accommodation is linked to other necessary, appropriate support services to improve their chances of living independently.

● **Relevant programs and services**

The Department of Community Services addresses the problem of youth violence on an individual level when it is identified as a risk factor in a family or when youth have become permanently detached from their families or become homeless. The Department of Community Services operates a number of accommodation support programs for youth, including the Substitute Care Program. This program provides community placements through foster and group care for children and youth up to the age of 18 years who are unable to live with their parents. Services are also available to assist youth in care who are exhibiting violent behaviour.

● **Future Directions**

The Department of Housing reported that a national strategy on youth housing to improve the access of youth on low incomes to stable, affordable housing will be developed following agreement reached at the last Housing Ministers' Conference.

The Department of Housing also plans to identify separately expenditure on repairs or maintenance due to vandalism in Departmental accounts in 1993/94.

Security intercoms are being trialled in high risk areas to prevent unwanted access to flats.

6.3.6 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Providing for the Health and Well-being of Youth

The Youth Affairs Policy states that

The Government is committed to making opportunities available for youth to develop their capacity to lead full and satisfying lives, reducing, wherever possible, health problems which may arise from

social, economic or environmental factors and ensuring easy access to high quality, appropriate services.

Various NSW Government agencies have developed the following strategic plans and policies which have implications for the issue of youth violence. These include:

■   NSW Domestic Violence Strategic Plan (Women's Coordination Unit)

■   NSW Youth Health Policy and NSW Youth Health Plan 1993 (Draft), which identify objectives relating to alcohol and other drug use; suicide; mental health; sexual assault; and physical and emotional abuse (NSW Health Department)

■   NSW Drug Strategy, which provides a policy framework for the reduction of alcohol and other drug related harm in this state. The NSW Drug Strategy identifies the reduction of alcohol related harm among youth as its first priority (Drug and Alcohol Directorate, NSW Health Department)

■   NSW Youth Alcohol Strategy which has been established to meet a series of outcomes, one of which is "A reduction in the rate of alcohol related crime and violence and reported incidents in which youth are involved" (Drug and Alcohol Directorate, NSW Health Department).

● **Relevant programs and services**

Prevention activities by the Drug and Alcohol Directorate and the Chief Secretary's Department that directly and indirectly target youth with the aim of reducing alcohol related crime and violence include:

■   the 1991 development of the Youth Alcohol Initiative, a joint venture with the Police Service

■   the development of community approaches to the implementation of responsible server strategies

■   the introduction of the Proof of Age card scheme

■   sponsorship of The Alcohol-Crime Connection, introducing a new Police Service approach to alcohol related crime.

The NSW Health Department administers a number of programs which aim to reduce the extent of substance misuse and abuse, including:

- Drug and Alcohol Treatment and Rehabilitation

- Community Drug and Alcohol Education and Prevention.

The Department of Community Services administers a number of programs which provide support for youth in families in crisis. These programs include:

- Family Work Program, which assists families to resolve issues threatening the family unit's viability

- Family and Adolescent Support Services, providing Community Grants for detached family counsellors and other supports for adolescents in crisis

- Child Protection Program, which works with children or youth where the Department has been notified of allegations of abuse or neglect

- Community Services Grants Program (CSGP), which assists non-government organisations and local government to provide a comprehensive range of developmental and crisis support services for a number of target groups, including adolescents. Within the program, a number of service types address issues relating to youth violence.

The Ministry for the Status and Advancement of Women aims to enhance the status of women and girls in NSW, and is responsible for addressing issues such as domestic violence. The issue of youth violence is of concern to the NSW Sexual Assault Committee and the Domestic Violence Advisory Council. The Committee's and Council's concerns are reflected in their work to address sexist and aggressive attitudes to women and girls through schools' programs, particularly through documents on curricula for Personal Development, Health and Physical Education. In addition, the Domestic Violence Advisory Council is concerned about the effects on children witnessing domestic violence. Recommendations have been made by the Sexual Assault Committee and the Domestic Violence Advisory Council to address sexual violence and sexual harassment within schools and other youth establishments. The Ministry also develops resources to advise the community on domestic violence, such as the *Domestic Violence Information Manual*.

The Department of Planning manages the Area Assistance Schemes which seek to develop a range of services and facilities to improve the recreational and cultural opportunities for youth and to increase their access to mainstream services.

● **Future Directions**

Further strategies coordinating the activities of the Police Service, Chief Secretary's Department and the Drug and Alcohol Directorate targeting venues or locations identified as being highly associated with alcohol related violence are currently in the planning stages.

