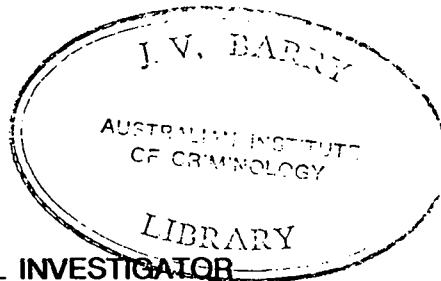


**HOMELESS YOUTH AS VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE**



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**FRONT PAGE  
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### (iii) Summary of findings

#### Background

- \* 75% left home aged 12-15 years.
- \* 53% left home because of physical and/or sexual violence.
- \* They most often stayed with friends or in refuges/hostels.
- \* 74% had had to stay somewhere they felt threatened, because of a lack of options.
- \* Females frequently spoke of sexual harassment and exchanging sex for somewhere to stay.
- \* The majority were neither in school nor currently working.
- \* Most time was spent in public locations, "just hangin' out".
- \* Over 80% drank alcohol and/or used drugs.

#### *Violence: Overview*

- \* 92% had felt scared for their safety since leaving home.
- \* 86% reported being physically hurt by someone since leaving home (96% of males, 74% of females).
- \* 65% reported being physically assaulted in the past 12 months (74% of males, 53% of females).
- \* 52% reported being sexually assaulted since leaving home (29% of males, 76% of females).
- \* 71% reported having physically hurt themselves since leaving home.
- \* Overall, the two major sources of violence were strangers and police. A total of 98 episodes of violent victimisation were recounted by the 51 subjects:

40% of all violent incidents involved a stranger as the assaulter (49% of males' incidents and 21% of females' incidents). 72% of the sample recounted at least one incident involving assault by a stranger (96% of males and 35% of females).

39% of all violent incidents involved police as the assaulter (43% of males' incidents and 30% of females' incidents). 55% of the sample recounted at least one incident involving assault by police (58% of males and 47% of females).

- \* Females were most likely to be physically hurt by friends/acquaintances (65% of females and 23% of males).

#### *Violence: Peers*

- \* Most instances of physical violence occurred on the street or in other public locations (eg railway stations).
- \* Many violent incidents and a good deal of sexual assault and harassment were reported in hostels, refuges and squats.
- \* Alcohol and/or drugs were frequently mentioned in descriptions of violent incidents.
- \* Violence often reported as an unprovoked attack, or as erupting out of scenes of mutual aggravation.
- \* Weapons were rarely used (knives were most frequently reported weapon).
- \* Violence for males predominantly involved fights with male peers, for females it involved sexual assault by a male thought of as a friend.

#### *Violence: Police*

- \* 58% of males and 47% of females reported being physically assaulted by police.
- \* 39% of all reported violent incidents involved police as perpetrators.
- \* More than one police officer was involved in most instances of physical violence.
- \* Incidents most often involved male officers, but some incidents involved females.
- \* The location of most physical assaults by police was the police station.
- \* Police harassment at refuges and squats was reported.
- \* Fists and feet were most often used to assault, although the "Yellow Pages" was frequently mentioned.
- \* Verbal abuse and general intimidation accompanied assault.
- \* Incidents of police violence are rarely reported because of a fear of retaliation, and a sense of powerlessness ("you can't prove it").

- \* Youths' descriptions of incidents did not suggest exaggeration or maliciousness: police assaults were justified and even excused in the light of their own behaviour (their antagonism of police was acknowledged) or accepted as a routine feature of police-youth relations.
- \* Females were less often assaulted by police, but experienced general harassment.

### *Reporting/Avoiding Violence*

- \* 80% of violent incidents were never reported.
- \* 76% of the sample had not or would not report a violent incident to police.
- \* Incidents of police violence were rarely reported because of a fear of retaliation, and a sense of powerlessness ("you can't prove it").
- \* 70% sought help from friends.
- \* 42% did not seek help from any other person/agency.
- \* 63% had attended hospital as a result of injuries from a violent incident. However, despite serious injuries and/or illness, many did not seek medical assistance.
- \* Threatening situations were most often avoided by "running away". Other responses included: distrusting others, seeking group protection, careful consideration of a place to sleep.

## 1. THE PROBLEM: BACKGROUND

It is only in relatively recent times that academics and policy-makers have begun to take more seriously the interests of victims of crime. Consequently, in Australia we still know very little about the vulnerability to crime of specific groups. However, the available victimization data both here and overseas, indicate that the young and the unemployed are two groups which are particularly vulnerable to violent crime. Therefore it was the objective of the research reported here, to investigate in more detail the violent experiences of a specific group thought to be particularly vulnerable to experiences of violent crime, that is, homeless youths who live "on the street". The specific focus of the research was the violent experiences of this group after they had left their family environment.

In a recent bibliography on homelessness, David Feld quotes a number of different definitions of "homelessness" and concludes that there are no simple answers to the questions, "What is homelessness?" and "Who are the homeless?" He points out that being "homeless" is more than being "houseless" (Feld 1986:7). The meaning of homelessness from the perspective of one young respondent to the National Inquiry into Homeless Children is quoted in the report:

When you haven't got anywhere to live or you got somewhere to live but not a place on your own. You get chucked around every week from one place to another and you're totally relying on other people. You've got no money of your own. You probably haven't got your own room and you're just travelling round all the time looking for somewhere more permanent (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:45).

Recently, particularly in the media, the term "street kids" has come to be used almost synonymously with "homeless youth". Due to the emphasis of media coverage on issues such as drugs, crime and prostitution, the term "street kid" has become a derogative one in the eyes of many young people who have nowhere permanent to live. Certainly it lacks any clear, precise definition (Gokhale 1987). There are young people who spend a lot of their time on the street, engaging in the sort of activity described in the media, but who still live at home. On the other hand there are young people who are no longer living at home and who do not have anywhere stable to live, who are attending school and avoiding the street scene.

The young people who are of concern in this research are those whose situation is reflected in the definition used by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in their recent National Inquiry into Homeless Children: "homelessness refers to lack of shelter that is permanent, adequate and secure and a vulnerability, as a result of both this lack of shelter and the lifestyle it imposes, to exploitation and abuse." (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:43).

The findings of a number of overseas studies suggest that this population is particularly vulnerable to violent crime. The most recent available statistics on criminal victimization in the United States indicate that people aged 12-24 years have the highest victimization rates for crimes of violence. In 1987, the estimated rates of victimization for crimes of violence per 1,000 population in each age group were: 55.6 (12-15 years), 67.5 (16-19 years), 62.5 (20-24 years), 33.5 (25-34 years), 18.5 (35-49 years), 8.6 (50-64 years) and 5.5 (65+ years). These rates suggest that young people 16-19 years of age are the most vulnerable to violent crime (U.S. Department of Justice, 1989:17).

The same U.S. report concluded that the overall victimization rate for violent crimes was higher for men than women, for persons never married and for central city residents (U.S. Department of Justice 1989:3). An earlier report from the same agency concluded that streets were the most common site for personal crimes of violence which were most likely to occur at night (U.S. Department of Justice 1988:3-8).

Studies which have compared Australian and overseas data have concluded that the demographic profile of crime victims is similar (Grabosky 1985; Braithwaite and Biles 1984). Grabosky (1989:4) concludes that, "In England, Wales, Scotland, Canada, the United States and Australia alike, young, single, unemployed males appear to run greater risks of becoming victims of assault and robbery" (Grabosky 1989:4).

Research in the United States has also found that victimization rates are high among the poor and the unemployed (Siegel 1983:81). Similarly, in their analysis of the Australian National Crime Survey of 1975, Braithwaite and Biles (1979) drew attention to the higher rate of criminal victimization among the unemployed. They speculated that the high rate of crime victimization among this group may reflect, in part, the large proportion of their time spent in public spaces. This is consistent with the findings of other U.S. studies which have found that personal violence victimization occurs disproportionately away from the home of the victim, mainly on the street or in other public places (Hindelang et al 1978:251-255). Hindelang et al (1978) argue that lifestyle differences which affect the probability of being outside the home, are thus related to differential exposure to the risk of personal victimization. Stafford and Galle (1984) similarly argue that victimization rates are related to degree of exposure to risk in terms of the time spent outside the home.

In Australia, Luby (1983:2) notes that two of the main elements consistently present in the plight of homeless youth are unemployment and poverty. These youths are by definition "outside the home", and many not only spend their time in public places such as shopping centers and railway stations, but also have to sleep in similar locations such as paddocks, abandoned cars and under buses (Luby 1983:1). Thus the economic circumstances, living situation and age of homeless youths are consistent with key factors which affect vulnerability to violence.

However when violent behavior is discussed in relation to homeless "street kids" it is most likely to be in terms of these young people as perpetrators of the violence rather than as the victims. The greater concern shown by some community groups about child abuse and domestic violence may have inadvertently fostered the belief that young people escape the violence of the home only to turn "bad", aggressive and threatening to the community when they are on the street and homeless. As Wilson (1986:18) points out, "... the picture of rebellious and violent gangs of youth roaming our streets, seeking out violence and trouble to inflict on bystanders, or parents, or authorities ..." is the one most often portrayed by the media. However, as Wilson goes on to conclude from his study of "Street Kids", this picture is often misleading. While Wilson recognizes this difficulty, his study also focuses on the criminal activities of the street kids themselves: their alcohol and drug use, prostitution, suicide, and involvement in serious crime.