The Government is considering the recommendations made in the Report submitted by the Community Youth Support Taskforce. The focus of the recommendations is to emphasise that local communities should, as far as possible, determine which programs and options serve their needs most effectively. Government officers at the local level need to coordinate and work more cooperatively together as well as being more flexible in delivering services in communities with small population bases.

The Domestic Violence Unit and the NSW Child Protection Council are planning a seminar to address the issue of children who witness domestic violence for workers involved with these children.

6.3.7 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Justice and Criminal Law Relating to Youth

The Youth Affairs Policy states that

> The Government is committed to ensuring youth are treated justly, and that their rights and responsibilities should be recognised and reinforced.

In addition to the objectives identified in the Youth Affairs Policy, the Government is currently considering the recommendations made in the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council's Green Paper on Future Directions for Juvenile Justice in New South Wales. The Green Paper places significant emphasis on crime prevention and a number of the recommendations relate to provision of services and programs to address the needs of youth "at risk".

The Office of Juvenile Justice has developed the "Whitten Cottage Strategic Plan for Young Women in Custody". This Plan provides a framework for a statewide approach to the provision of accommodation and services for all young women in custody.

The NSW Police Service is also currently developing a specific Police Youth Policy.

● **Relevant programs and services**

The criminal law and justice system seeks to address the issue of youth violence directly or indirectly through a variety of programs and services, including:

■ General Duties Youth Police Officers (Police Service)

■ Crime Prevention Workshops (Police Service)

■ Programs (Child Protection) Unit (Police Service)

■ Federation of Police Citizens Youth Clubs (Police Service)

■ pre-Court programs and diversionary sentencing options to provide alternatives to detention of youth (Office of Juvenile Justice)

■ Post Sentencing and Post-Release Support Programs for young offenders released from custody (Office of Juvenile Justice)

■ Juvenile Justice Community Based Services, providing community-based alternatives to custody for youth under 18 years of age (Office of Juvenile Justice)

■ the "Legal Survival Kit for Youth" which provides essential, easily accessible and up-to-date information to youth in trouble with the law. It aims to promote youth's awareness of the legal system and encourages youth (and their parents) to become aware of and exercise their legal rights (Legal Aid Commission, with significant contribution from the Office of Juvenile Justice)

■ Children's Law Program, which provides free, non-means tested legal aid to persons under the age of 18 years appearing before the Children's Court on a criminal or welfare matter, and provides means

tested assistance for parents or guardians in child and welfare matters (Legal Aid Commission of NSW)

■ Streetwatch Report Monitoring Committee (Anti-Discrimination Board)

■ Anti-Discrimination Board Youth Activities

■ Management of Child Sexual Assault Prosecutions (Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions)

■ Young Offenders Program (Department of Corrective Services)

■ Education and Living Skills Program - mainstream and youth specific (Department of Corrective Services)

■ Probation Service youth programs such as Probation and Parole Supervision, Community Service Orders and Day Attendance Centres (Department of Courts Administration)

■ mediation services offered by Community Justice Centres (Department of Courts Administration)

■ Victims Compensation Tribunal (Attorney-General's Department)

■ Victims' Assistance Scheme (Attorney-General's Department).

The following strategies are adopted to help combat youth violence in Corrective Services institutions:

■ separation of troublesome inmates

■ counselling and support for those who have a history of violence

■ a "buddy" system with older inmates for those who fear violence, as well as counselling and support

■ an "At Risk" program for those who request protection, for whatever reasons

■ internal programs developed to assist young offenders to cope with aggression

■ programs developed to assist young offenders to acquire self esteem.

For juveniles ordered by the court into a NSW Juvenile Justice Centre, the following strategies have been introduced by the Office of Juvenile Justice to combat youth violence:

■ "streaming" of juvenile offenders across Centres in terms of age, seriousness of offending, and management problems

■ psychological assessment and counselling services for all juveniles placed in custody

■ a variety of complaints mechanisms (including Official Visitors, Ombudsman, and regular visits from community and religious support groups)

■ programs dealing with anger management and problem behaviours (such as sexual offending)

■ programs dealing with personal and social development, educational and vocational programs all aimed at increasing the young person's self esteem, credentials and experience with the view of long term integration into the community.

● **Future Directions**

In 1993, the Office of Juvenile Justice will be involved in the preparation of a White Paper on Juvenile Justice, in response to the recommendations of, and community comment about, the Juvenile Justice Advisory Council's Green Paper. The Office of Juvenile Justice is also:

■ preparing a policy on the management of Child Protection Issues in Juvenile Justice Centres

■ preparing policies and protocols on the prevention of suicide and self-harm and the management of "at risk" juveniles

■ developing interagency protocols with the Department of Community Services for effectively responding to juvenile offenders with critical welfare concerns

■ examining appropriate recruitment and training of staff to deal with issues relating to Indo-Chinese young offenders

■ introducing, implementing and evaluating culturally appropriate programs for juvenile offenders from different ethnic backgrounds/cultural groups, including specific programs for Aboriginal youth and Indo-Chinese youth.