That violence is a part of the everyday life of homeless youth who are living "on the street", is recognized by Luby (1983:5) who points out that, "Violence can be a norm for the adolescent living on the street. Within his peer group its influence can be so strong that the concept of living without it can be inconceivable". The National Inquiry into Homeless Youth similarly commented on the prevalence of violence in the lives of homeless children: "Many young people have escaped violent homes only to encounter further violence on the streets." (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:51). As indicated in this comment, for many homeless youths, violence was a part of their everyday experience before they left home.



The incidence of assault, including sexual assault, in the families of homeless youths has been discussed in the literature (eg Low, Crawshaw & Mathews 1984; Girls in Care Project 1986; Maas & Hartley 1988). However, their experience of violence as victims after they have left home is less well documented. While the report of the NSW Girls in Care Project focuses on violence in the family, some of the data which are reported suggest that the girls interviewed may also have been victims of violence outside the home. Of 79 girls interviewed 21% reported having been physically assaulted and 23% sexually assaulted (other than incest). Of the 21 instances of physical assault and 18 of sexual assault (other than incest) which were reported in the interviews, over 80% were reported to have been committed by people other than relatives or parents.

A clearer indication of the extent of violence in the lives of homeless youths after they have left home was provided by a study conducted by Dr I. O'Connor for the Inquiry into Homeless Children. He reported to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission that: "The interviews were replete with descriptions of being attacked in all manner of situations and of the ever present danger of violence" (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:4) However, although we have recognized the general vulnerability of this group of young people, and have been concerned about the violence in their home life, O'Connor's study is the first to specifically address the issue of their vulnerability to violence after they have left home.

## CONCLUSION

The National Inquiry into Homeless Children estimates conservatively that there are between 50,000 to 70,000 children and young people who are homeless or at serious risk (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:69). The age, economic circumstances and lifestyle of this group suggests that they are one of the groups in our society most vulnerable to violent crime. However, this has been barely recognized in the current literature. This is in part due to the lack of research available on homeless youth in general, and also the minimal level of research on victims of crime in Australia. The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission concluded from their review of the available material: "In compiling the report, we found a major difficulty to be the lack of research in Australia on the plight of homeless people in general, and homeless children in particular." (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1989:iv).

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The objective of the research was to investigate homeless youth as victims of violence after they had left home. The overall research strategy was to conduct intensive interviews with approximately sixty homeless young females and males.

For both ethical and methodological reasons, eight young people who had experienced homelessness were employed as research assistants throughout the project. Youth have been involved successfully in the research process (e.g. Wilson, 1986) and the conducting of interviews (e.g. Coventry, 1983) in other Australian research on youth issues. As Wilson (1986:27) notes, "no amount of background reading or careful entry into a social setting can compensate for already being a participant in the group".

### Sample

A total of 63 interviews were conducted. However, due to predominantly technical difficulties, the data reported here were obtained from 51 interviews conducted with 28 males and 23 females aged between 14 and 18 years of age. An age limit of 18 years was chosen since in Victoria, young people below this age who are without adequate parental care are potentially the responsibility of the state.

The young people were recruited through a variety of sources including: youth refuges, State Government community residential services, drop-in centres, outreach service workers and word of mouth from interviewers and interviewees. All interviewees received payment of ten dollars for their participation.

Prior to interview, using an informal process which covered the kinds of places they had stayed in since leaving home, the youth researchers screened prospective interviewees to establish that the subjects had experienced homelessness. This was deemed necessary after initially finding that a number of prospective subjects had tried to misrepresent themselves for interview in order to receive the payment.

### The Research Design

The employment of young people as interviewers was a key design feature of the study. This strategy was premised on the assumption that young homeless people would feel more comfortable disclosing information about their lifestyle and particularly their fears and experience of violence, if interviewed by peers who both appeared credible, culturally consonant, and were known to be or to have been in a similar situation. The principal investigators undertook 15 of the 51 interviews as a check of the reliability of youth interviewers.

The initial stage of research entailed a literature survey and discussions with practitioners in the area of youth work. Through these practitioners, eight young people were identified who had or were currently experiencing homelessness. These young people were invited to join the research team. All those referred through practitioners were accepted to the team.

Youth researchers were involved in all stages of the research. Initially, they helped develop the question guide both in terms of content and form of expression. The youth researchers were then trained in interview skills and practiced these techniques in mock situations before commencing the research interviews. The principal investigators provided feedback and constructive criticism to hone their abilities throughout the interview timetable. In the final stage, they were introduced to coding and data analysis although with rare exception, this aspect of the research was conducted by the principal investigators.

The youth researchers were also coached in the preparation of material for public presentation. Information about the research was presented in a number of formal settings: National Committee on Violence; the Ministry of Education, Government of Victoria; Delinquency Prevention Conference, Australian Institute of Criminology; "The Today Show", Channel 9 T.V.; Radio 3AW, 3RRR, 3AW and ABC Radio.

In planning the project, the principal investigators expected training and interviewing to occur in half day blocks. Given the lack of recent work or school related time structure for the youth researchers, full day employment was thought too sharp a change in lifestyle. The work day usually commenced in the early afternoon, again to accommodate the existing lifestyles of the youth researchers.

Youth researchers were originally asked to make a two week commitment to the research project. It had been assumed that their homeless situation would make lengthier time commitments difficult to sustain, and it was also originally believed that the training process and data collection could be achieved within this short period. In actual fact, these stages demanded approximately five weeks, and it was a mark of the youth researchers' genuine concern for the topic that they extended their period of involvement.

At the time of writing this report, six months has elapsed since the final interviews were conducted. Three of the eight young people are still actively involved in the project on a voluntary basis without pay. They have reviewed early drafts and written components of this document.

### The Question Guide

Intensive interviews were deemed the most appropriate methodology for the study due to the sensitive and personal nature of the subject matter, the exploratory nature of the research, the range of language and literacy skills that were expected among the subjects and the "outsider" character of the subject group.

The question guide was semi-structured in order to prevent the response set which could be expected of adolescent responses to a highly structured questionnaire, (see Appendix i). It was also intended that the format should capitalise on young peoples' penchant for recounting stories.

Subjects were advised that the interview would cover the experience of homelessness for young people. They were not told that a specific concern of the research was the fear and experience of violence.

The question guide was designed to first obtain demographic data, important not only for the data which it would yield, but also to allow the interviewer and interviewee to "warm-up". The interview then gathered information about the interviewees' general lifestyle. In this minimally threatening and non-focussed section, it was expected that stories of violence would emerge unprompted. This permitted an assessment of the extent to which violence, the major research concern, was a primary consideration in the lives of the subjects.

The next segment specifically directed respondents to describe violent incidents which they had experienced. Firstly, young people were asked to talk about the most recent or the most severe violent experience. Before the project began, the principal investigators held discussions with a range of practitioners to identify potential sources of violence. These were verified with the youth research team. In the final segment of the interview, respondents were specifically asked whether they had been physically hurt by a range of sources.

To maximise the qualitative data obtained, all interviews were taped. All tapes were reviewed by the principal investigators and constructive feedback on interview techniques provided to the youth researchers during on-going debriefing sessions.

### **Data Analysis**

A coding sheet was developed for the generation of summary data. A number of interviews were transcribed before coding while the remainder were coded from tapes. The cost entailed in transcription prevented all interviews being transcribed. Extensive notes and card catalogues were kept for the non-transcribed interviews.

Not all questions were asked of all interviewees and hence the number of respondents fluctuates across questions. This was due to a number of factors:

- 1) the semi-structured nature of the interview schedule was intended to create a dialogue which aimed to elicit stories rather than specifically ensure coverage of a range of set questions;
- 2) some of the interviewees went into greater detail at earlier points in the interview and became patently restless as their attention span was overloaded;
- 3) technical difficulties associated with the range of interviewing locations rendered some complete interviews unusable and segments of others impossible to decipher; and
- 4) from reviewing the tapes, it was apparent to the principal investigators that youth interviewees were on some occasions very wisely sensitive to the emotional state of respondents and accordingly did not ask questions which were thought to be upsetting.

### **Rights of Subjects**

Before the project began, it was approved by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Melbourne. All participation was voluntary and subjects were paid ten dollars for their time and effort.

Interviews were conducted in a variety of venues with capacity for privacy a prime consideration. Interviewees were informed of their right to withdraw from the interview at any time and offered the choice of a male or female interviewer in most cases.

Anonymity was assured to participants and no names were recorded on tape or any schedules. A consent form (see Appendix ii) was signed by both the interviewee and the interviewer. Interviewees were advised that their consent forms could in no way be matched to their tapes, and that the tapes would be destroyed on completion of the project.

One of the principal investigators was on hand during interviews. No complaints or concerns were received.

Pseudonyms are used throughout this report.

### Summary

Intensive interviews were audio-taped with homeless youth concerning their fear and experience of violence since leaving home. Although quantitative data was collected, the major aim was to gain qualitative information about their situation. The employment of young people in similar circumstances as the research assistants was an important feature of the study.

### 3. LIFE AFTER HOME

#### Leaving Home

Most of the subjects (75%) were aged between twelve and fifteen years when they first left home. A smaller proportion left home when they were ten or eleven years of age (10%) (Table 1). Subjects were asked the question, "Why did you leave home in the first place?" However, this was not an issue of central concern to this research and so was not pressed or probed by the interviewers. Nevertheless the majority of young people (88%) mentioned some form of family conflict as the reason they first left (Table 1).

Table 1 Age and Reason for Leaving Home (in percent)

| Age First<br>Left Home |     | Reason<br>Left Home<br>(General) |     | Reason<br>Left Home<br>(Violence) |     |
|------------------------|-----|----------------------------------|-----|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Year                   | %   |                                  | %   |                                   | %   |
| 10                     | 4   | Family<br>Conflict               | 88  | Physical<br>Violence              | 30  |
| 11                     | 6   |                                  |     |                                   |     |
| 12                     | 24  |                                  |     |                                   |     |
| 13                     | 11  | Other                            | 12  | Sexual<br>Violence                | 6   |
| 14                     | 20  |                                  |     |                                   |     |
| 15                     | 20  | Total                            | 100 |                                   |     |
| 16                     | 11  |                                  |     | Both                              | 17  |
| 17                     | 4   | n = 49                           |     | Neither                           | 47  |
| Total                  | 100 |                                  |     |                                   |     |
| n = 46                 |     |                                  |     | Total                             | 100 |
|                        |     |                                  |     | n = 47                            |     |

For just over half (53%) of the subjects, this family conflict involved physical or sexual violence (Table 2). Thirty percent indicated that they had left home because of physical violence and a slightly smaller proportion mentioned sexual violence (23%) either by itself (6%) or in combination with physical violence (17%). However, close to half (47%) did not specify any form of violence. This is probably a sensitive area for many young people and since it was not probed by the interviewer, some may have been reluctant to talk about it. The following quotations illustrate the types of reasons given for leaving home:

Why did you leave home in the first place?

Oh, because I was sick of all the hassles at home, my parents yelling and fighting, things like that. (Barb)

Why did you leave home from the beginning, I mean when you first left home, why?

Well because there was a guy who was living at my nann's house and he decided to sexually assault me, and then I got sick and tired of it so I left me nanna's house .. (Judy)

I left because my brother tried to have sex with me. (Kate)

Me dad and I always fight over just little things, like if I forgot to make my bed or that, me dad would stand over me and hit me .. (Brian)

My father .. started beltin' me brother's face into walls and kickin' down stairs and he sort of had a go at me and I sort of said "No way, I'm not putting up with this", and I just left at the age of 14 and a half, 15. (Ian)

Given their age and family situations, it is perhaps not surprising that approximately 31% stated that they were currently under a statutory protective order (State Guardianship or Supervision Order) or a statutory correctional order (probation or parole), (Table 2).

**Table 2** Type of Statutory Order

|                   | %    |
|-------------------|------|
| No Order          | 65   |
| Gurardianship     | 15   |
| Supervision Order | 10   |
| Probation         | 4    |
| Parole            | 2    |
| Other             | 4    |
|                   | ---- |
| Total             | 100% |

n = 46

It was also interesting to find that 48% had a "Worker" to whom they could presumably turn to for assistance, a figure greater than the percentage currently under a statutory order. (Table 3). However, some interviewees did indicate that they had been under statutory supervision in the past (figures for past orders were not specifically obtained).

**Table 3** Percentage of Homeless Youth with a "Worker"

|       |      |
|-------|------|
| Yes   | 48   |
| No    | 52   |
|       | ---- |
| Total | 100% |

n = 46

This would seem indicative of young people's capacity to maintain professional supports: it is, however, conceivable that there was a similar proportion of young homeless youths who did not consider anybody as a worker to whom they could turn, despite the high percentage who have passed through staffed accommodation. (See below).

## Where to Stay?

Since leaving home interviewees had stayed in a range of settings. The two most frequently mentioned places were staying with friends (mentioned by 82% interviewees) and refuges or hostels (84%). Close to half (43%) had stayed in parks and gardens and both public buildings and squats were mentioned by at least a quarter (25% and 27% respectively) of the youth (Table 4).

**Table 4 Accommodation Since Leaving Home (in percent)**

| Where Stayed     | %  | Ever HAD to Stay? | %   |
|------------------|----|-------------------|-----|
| Friends          | 82 | Yes               | 74  |
| Hostels/Refuges  | 84 | No                | 24  |
| Squats           | 27 |                   |     |
| Parks/Gardens    | 43 | Total             | 100 |
| Public Buildings | 25 |                   |     |
| Public Transport | 13 | n = 42            |     |
| Other            | 52 |                   |     |

n = 51

\* Percentages do not add to 100 since more than one location could be specified.

Many youths mentioned not being able to stay with friends over a long period because they did not want to impose on their friends or outstay their welcome.

And why did you leave your friend's house?

Because of his parents .. they didn't like it. (Geoff)

Have you ever lived or stayed with friends?

Yeah, only for about two weeks.

What was the reason for leaving?

I felt like I was using them. (Ann)

I don't like to beg on my friends and that .. I don't want to go in and cause problems there. (Ian)

Have you ever had to stay somewhere that you didn't want to because you had nowhere else to stay?

Yeah, Flinders Street (railway station) steps, Yarra River, places like that.

And what happened?

Ah, well I stay there for a week on end, sometimes two weeks and then I just um, go and stay at a friend's place, I ask them to put me up, because I don't really like asking them but, y'know, if the worst comes to worst I have to .. I can't expect them to put me up all the time, y'know. (Colin)

While youths frequently left friends houses for the above sorts of reasons, the majority (74%) (Table 4) also spoke of having felt compelled to stay somewhere or with someone because of the lack of options. They often spoke of physical and sexual violence in these circumstances which applied to both private housing and funded program accommodation such as refuges and hostels (See also Section 5).

There was this shared house accommodation for young people, um, twenty fives and under, up to about sixteen. I was living in a place in Newport and I kept getting my face kicked in and I sort of stayed



because I had nowhere else to go .. I come back one morning and all my stuff had been smashed around, my clothes had been slashed. (Ian)

A few blokes y'know they're always out rolling people, sparring each other and sometimes they get a bit serious y'know. I wasn't quite sure about them.

Did you have to stay there? Were you forced to stay there?  
I had nowhere else to go so, yeah. (Andy)

Girls in particular spoke of sexual harrassment and exchanging sex for somewhere to stay (See Section 5).

Yes, I've stayed with friends, but most of them have been boys and they take advantage of you. You haven't got much choice. (Fiona)

They told me about a guy who wanted a girl to share with him .. after a couple of weeks, he walked into my room with nothing on and I just about had a heart attack .. He was just taking advantage of the situation but I got out anyway. (Lori)

### School/Work/Income

All, except five (10%), of the subjects were not currently attending school. The majority (78%) had left school during Year 9 or Year 10 (Table 5).

Table 5 Education Level and Current Schooling (in percent)

| Currently in School? | %   | School Level When Left School |     |
|----------------------|-----|-------------------------------|-----|
|                      |     | Level                         | %   |
| Yes                  | 10  |                               |     |
| No                   | 90  |                               |     |
| Total                | 100 | 7                             | 2   |
|                      |     | 8                             | 15  |
|                      |     | 9                             | 44  |
| n = 50               |     | 10                            | 34  |
|                      |     | 11                            | 5   |
|                      |     | Total                         | 100 |
|                      |     | n = 41                        |     |

Most (86%) of the subjects were not currently working. However, most (92%) had held a job since they had left home and over half of these young people (68%) indicated that they felt that they had been "ripped off" at work (Table 6).

**Table 6** Employment Since Leaving Home (in percent)

| Currently Working? | %   | Job Since Left Home? | %   | "Ripped Off at Work"? |     |
|--------------------|-----|----------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|
| Yes                | 14  | Yes                  | 92  | Yes                   | 68  |
| No                 | 86  | No                   | 8   | No                    | 32  |
| Total              | 100 | Total                | 100 | Total                 | 100 |
| n = 50             |     | n = 50               |     | no = 34               |     |

Those young people who felt "ripped off" spoke of the number of hours expected of them, broken agreements and sexual harassment. Most frequently mentioned, however, was the rate of pay:

Have you ever not been paid properly, like wages?

Yes, the last job I was at.

What was the agreement you had?

Well I got it through the CES (Commonwealth Employment Service).

They said "from 18 onwards at \$7.14 an hour". I said "fair enough".

I went down and got paid - I was getting paid \$4.44 an hour. (Andy)

Well I was meant to be getting \$149 and I was only getting \$123.

(Cheryl)

Young people were asked to describe their source of income and their responses have been categorised in Table 7.

| Source of Income             | %    |
|------------------------------|------|
| Social Security Benefits     | 50   |
| AusStudy                     | 8    |
| Casual or regular employment | 15   |
| No source or begging         | 17   |
| Other                        | 10   |
| Total                        | 100% |
| n = 48                       |      |

It was clear in the interviews that the young people were not certain of the precise kind of social security benefit they were receiving. For example, many simply referred to "the dole". Only three respondents made specific reference to Young Homeless Allowance. Seventeen percent of young people received no money through benefits or employment.