Future directions for justice and criminal law will also encompass the consideration of legislation as outlined below:

■ Homosexual Vilification - recent reports have identified an unacceptable level of homophobic violence in the community (eg the Puplick Report, May 1993). The New South Wales Law Reform Commission, in the course of its present reference on the Anti-Discrimination Act, has raised questions about anti-vilification for public comment. When it has considered this matter and consulted further the Commission will bring out a report in 1994, which will be given full consideration by the Government.

■ Crimes Act Part 15A - there is a proposal to allow people aged 16 to 18 years to apply on their own behalf for apprehended violence orders

■ Summary Offences Act - the Attorney is examining a proposal to remove imprisonment as a penalty for offensive language. This section of the Act has had a disproportionately heavy impact on youth

■ Bail Act - amongst other things, the Attorney is considering proposals that:

(a) victims of personal violence offences be notified as to whether bail has been granted or refused

(b) minor bail conditions (such as which police station the accused may report to) to be reviewed by the Justice of the Peace in a courthouse.

6.3.8 Youth Affairs Policy Primary Objective: Assistance for Specific Groups of Youth

The Youth Affairs Policy states that:

> The Government is committed to ensuring that all youth are represented in mainstream activities. Where their circumstances inhibit this, it is committed to ensuring that specific policies and programs are established to enhance their capacity to do so. These initiatives will take into account the distinct needs of: young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; youth with disabilities; youth who are geographically isolated; youth from non-English speaking backgrounds; youth disadvantaged by socio-economic circumstances; and young women.

● **Relevant programs and services**

Programs and services currently available for specific groups of youth include:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth:

- the pilot Koori Youth Program (Office of Youth Affairs)

- Young Offenders Program: special programs for young Aboriginal people (Department of Corrective Services)

- Aboriginal Juvenile Offenders Program (Office of Juvenile Justice).

Geographically Isolated Youth:

- Support for Families (Dept of Community Services).

Non-English Speaking Background Youth:

- Young Offenders Program: special programs for youth of non-English speaking background (Department of Corrective Services)

- Circuit Breaker (Office of Youth Affairs).

● **Future Directions**

The Chairman of the Ethnic Affairs Commission chairs the NSW Inter-Departmental Committee on Migrant Settlement (NICOMS). In 1994, consideration will be given to the needs of migrant youth as a possible subject for coordinated attention. It is anticipated that this will contribute to solutions of some of the relevant underlying issues regarding youth violence.

6.4 JOINT STATE/COMMONWEALTH PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

A number of State and Federal government departments provide initiatives on a joint basis. Examples of various projects and services are outlined.

6.4.1 Accommodation

■ Crisis Accommodation Program, which funds community housing groups to provide premises to meet the needs of homeless youth (NSW Department of Community Services/ Federal Department of Housing)

■ The Youth Social Justice Strategy Supported Accommodation Program (YSJS SAP), which is incorporated into the general Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

6.4.2 Health

■ Student Welfare and Child Protection Education (Department of School Education)

■ Health Services for Homeless Youth (joint Health Department/ Commonwealth program, however, it is uncertain that Commonwealth funding will continue)

■ Australian Violence Prevention Award for the most outstanding projects which assist in the prevention or reduction of violence (NSW Government and the Australian Institute of Criminology)

6.4.3 Specific Groups of Youth

Aboriginal Youth:

- Aboriginal Education and Training Program (TAFE)

Youth with disabilities:

- Home and Community Care Program (NSW Departments of Housing and Community Services).

Non-English Speaking Background youth:

- Whole School Anti-Racism Project (Department of School Education)

6.5 COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT POLICIES, PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Commonwealth Government has initiated a range of policies and programs which are aimed at reducing youth violence. Examples of these projects are outlined.

6.5.1 Education

The Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) is funding a Gender and Violence Project, which has produced a position paper focusing on gender-based violence in schools. The second part of the project will involve development of professional development and curriculum materials on gender-based violence, for use in schools.

6.5.2 Further Education, Training and Employment

The Commonwealth Government funds a range of programs to assist youth with further education, training and employment. These programs include: Accredited Training for Youth (ATY); INWORK; Job Placement and Employment Training (JPET); Landcare and Environment Action Program (LEAP); and Job Clubs. Youth are also able to access programs that are not youth specific such as: JOBSTART; JOBTRAIN; and the Special Intervention Program (SIP).