### Filling in Time

For most of the interviewees, their days were spent "just hangin' out", some mentioned looking for work and others talked of the time spent looking for somewhere to stay.

A small proportion of both male (14%) and a smaller proportion of female (5%) homeless youth said they spent their time with mainly female friends. Half (50%) of the females said they spent their time mainly with males. Males on the other hand tended to spend their time in mixed sex groups (Table 8).

**Table 8 Sex of Friends (in percent)**

|            | Males | Females | Total |
|------------|-------|---------|-------|
| Male       | 22    | 50      | 40    |
| Female     | 14    | 5       | 9     |
| Mixed      | 50    | 35      | 42    |
| No Friends | 14    | 5       | 9     |
| Total      | 100   | 100     | 100   |
| n =        | 14    | 20      | 34    |

\* Particular caution is advised in interpreting these percentages because of the small number of cases.

A high proportion of the interviewees said that they drank alcohol (88%) and/or used drugs (80%) (Table 9).

**Table 9 Percentage of Homeless Youth who Drink/Use Drugs**

|       | Drink  | Drugs  |
|-------|--------|--------|
| Yes   | 88     | 80     |
| No    | 12     | 20     |
| Total | 100    | 100    |
|       | n = 43 | n = 45 |

However, over half said that they did not think that they had a drinking problem (62%) or a drug problem (58%) (Table 10).

**Table 10 Percentage of Homeless Youth with Self-Defined Drinking/Drug Problem**

|       | Drink  | Drugs  |
|-------|--------|--------|
| Yes   | 38     | 42     |
| No    | 62     | 58     |
| Total | 100    | 100    |
|       | n = 39 | n = 40 |

### The Good/Bad Things about Life

When asked about the best thing in their life at the present time, most young people looked at the interviewer in silence for several seconds trying to think of something to say. Most would then indicate that they did not think there was anything good about their lives; "Nothing", "nothin' much", "Its all bad", were the most frequent sorts of responses to this question. When prompted, friends were most frequently referred to:

No good things .. (long pause) . I have some friends. (Rita)

I'm makin a lot more friends .. meeting people here (refuge) (Fiona)

Nothin' .. (pause) . Except I'm with me boyfriend. (Claire)

My girifriend .. the refuge .. makin friends. (Nick)

I've got a girlfriend, a place to stay, friends. I don't want much out of life. (Colin)

As suggested by the last two quotations above, another "good thing" that was mentioned was finding somewhere to stay: "Got somewhere to live" (Phillip); "I'm in the refuge" (Joe); "I've got a place to stay" (Claudia). While for a handful of other young people, there was hope in their lives and this was indicated by such comments as:

Getting along at the hostel. Looking for a job. My girlfriend. (Ben)

The idea off having something in my life when I got Year 10 and I'll get a job. (Nat)

Getting myself together again. Going to school. Getting myself off pills. (Barb)

Just now I'm at school y'know and I'm meeting people and doing interesting things. (Owen)

When asked about the worst thing in their lives at the present time, many interviewees referred explicitly to their homeless situation: "Being homeless" (Eve) or "Living away from home" (Ben). The following quotation from one young man illustrates a sentiment felt by many of the youth:

Being out of home. I'd rather be back home with my family but I don't think that would happen. (Sean)

Other young people referred to the consequences of the stigma of being homeless, one of which is losing contact with or being rejected by old friends:

I've lost every one of me friends. (Claire)

My school friends don't want to see me. (Rita)

But it was not having a job and the lack of money which were most frequently mentioned:

Being without a job. (Jesse)

Not getting a job. Being unemployed. (Phillip)

Not having a job or any money and its a hassle not having anywhere to stay. (Hamish)

My money hasn't come through from Job Search. I'm broke at the moment. (Fiona)

Most young people expressed some combination of the above factors:

I've lost me friends. I can't get a job and I'm stuck at the hostel. (Claire)

No work. I don't want to go back to school. And me girlfriend's pregnant. (Nick)

Being homeless and I'm worried about my boyfriend .. I also might be pregnant. (Eve)

Being out on the street. No job. Gettin' into fights .. Cops hassling me. (Andy)

Several of the interviewees referred to being "hassled by the cops":

Coppers hassling me. Being broke. (Colin)

Being kicked out of my place by the cops and having to come back here (the refuge). (Adam)

Being on the run - coppers coming up to you every five seconds. (Esther)

This final quotation from one young man captures the mood expressed throughout the interviews:

There's no fucking future anyway. No one cares no more, no one cares nuthin' about me, that's it. (Kev)

### Summary

Most of the young people interviewed in this study had been forced to leave home at a very early age because of major conflicts with their parents which frequently involved physical and/or sexual violence. Having left home and school at an early age they had few resources and were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. For example, while few of these young people were presently working, most had held jobs since leaving home, but felt they had been "ripped off" in various ways.

Both during the day and at night, finding a place to "be" was a major problem. During the day, time was most often spent "hangin' out" in public spaces. In the evening many of these young people moved from friend's place to friend's place, often regretting that they had to impose in this way. Refuges and hostels were also frequently used. However, many young people reported that they had had to stay in places, both private residences and supported housing, where they felt that their safety was in jeopardy. A lack of options made these young people vulnerable to exploitation in return for a place to stay. Young women in particular, frequently spoke of having to exchange sex for a place to stay.

#### 4. VIOLENCE: OVERVIEW

##### Fears

Virtually all (92%) of the interviewees said that they felt scared or frightened for their personal safety (Table 11).

**Table 11** Percentage of Homeless Youth who were "Scared"

|        | %   |
|--------|-----|
| Yes    | 92  |
| No     | 8   |
| Total  | 100 |
| n = 50 |     |

When asked of what it was they were most frightened, half (50%) made some explicit reference to a fear of being a victim of some violent act (Table 12). This was the most frequently mentioned fear. Close to forty percent (39%) made some reference to factors to do with their general vulnerability. A smaller proportion (17%) spontaneously referred to the police:

**Table 12** Sources of Fear Identified by Homeless Youth who had Experienced Fear (in percent)

|               | %  |
|---------------|----|
| Father        | 6  |
| Police        | 17 |
| Vulnerability | 39 |
| Violence      | 50 |
| Other         | 6  |
| n = 46        |    |

\* Percentages do not add to 100% since more than one source could be identified.

The following quotes are examples of the different sorts of fears which were expressed throughout the interviews:

It's not like on TV it's real - it's real. Like you can walk around a corner, and the next corner you walk around, somebody might - you know - pull out a knife and stick it'n your gut. Like, you think about that. Like I sleep with a knife open all the time. Its fucked, as simple as that. (Kev)

What worries you most about being on the street?

Whether you're going to get killed or not?

Does that keep you awake at night worrying about it?

Sometimes it does, yeah, depends on where you're sleeping.

Sometimes in the park, y'know, if the park's got a bad name and

you've never been there before, you worry about it .. if you're going to

wake up or not. Someone might rob you - if you're going to wake up

or not. Someone might rob you -if you've got money they roll you; get

sick, whatever. (Andy)

Are you ever scared, frightened for your safety?

Sometimes, yeah.

Well why are you scared for your safety?

Oh if you get into fights and that, the blokes say they're going to come

after you, and they're bigger than you ..

Where were these fights happening?

Just out on the streets. (Joe)

### Violent Incidents

The vast majority (86%) of the respondents reported having been physically hurt since leaving home (Table 13). Males were more likely (96%) than females (74%) to report being physically hurt.

**Table 13** Percentage of Homeless Youth (by sex) who had been Physically Hurt Since Leaving Home

|       | Female | Male | Total |
|-------|--------|------|-------|
|       | %      | %    | %     |
| Yes   | 74     | 96   | 86    |
| No    | 26     | 4    | 14    |
| Total | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| n =   | 23     | 28   | 51    |

When asked the more specific question as to whether or not they had been physically assaulted in the past twelve months, over half (65%) of the respondents answered affirmatively (Table 14). Again the males were more likely (74%) than the females (53%) to report physical assault.

**Table 14** Percentage of Homeless Youth (by Sex) who had been Physically Assaulted in the Past Twelve Months

|       | Female | Male | Total |
|-------|--------|------|-------|
|       | %      | %    | %     |
| Yes   | 53     | 74   | 65    |
| No    | 47     | 26   | 35    |
| Total | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| n =   | 15     | 19   | 34    |

NB Caution is advised in interpreting percentages because of the small number of cases.

The level of reported sexual assault was lower than that of physical assault; just over half (52%) of the respondents reported having been sexually assaulted since leaving home (Table 15). However, a good deal of other research indicates the reluctance of people to report this form of assault. In the interviews, females were more likely (76%) than males (29%) to report sexual assault.

**Table 15** Percentage of Homeless Youth (by Sex) who had been Sexually Assaulted Since Leaving Home

|       | Female | Male | Total |
|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Yes   | 76     | 29   | 52    |
| No    | 24     | 71   | 48    |
| Total | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| n =   | 21     | 21   | 42    |

A specific concern of the research was to identify the sources of violence for the study population. While the study focused on external sources, the respondents were asked if they had physically hurt themselves since leaving home - 71% said they had (Table 16). It is interesting to note that data for males and females indicate that they were equally likely to hurt themselves.

**Table 16** Percentage of Homeless Youth who had Physically Hurt Themselves Since Leaving Home

|       | %   |
|-------|-----|
| Yes   | 71  |
| No    | 29  |
| Total | 100 |
| n =   | 34  |



A total of 98 violent episodes were described by respondents; Table 17 indicates the source of violence in these incidents. The two major sources of external violence identified in these incidents were strangers and police: 40% of all reported violent incidents were caused by strangers and 39% by police.

**Table 17** Percentage of Violent Incidents (by sex) by Source of Violence

|                          | Incident with<br>Female Victim | Incident with<br>Male Victim | Total<br>Incidents |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------------------|
|                          | %                              | %                            | %                  |
| Friends/<br>Acquaintance | 42                             | 8                            | 19                 |
| Stranger                 | 21                             | 49                           | 40                 |
| Drug Dealer              | 7                              | 0                            | 2                  |
| Police                   | 30                             | 43                           | 39                 |
| Total                    | 100                            | 100                          | 100                |
| n =                      | 33                             | 65                           | 98                 |

Since each respondent could relate more than one violent incident, Table 18 indicates the percentage of subjects who had been a victim of violence of each of the sources.

**Table 18** Percentage of Homeless Youth (by Sex) by Source of Violence

|                          | Females | Males | Total |
|--------------------------|---------|-------|-------|
|                          | %       | %     | %     |
| Friends/<br>Acquaintance | 65      | 23    | 40    |
| Stranger                 | 35      | 96    | 72    |
| Drug dealer              | 11      | 0     | 5     |
| Police                   | 47      | 58    | 55    |
| n =                      | 17      | 26    | 43    |

n = no. of respondents who said they had been hurt

NB Caution is advised in interpreting percentages because of the small number of cases.

\* Percentages do not add to 100% since more than one source could be identified.

The pattern of violence varied by sex. Females were more likely (65%) than males (23%) to describe violent incidents caused by friends or acquaintances. Nearly all males (96%) and a smaller proportion of females (35%) claimed to have been assaulted by a stranger. Males were also somewhat more likely (58%) than females (47%) to report being physically hurt by police (Table 18).

### Summary

Contrary to the common image, homelessness is not carefree freedom enjoyed by rebellious teenagers. It is filled with anxieties about survival, with some young people literally fearing for their lives. Harm and violence emerged as a routine feature of their daily experience. Nearly all homeless youth spoke of feeling scared for their personal safety and identified vulnerability to violence as a major reason for their fears. Given these fears, it is not surprising but nonetheless disturbing to find that a large proportion had physically harmed themselves since leaving home.

Overall the findings indicate that young people are victims of an unacceptably high level of violence after they leave home. Few had not been physically hurt since becoming homeless. Males are more likely than females to report being victims of physical violence, but females are more likely to report sexual assault. The findings for the total population indicate that the two major sources of violence are strangers and police. However, a closer examination by sex indicates that females are most likely to be hurt by people they know.

## 5. VIOLENCE: PEERS

### Who?

Homeless youths were victims of physical violence at the hands of both people who were unknown to them and others who were known. Males were more likely (96%) than females (35%) to be physically assaulted by someone who was a stranger to them:

One time I was at the beach .. I was so pissed .. I was just laying on the sand .. these guys come up and one of these dudes goes "You want to fight me?" .. and I got up and I was gunna fight him and then like there was five fists y'know. Just hit me in the face all at the same time and I got a broken cheekbone and a fucked eye out of that .. (Owen)

Just when I was on the street one day .. and some guys were coming out the door of the pub .. and they asked me what I was doing .. and I said "nothing" .. and he said "don't get smart with me" and he jabbed me straight in the mouth .. and he kept laying into me and I kept getting up and I had a blood nose, a fat lip, two black eyes and my cheek was all puffed up and my arm was swollen from kicking. (Austin)

I've been bashed a couple of times by gangs when I've been out at night. (Hamish)

However in many instances the attacker was known to the victim. On a few occasions the person was literally referred to as "a friend", for example:

i was drunk and had been sniffing petrol and one of me mates beat me up .. and then took me to hospital. (Sean)

This dude was walking down the street .. I knew him .. and he was pissed and I was sober, and he was with another mate of mine who was pissed. They just got violent .. He hit me and I don't know why .. I went to the hospital .. they just tried to stop me nose from bleeding." "I had a broken nose. (Ross)

When I was locked up with me best mate. We had a little argument. I had my back turned to him and there was sort of a window and he said something and I turned around and said "stand up and say it" so he stood up and he fuckin' punched me one in the mouth and it went rumbling on. (Des)

More frequently, the person was "known" to the extent that he/she was living in the same hostel or squat:

I was living at a hostel and I got bashed there .. I was going out and two other kids from the hostel .. [who] had been drinking just came and bashed me up .. I was in hospital for three days. (Hamish)

I was in the bedroom in the hostel when he just walked in .. and he just started hassling me and got me in a corner. Then started punching me and he thought I wouldn't hit him back but I did .. I got kicked out over that. (Brian)

Or in a few instances the person who inflicted the harm was more of an acquaintance:

Outside the pub, as soon as I walked out, a guy pulled a knife on me. I went to kick him and he held the knife at me and it just went straight into my leg .. we had been playing pool and I was beating him all the time so he just cracked the shits after it .. I got stitches in me leg at the hospital. (Ben)

On several occasions, ethnic clashes were indicated in the description of violent incidents:

I was down at Hawthorn railway station .. I was drinking a lot at the time .. and about seven or eight wogs came up and started belting into me for fun. I was pretty scared but I was drunk .. I was asleep, about four in the morning .. they were just looking for trouble and they were drunk too .. I was hurt .. two black eyes .. my nose is all stuffed and sore lips .. they kept me in hospital for about three days .. my ribs were bruised and sore .. I didn't tell the police - they'd just laugh at me. (Elliot)

Six of us and about seven or eight wogs - and about ten coppers turned up as well. We were bad mouthing each other as usual. Then it started and the cops turned up and started belting both of us. Hurt pretty bad. I was in hospital for quite a while .. bruised all over, bleeding everywhere. You couldn't really report it because the cops would probably come back after ya if ya dobbed on them. (Andy)

#### Where?

Most of the instances of physical violence occurred on the street or in other public locations. Especially for males, streets were frequently mentioned, for example:

In Werribee about 7 or 8 kids in a gang bashed me on the street late at night. They were all drunk or on drugs. (Hamish)

I was in Kings Cross and I was just walking home one night and four guys jumped me, kicked the shit out of me and left me in the gutter .. I was taken to hospital. (Adam)

Some guy just walking up behind me in the street .. He just came running at me so I hit him. He got up and just threw the stubby and hit me in the back then he hit me over the head .. I had to go into hospital for a couple of nights and had some stitches. (Ben)

Have you ever been physically hurt?

Plenty of times getting into fights just out in the street .. (Ross)

Another public location which was mentioned on several occasions was the railway station, for example:

At Flinders Street I got bashed by five guys - they were after my brother - I was in hospital for five weeks with cracked ribs and coughing blood .. they left me laying bleeding (on the street). In hospital for three days I didn't know where I was - I had cracked ribs, a punctured liver, concussion and a badly chipped nose .. they kicked me in the face and left me laying there. (Ian)

I was at Broady station and there was this bloke with his mates mouthin', so I called me brother .. and we had a punch on with them. And then about three months later I was walkin' down the tracks at Broady and six blokes jumped me; I just woke up in hospital .. and lost me teeth. (Geoff)

In fact the youth spent a fair amount of their time in such public spaces and it became part of the system of personal definition and thus could itself be the cause of some physical violence.

We've all got our own turf .. the street kids, mods and scanners they all hang round the city square. Another group, the hoods, hang round the Flinders Street steps. The Turks and the wogs, they hang round Hungry Jacks - when you move away from the groups you might get gang bashed. (Ian)

Apart from public spaces, most youth spent some time in hostels, refuges, Youth Housing Projects and squats; these were also sites for many of the violent incidents:

A raving mad lunatic tried to kill a couple of us in a squat. The police came...I'm still paranoid about what happened. (Ben)

I was trying to get some sleep and they were all arguing and turning the music up and I said "Just shut up for a while" and I turned the music off .. I got a kick in the back of the neck and I had everyone coming at me with punches so I just punched back. It ended up with staff coming in and we all turned around and we were punching up the staff .. We all ended up, sort of went up to the hospital to fix our injuries up because there was broken noses and everything everywhere. (Ian)

Have you actually been hassled while at the squat?

Yeah I was hassled like..I stayed there about three months ago, I was hassled by three guys.

How did they hassle you?

Well they come in, they crashed in the doors and they come in and we had blankets and that and they put them all in a pile, lit them up and burnt them and they started bashing up a few of the guys and that.

What did they do to some of the guys?

...they had planks of wood and they were just smashing their faces with planks of wood. There was others just kneeing everyone in the head and kicking everyone, y'know; half of them were trying to get some sleep and you get these guys just walking across kicking them in the face on purpose. (Andy)

Also frequently mentioned by males were "pubs" or locations close to pubs.