The Commonwealth Government has announced a number of initiatives to assist youth in further education, training and employment in the context of the 1993/94 Federal Budget. Examples of these initiatives include: better targeting and revised wage subsidy rates for the JOBSTART program; Regional Innovation for Employment Pilot Projects; a Community Activity Program; a Training Incentive Program; and improvements to the Newstart strategy.

6.5.3 Health and Wellbeing

The Commonwealth Government funds a variety of programs which aim to enhance the health and well-being of youth. Examples of programs and services with direct relevance to the issue of youth violence include:

■ Health Advancement Program, which has included development of two "alcohol related violence" communication strategies; the Adolescent Alcohol Campaign *How Will you Feel Tomorrow?*; preparation of a National Drug Strategic Plan; and education and prevention activities focusing on alcohol and drug use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Department of Health, Housing, Local Government And Community Services - DHHLGCS);

■ National Drug Strategy (DHHLGCS)

■ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) National Family Violence Intervention Program

■ Youth's Development Program, which assists young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through cultural education, community work projects, hostel accommodation and intervention programs for those at risk of entering or in the juvenile justice system (ATSIC)

■ the Violence Prevention Unit (Australian Institute of Criminology)

■ National Agenda for Women, which encompasses a specific commitment to promoting the safety and personal security of women. One of the twenty action plans for 1988-1992 focused on violence against women and children (Office of Status of Women)

■ Stopping Violence Against Women - Community Education Program (Office of Status of Women)

- Office of Status of Women provides policy advice and develops resources on violence against women, such as the publication: *Violence at Home. The Big Secret*

- National Committee on Violence Against Women (Office of Status of Women)

- Rural Youth Suicide Prevention Program (DHHLGCS)

- the Gay and Lesbian Teachers and Students Association has been funded to establish a telephone hotline targeting suburban and rural areas of New South Wales. The project will assist students who are victims of homophobic harassment and discrimination in schools (DHHLGCS).

6.5.4 Justice and Criminal Law

- **Examples of relevant policies/programs and services**

  - The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) advises on legislation relating to human rights and monitors its implementation. It also advises the Federal Government on international instruments relating to human rights. The HREOC has conducted inquiries relevant to the issue of youth violence, such as the 1991 National Inquiry into Racist Violence and the 1990 Inquiry into Race Discrimination, Human Rights and Distribution of Alcohol in the Northern Territory

  - Australian Youth Initiatives Grants (AYIG), which funded nine youth crime prevention projects throughout Australia in 1991, including four in New South Wales. The projects represent an attempt to address the basic social needs of young offenders, or those at risk of offending, moving away from an emphasis on law enforcement and punishment (Department of Employment, Education and Training). The NSW projects include:

    - The Greenhill Young Offender Support Program, Kempsey, NSW, which supports young Aborigines. Project staff work closely with the justice system, participating in police

interviews, providing reports for the Magistrates Court and supervising offenders on community service orders. A range of activities, including camps, family counselling and cultural and legal education is also provided

. Expanding Horizons for Young People of Non-English Speaking Background, Campbelltown, NSW, which attempts to reduce crime through encouraging young people from non-English speaking backgrounds to have a positive influence on their community. Workshops and group activities attempt to increase self esteem and reduce feelings of community alienation and resentment

. Project Turnaround, Riverstone, NSW, which takes young people who have problems with drug abuse, sexual assault and family breakdown on five to seven day camps. The camps help participants to develop their self-esteem and to discuss their problems

. South Sydney Youth Services which addresses the problems associated with community alienation by providing young offenders and 'at risk' youth with a greater access to a broad range of services, including counselling, developing support structures within the community and assistance with education and employment

■ Youth Bail Accommodation Program, which aims to reduce the rate at which young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are remanded in custody (ATSIC)

■ Services funded by the Attorney-General's Department such as marriage counselling; marriage education; family mediation; adolescent mediation and family therapy; and family skills training.

● **Examples of future directions**

The Commonwealth Government is proposing to establish a Community Safety Council, a broad-based government/non-government organisation which will provide a national framework for the coordination of community safety across Australia. The proposed Council will provide an opportunity to coordinate youth crime

prevention projects. It is anticipated that the issue of youth violence will be identified as a focus area for the Council to consider.

6.5.5 Assistance for Specific Groups of Youth

The Commonwealth Government provides a wide range of assistance for specific groups of youth. Examples of programs and services (in addition to the joint State/Commonwealth programs and services listed above) include:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth:

- INWORK

- Youth's Employment Program

- Youth's Development Program.

Youth with disabilities:

- Special Education Program

- the Disability Reform Package.

Geographically isolated youth:

- Assistance to Isolated Children.

Non-English speaking background youth:

- School Language and Literacy Program

- English as a Second Language (ESL) Program

- Refugee Minors Program.