In a pub, this guy wanted a drink and 'e tried to strangle me. I couldn't hit back and he cut me head. (Joe)

...some guys were coming out of the door of the pub and they come out of the door and looked at me and my hair was all messy and that and they asked me what am I doing and I said "nothing, just walking around the corner" and he said "don't get smart with me" and he jabbed me straight in the mouth. I got up and he said "stay down", I said "what for" and he kept laying into me...(Austin)

The frequency with which such locations were mentioned is consistent with the large number of incidents in which the use of alcohol and or drugs was mentioned. Although as indicated by the following quotations, pubs were not the only locations in which the use of drugs or alcohol was referred to:

I was living at a hostel and I got bashed there .. I was going out and two other kids from the hostel .. [who] had been drinking just came and bashed me up ... I was in hospital for three days. (Hamish)

He was stoned .. he was hassling me and I told him to piss off and he started punching into me. (Warren)

Worst fight .. I lost half me teeth and two black eyes .. I was really pissed .. this guy came up and hassled me .. for no reason .. and I turned round and I fought him .. he'd been drinking I was that drunk I fell over .. went to hospital next day .. (Joe)

### Reasons

As suggested in the above quotations, particularly in incidents involving strangers in public scenes, the violence was thought to be unprovoked. However, most often the violence erupted out of a situation where young people were aggravating each other. This was most frequently the explanation for violent incidents in living situations such as hostels, refuges or squats:

I was asleep and this guy was annoying me, then I jumped up and told him to stop. Then there was a fight and I got a cut under the eye. (Geoff)

They give you smart comments and you give them back, and they start turnin' 'round and commenting on what you say. You say it again and that's how it goes. (Andy)

In a couple of instances reference was made to violence to obtain money or goods:

Have you ever been physically hurt by other kids?  
Yeah, they're always desperate for money and find out how much you've got, they want it and you get in a fight with them. They're tougher than ya so what can ya do? (Andy)

### Weapons

The use of weapons other than fists was rare. Weapons that were referred to included a steel pole, wood planks and knives; knives were the weapon most frequently mentioned:

Outside the pub, soon as I walked out, a guy pulled a knife on me. I went to kick him and he held the knife at me and it went straight into my leg.  
How did it start?  
Ah because we were playing pool on a pool table and I was beating him all the time so he just cracked the shits after it. (Ben)

One time up Kings Cross walking through the streets, two guys cut me arms up .. they got butterfly knives and cut me arms up pretty bad - couldn't use them for two, two and a half weeks...they took me wallet. (Joe)

## Types of Injury

The range of injuries is apparent throughout the quotations in this report. Most injuries are consistent with violence involving fists and ranged from the black eye to sets of injuries requiring periods of hospitalization, for example: "cut under the eye"; "a broken cheekbone and a fucked eye"; "cut me head"; "I had a broken nose"; "I had cracked ribs, a punctured liver, concussion and a badly chipped nose"; "I got a chipped cheek bone and bruises".

## Females

Young women were victims of violence in situations similar to those described above by young men, that is in public locations, involving groups of other young people and sometimes the use of weapons. For example:

Skinheads bashed me up.

I was giving them shit - about six of them came onto me ... I cried and cried and someone came along and I just layed there and found me in a toilet room.

I've gotten a broken nose, stabbed, broken ribs, concussion; it was done by other street kids, drunks, coppers. (Claudia)

I have been bashed; the only thing that scared them off was I had a knife. I got a chipped cheek bone and bruises. There was about four of them. I was just walking along. I'd never seen them before in my life. (Fiona)

I've been pretty beaten up...(Seven) of the guys caught up with me on Flinders Street Station steps. I was beaten up with a steel pole...about one o' clock in the morning... it was just past platform six. They got me in a corner and started beating hell out of me...they took me to hospital for a while. (Helen)

Well I've been punched up. Just the other week I've had a miscarriage. (Ann)

There was one kid at {a named refuge}; there was a billiard table there and he was just muckin' around but he used to go overboard and he used to hit me on the head with the cue sticks and all that. (Cheryl)

As with males, the reason for violence towards young homeless women was sometimes apparently petty:

It starts over absolute shit...I disagree with fights. (Esther)

Say you accidentally bumped into someone, they call you a bitch, but you just keep walking. If you pull over, you'd start fighting anyway. (Lori)

This sort of violence was often associated with sexual demands:

I was in hospital for three weeks .. I was found in the street where five wogs forced me into a car and raped me and dumped me at St Kilda. I was in a nervous state where I nearly went mental. (Kate)

When this bloke couldn't get his own way with me , he kept hitting me in the kidneys and ruptured my kidneys...I didn't go to hospital so I've got bad kidneys. (Claudia)

How did it start?

Oh, I guess I .. I wasn't really friendly to him .. I was just sort of .. I guess I started talking to him, I mean, he must have got the wrong idea, I just talked to the guy.

How badly were you hurt?

Ah, not really badly.

What happened to end it?

Um I sort of did get away and I opened the door and I said to him "If you don't get out of here I'm going to scream the place down!", and he just sort of just punched me and he just went out, and then he went to harrass the other chicks who were staying in this place. Did you report it to anybody?

Nuh. (Gina)

However, it was not always males who physically assaulted females:

I was down Werribee one day and, I asked this sheila for a smoke and she turned around and kicked me head in. (Judy)

I was belted up by this girl because I was set up and she just walked up and hit me and just kept hitting me and hittin' me and hittin' me and I had no defence on me or nothin' .. and if I had've hit her back all her friends would have jumped in .. the police drove past .. and they stopped her. (Cheryl)

Females were more likely (65%) than males (23%) to indicate that the person who physically hurt them was a friend:

I got in with this one guy. He promised me the world, 'sposed to be my so called boyfriend. All he was doing was feeding me drugs and belting into me. I've got scars on the back of me neck where he belted into me...he'd get drunk and off his face with whatever he he had...it hurt because I trusted him...I was hurt pretty bad, black eyes and all...I was in hospital once cos he belted me. I was knocked unconscious. I forgave him!... I trusted that many people and they just shit in my face and I got sick of it. (Claudia)

I used to live with a guy, we were both on drugs. He used to bash the shit out of me every day. I had injuries quite often all the time...that guy had a real hold over me...I'd want to leave nearly every night...but I had nowhere else to go. (Di)

Not long ago, one of my mother's boyfriend's mates attacked me in my flat. It was an attempted rape. And when I was staying at Clayton with a guy, his father hassled me a bit. He came up to me and did things. It's always old men .. it's always people that I know or mum knows. (Eve)

Young women were more likely (76%) than males (29%) to report being sexually assaulted since leaving home. They frequently made reference to sexual harrassment and assault both in other people's homes and in staffed residential settings:

I stayed with some guys and they tried to have sex with me. I was really freaked out. I just panicked and ran. (Helen)



Have you ever had any trouble while you were staying in a refuge or a hostel?

Yeah.

What happened?

(Laughs) I got, I was offered drugs and sort of pushed into it. Ah, always harrassed by guys, just y'know, things like that. (Kate)

They told me about a guy who wanted a girl to share with him .. after a couple of weeks, he walked into my room with nothing on and I just about had a heart attack. He was just taking advantage of the situation but I got away. (Lori)

Well, for example, we stayed at [a named refuge] and we, you just get all these dickheads harrassing you, and wherever you go the same thing just happens; it happens to all females, it wasn't just me, even ones with kids and stuff, y'know, it's stupid. (Ann)

Have you ever had any trouble while you were staying in a refuge or a hostel?

Yeah.

What happened?

(Laughs) What happened? Um, well the first day we got to [a named refuge], it was at night and this guy Paul just kept on, y'know, coming up to me and stuff. And he sort of came into my room and he wouldn't get out. Like, he's sort of really big, all tatoos, he's one of those guys and he, um, I told him to get out but he sort of slammed the door on me and he just sort of pushed me on the bed. (Gina)

In regard to the general situation in hostels for young women, one commented:

You couldn't sort of, y'know, go out of your room or to the shower unless, you know, with guys hanging around the corner, or in the shower, or stuff like that. (Gina)

One young woman summarised the situation for young women as:

You havent' got much choice. Either you sleep in the streets or at somebody's place; either way you're gonna get used .. I either pay them or I sleep with them. (Fiona)

Some young men also reported sexual harrassment and sexual assault:

Have you ever been sexually harrassed?

I'll say yes to that but I won't say anything more. I suppose you can understand that. (Steve)

One of the worst times was in Kings Cross. I was into speed when I was 14. I got to the Cross and got into heroin and to get money for the heroin you've got to do things. Whether it's rip people off or sell your body and it becomes very scary when you're selling your body and the person gets violent or won't take you back to where you want to go. Or they threaten you or whatever. (Joe)

One night I got picked up by someone .. they said hop in. I was running away from home and I jumped in the car with him and he started sexually harrassing me .. I was only 13 .. I really didn't know what was going on .. I was led to believe what was going on was normal... and then, selling my body didn't seem like such a hard thing .. I've done it a couple of times with other young people .. it had happened to them too...I was staying on the streets. I was in a park in Geelong and this man comes up to me and starts talking to me and I thought "here's some money" and all that. And then he tried to rape me and I ran away and he got in a car and he chased me and caught up with me and raped me. I didn't tell anyone - I was too scared cos they'd ask me my address and I didn't have nowhere and they'd put me in Turana. (Phillip)

### Sex Differences

The basic difference for males and females in violent experiences is encapsulated in the the comments of the youths themselves. That is, the violence for males predominantly involves fights, while for females it involves sexual assault. A general question was asked of the youth: "Do you think there are any differences for guys and girls living away from home?" In many of their responses, the youths referred to the different sorts of physical assault experienced by both sexes. The following comment by one young women summarises their observation:

There's a difference, because a girl can get raped. Guys get into a lot of fights, but I'd prefer to get belted up than to be raped. (Cheryl)

Another young woman commented sympathetically on the physical fighting with which young men had to deal:

It can be just as hard for guys. Heaps of guys don't know a thing about fighting but on the street they have to fight to survive. You notice the change in them. (Inge)

Both males and females commented on the threat of rape for females:

It's worse for girls. They're easier prey on the streets to be raped and that sort of stuff. (Claudia)

Yeah, I reckon it's different for girls because I mean girls don't go around raping guys and stuff. (Ann)

It's harder on girls because there are a lot of maniac men going around raping a lot of girls. Girls would get a lot more frightened than boys do. (Ken)

It's harder 'cos they got a greater worry of being raped. (Elliot)

Males as well as females also spoke of the added difficulties for females in terms of sexual exploitation:

.. a lot of street kids like the sheilas, they do prostitution and think nothing of themselves and then they think they're not worth anything. They believe they are a piece of shit and that's why a lot of cases of street kids, especially girls can be taken advantage of. So that's why I think it's much worse on them than it is for guys. (Steve)

Pimps get their hooks into girls worse with drugs and stuff and then they become junkies. (Cheryl)

Girls get it more easy, but they have to give more. (Sean)

A lot of girls on the street fall into prostitution and in that way it's hard. If you're on the streets and on drugs and with guys, they label you a tart. (Inge)

### Summary

Particularly for males, violence most often involved physical attacks by other young males. These frequently took place in the locations where they spent most of their time, that is, public spaces such as the street, railway stations and near pubs. The attacks sometimes involved other males who were known to the victim, but often seemed to be unprovoked attacks by strangers. Alcohol and/or drug involvement was frequently a factor, however, these fights most often evolved out of interpersonal aggravation - one male "mouths off" at another; a male "bumps into" another or plays his music too loud. Weapons were rarely used, although quite serious physical injuries resulted from physical assaults using fists and feet.

While females were involved in similar sorts of incidents, more often they were victims of physical and/or sexual assault by a male friend or acquaintance. These incidents ranged from pushy verbal intimidation to gang rape. Staffed residential settings were a disturbingly common location for sexual harassment. Fewer details were given or encouraged by the interviewers about these incidents, which were perceived as more "personal and private" than other forms of street violence.

## 6. VIOLENCE: POLICE

### Type of Violence/Use of Weapons

Homeless youth reported a variety of forms of physical assault by police; the most frequently reported was hitting of the youth with hands or fists. This form of behaviour ranged from a "slap across the face" through to hitting accompanied by kicking. The following quotes are examples of the types of incidents which were frequently reported:

I stole a car and got caught by police...At first I lied...I got a clip over the ear for that. (Stan)

When they {police} find out who I am, I've been bashed by them but it didn't really hurt because I was off my face most of the time. (Ann)

Yes, and I deserved it, and then I was a bit of a smartass...and I got a telephone book over the head and got smashed into the wall because I was being smart... (Nat)

The police caught me sleeping on the street and...not wanting to say anything so they tried bashing it out of me ...Well, they pushed me against the wall and squeezed me throat and punched me in the side a couple of times, just pushing me around. (Austin)

I thieved something and was taken back to the station. I had a real smart mouth on me and told 'em where to go...one took me into a room by m'self and punched into me and I tried to hit him back... (Inge)

Hitting was also sometimes accompanied by kicking:

Another time when they wanted me to say I did some burglaries that I didn't do...they just belted shit through me...kicked into me a bit. (Elliot)

One night a shop assistant asked me to leave... I went back in after him...I was really wild and I broke a window...they held me until the police came...I didn't resist arrest...they told me they'd raped my girlfriend...they're capable of anything...they slammed me on the floor in the lock-up...kicked shit out of me ...I couldn't go to work the next day, I had to go to hospital after they released me. I had severe bruises and issue damage to my leg. I was charged with wilful damage, assault. (Joe)

Use of the yellow pages of the telephone directory was frequently mentioned in conjunction with hitting:

When I was locked up about two years ago, they beat me around the head with a telephone book. (Helen)

Are there any other times, apart from those instances, when you have been physically hurt?

Only by my step-dad.

So of all those experiences, what was the worst?

When I was taken to the police station.

Why was that the worst?

Because they are specially trained. They don't leave one mark on you; that's why you can't prove it. They get a phone book or something really thick and put it up against you and start belting the phone book. That does not leave one mark.

Up against where?

Up against your chest or something. (Hamish)

The last time was at Flinders Street Station and this guy started mouthing off so I hit him in the mouth...and when the police came he dropped to the ground as if I'd hit him in the stomach really bad...and they took him to the hospital and he had cracked ribs...so when they came back they just belted shit through me..they said "does it make you feel big?"; I said "yeah"; they said "Why did you do it?"; I said "Because he mouthed off to me and I don't put up with any of that shit"; they said "good language" and hit me in the face with a fist...They came in with the yellow pages...two of them held the yellow pages up against my stomach and they got stuck into me against the yellow pages with the baseball bat. (Ian)

Handcuffs and batons were also reported to have been used to cause physical pain:

I've had handcuffs on me so tight, but leave them for about an hour and the mark's gone. Sometimes it takes three hours. They put them on you but they don't put them on lock so they get tighter and they just grab the chain that is in the middle of the handcuff and pull you along.

You haven't actually ever been to anybody about that?

No because you can't prove it. (Hamish)

Early last year...from resisting arrest... I had marks around my throat, strangled, I had grazes on my legs from being dragged around the carpet by handcuffs. (Joe)

I got picked up in a stolen car and later, back to the cells, about four or five of them took their batons and started hitting me round. They left me for two days without food or water and when some friends tried to say what happened, there was no record of me being there. (Adam)

...hit me on the back of the neck with his hand, put the cuffs on me and squeezed them real tight. They swelled up heaps. (Sean)

In another instance a young man was pushed off a pier:

I was pushed off the pier by the cops when I was working as a prostitute. I was in drag...they pulled me up cos I was standing on the corner...and they chucked me in the back of the van...chucked me over and left. (Phillip)

Interviewees also alleged verbal abuse and general intimidation:

.. and he didn't hit, he just went slap over the back of my head, and it's just a scare tactic as well, they try these scare tactics on you.

What other scare tactics?

Oh like as in "we might put you out the back with the aboriginals so they can fuck him up the arse" and all this sort of stuff. (Nat)

They took me down the station. I was there for about 2 hours getting interrogated and they wanted to know where I were and I wouldn't tell them because I know my boyfriend would be in big hassles then. They said they would have to give me an internal examination, and I thought "bullshit" and I refused and they made me sign a consent form, they reckoned I had to. I got into a hospital in town somewhere and they just said that I had to see this male doctor and I refused to and said I'm not having any male near me. And when I got back to the station they got stuck into me again, not physically, just abuse verbally at me because I wouldn't let a male doctor near me. So they arranged -it was about 11 o' clock at night by this stage, and they found a female doctor and I had to have the examination and all this other bullshit. And they ended up charging my boyfriend with carnal knowledge and I was rather upset but they, really, there was no need to call me a whore-banger and all this because that's not what I'm about, and I don't know why they have to do this. They seem to get their kicks out of harrassing young people, I don't know why. (Lori)

They call you names; prostitute, druggie. (Claire)

Some accounts of the strip-searching process were seen to also contain these elements:

I felt YUK! And it was so cold, and all them fucking four guys looking and as, it just felt like they were poofers, y'know. (Des)

What about being strip searched, have you been strip-searched before?

Oh yeah.

Was it male police or female?

Male, there was a female there.

How did you feel about that?

I was ready to kill them. (Helen)

### Number of Officers

In most instances where physical abuse by police was reported, more than one police officer was involved. As one youth said:

Two come and got me and there was a few when I got there - C.I.B. It was the same old story; one's good and one belts ya...and they never had nothing on me so they were just hitting me expecting me to hit 'em back. (Geoff)

Youth often reported the involvement of three or more officers in an incident:

Do you think you provoked them in any way?

Oh, a little bit.

What did you do?

I sort of said "I don't have to say anything to you mongrels" and they, they started pushing me around. The first copper who pushed me, I pushed him back and that made it worse, then three coppers were pushing me around. (Austin)

What happened?

I put a brick through a window, a shop window.

And you got arrested?

Yeah, took me down the copshop and belted me up.

How many police came to arrest you?

Four.

Four?

Yeah.

O.K., and well, what happened when you got to the police station?

They took me out the back to the cell.

Was this before you got beaten up?

No this was, no they belted me up in the cell as soon as they took me back, there was four of them... (Ben)

### Sex of Officer

Male police officers were most often involved in such incidents, but there were a couple of incidents which were reported by young women to have involved female police officers:

Have the police ever hit you?

Oh yeah, one policelady did.

Where was this?

In Altona North.

And, what did she hit you for?

I called her a pig. (Judy)

Have you ever been physically hurt by the police?

Well, when I got charged with that theft and that and because I kept denying it, my dad came down there and as the lady - y'know she told me to hold the phonebook against my stomach and as she was just about to hit me, me dad walked in the room and she stopped so, y'know, I was lucky. (Cheryl)

Have you ever been physically hurt by the police?

Only when they grabbed me, she really twisted my arm a bit hard. (Lori)

### Location of Assault

The location of most of the physical assaults was in police stations:

They took me into a police station and they just started hitting me around. One threw me into a room and they kept there for about three hours.

Did you tell anybody about it?

I can't prove it. (Hamish)

I was arrested and they put me in the cells because I was callin' them names. They had handcuffs on me and they just grabbed the chain and threw me down and another two just kicking into the side and I just started bawling me eyes and calling them names...(Ross)

Now is there any particular place where you feel threatened for your own safety?

Nuh.

No?

Oh, police stations.

Why police stations?

Since I was 15, I've copped hidings from them. (Geoff)

However there were also reports of assaults in more public locations such as streets:

In St Kilda, about one o' clock in the morning...I was just walking down the street and two policemen came walking up behind me, dragged me into an alley and just bashed me. (Hamish)

They find out you're out on the streets so they punch the living shit out of you...There's nothing you can do; they still keep belting and belting you until you're on the ground and then they start kicking you...they think you're scum. (Andy)

Me and a friend were mucking round in a car park and the police just rolled up in their car. They stopped, got out, just kicked us around a bit. (Hamish)

I know there are people who don't believe that it goes on, but I've seen guys, they usually only get stuck into guys as far as I know, I've seen guys who have been bashed hard. You know, black eyes, broken ribs, everything done. Even when they are just walking around the street, they just grab them cos they've seen them before.

Where have you seen that?

Oh, I was at [a named] Town Hall once, and a blue light {disco} was going on. I was amazed. Someone over at the Post Office, they walked over and fair enough, they were under age and were drinking, but the copper dragged them into the car and I saw him put a full fist into this guy's face and I thought "oh shit", you know, and I swear I did not touch a drop of the grog, and a lady cop came over to me and she started being heavy on me, she just let me go but they were bashing into Mat and the other bloke and I couldn't do anything. (Lori)

Youths who had stayed in refuges and hostels complained of harassment of these locations by police:

In refuges and hostels, the police hassle me over old warrants, being locked up - keep coming round questioning me about old assaults, burgs, some I've done, some I haven't....end up belting into you saying "You've done it haven't you." (Elliot)

### **Police/Youth Antagonism**

The overall impression of police/homeless youth relations derived from the interviews is one of antagonism. It is apparent that this antagonism from both sides fuels the nature of their interaction. Homeless youth believe that the police are not sympathetic to their position and in fact actively dislike them. As one youth said, "They think we're scum". The following quote captures the tone evident in many of the interviews:



I don't really trust them ... like sometimes the way they come across to you like you're all hardened criminals - I don't like it. They come up to you and ask you questions you don't really want to answer, ask you what'ya age and all that and ya don't really want to tell them that. You want to keep it to yourself. They treat streetkids like a lower grade of people and I don't like that. (Jason)

In the context of general antagonism between the two parties, it is the case that the homeless youth give the police a hard time: they refuse to cooperate with requests and verbally abuse the officers:

He was saying "tell me your name and address" and I said " I don't have to tell you" and he said "Yes you do cos you're being charged" and he just clipped me across the back of the head to stop me being a smartarse and I stopped. (Warren)

I was walking down Flinders Street with me mate. He was pretty drunk telling coppers to "fuck off"..He pissed off and the copper ran up to me and started belting me and I went to hit one of the coppers and I got him so they put the handcuffs on me and dragged me around to Flinders Lane (police station) and told me to lay on me stomach. There were four coppers kicking shit out of me. I was charged with assault. (Elliot)

She just slapped me across the face with callin' her a pig and then I called her a dumb slut so she hit me again. (Judy)

### Youth Justifications

While youth refuse to co-operate with police, they also do not view the incidents as physical abuse. In part this is because they themselves sometimes see the police action as justifiable in light of their own behaviour:

When I was caught trying to pinch a car they hit me...he hit me with his hand...for being a smartarse...I deserved it...they've got their job to do...I try to pinch a car so they give me a back-hander. (Warren)

A couple of days ago I did get a bit of a beating...but that was my own fault...I'd been out with a friend. I helped him knock off a car which I shouldn't have done. (Steve)

Why do you feel it was O.K. for them to clip you over the ear and do that with the telephone book?

Because basically I fucked up. I mean you just don't crime, crime is fucked...

Do you believe that being clipped over the ear or hit with a telephone book is a crime?

Is a crime? No. The police are there to do their job...if I deserve it, well I deserved it, I was just being smart, I wasn't being straight. (Nat)

Any other times you've been physically hurt? You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to.

Oh, a couple of times I've been physically punched up by the police but I was sort of mouthin' off. (Des)

The comments of other young people indicate that police violence is taken as a given feature of police/youth relations:

How are you treated by police in general?

Fairly good.

What sort of things do they do?

I've got belted up a couple of times by them. (Ben)

How have you been treated by the police?

Oh, fairly alright. Portland cops gave me one bashing but that's about it. (Austin)

it must be said that not all youth described their experiences with police as negative. However, these cases were few, for example:

Sometimes police could be quite good. No bad experiences. (Karen)

In general how are you treated by the police?

Pretty good.

Treated alright? What sort of things do they do?

I don't do nuthin' wrong by them and don't do nuthin' wrong be me; I talk to them y'know, we have a good laugh sometimes. (Ben)

Have you ever been physically hurt by the police?

No.

So they were pretty good to you?

Yeah, they were pretty good under the circumstances.

But you still wouldn't go to them for help?

Ah, no, probably not 'cos I wouldn't really trust them. (Judy)

Yes, in Melbourne I find the police are bloody great people. The Melbourne police have helped me a lot...

So you've never had any bad experiences with the police?

No - not since I got to know them, except when I stole the car and I deserved what I got, the beating I got, and the police apologised afterwards. (Nat)

These comments indicate that some of these young people underestimate the significance of physical assaults by police rather than exaggerate them as is sometimes argued. They are quite likely to indicate that they were not hurt by police but rather "they just kicked us around a bit", "...she just slapped me across the face".

### Transit Police

Some young people singled out Transit Police as a source of violence.

What about transit police, how do you get on with them?

Despise them.

Why do you despise them?

Because they used to provoke me, to get me aggro so they can charge me with something so I could slip up.

Have you ever been physically hurt by the transit cops?

Yes.

When was the last time you were hurt by the transit cops?  
 When about two minibus loads of them beat the shit out of me and then charged me with assault. (Geoff)

I've seen some of the things they done, like fair enough, they help to stop violence, but one guy was just sitting on the train minding his own business, he was going to get off so he pulled a smoke out of his packet, he didn't light it, but they grabbed him anyway and as it took off I saw them pushing him against the wall and started laying the boot into him and I thought that was pretty disgusting. He was just minding his own business. They were just picking on him. (Lori)

Just kicked me - only a bruise. (Stan)

Attempts at fare evasion and graffiti art appeared as particular prompts for conflict.

I got busted with spray cans so they beat me up. (Warren)

They're arsholes - they belt into you even if you didn't do graffiti. They locked me up, hit me twice with a baton. (Elliot)

I got off the train without a ticket and two of them grabbed me and asked for I.D. and I never had any, then they started hassling me so I smacked one of them in the mouth and then they took me down the end of the station so they were punching shit out of me down there. (Ben)

Lately the guards have been like using physical violence y'know, like "hurt graffiti writers" and it doesn't work for them either. They jump out and hit one writer and when that writer sees, like, him, with more people, he'll just get them back, y'know. They're at the moment, they're starting, they're starting to use a lot of physical force.

What about yourself? Have you been hurt by one of them?

Um, only transit police, like when they've been busting, you know, sort of graffiti and that.

What happened?

It was minor y'know, they only, like, pushed me around, sort of slapped me y'know, pushed me over, told me to shut up, y'know, being offensive to me and all that. And, like, they give you a lot of bad remarks that make you feel like shit, y'know. They just sort of want to be real arseholes to ya...(Owen)

Harassment without violence was the more common allegation against Transit Police:

Whenever they'd see you they try to pin something on ya. Maybe something's done in your {graffiti} style. They say "Righto, you've done that. Come with us." No matter what you do you always get the blame for it.

What do they do?

I haven't been beaten up by them yet. (Andy)

I mean if the Transit Police pick up a sheila they treat her like a piece of shit. You know, they pull out guns...(Steve)

Cos I look different, long hair blah, blah, blah, they sort of come up and ask me for my ticket and there might be someone next to me who hasn't got a ticket and I've got a ticket. They don't ask him, they ask me because I look different...

Have you ever been physically hurt by them?

Nah. (Des)

I've never had any confrontations with them but I know they're bad; they've hassled a few of my mates. (Colin)

### Sex Differences

It was observed in both the quantitative and qualitative data above that girls were less likely to report physical violence from police. This observation was confirmed by the youths, who frequently referred to this as one of the differences between the experiences of males and females on the street:

I never heard of a girl being bashed by a copper. (Hamish)

The police, I mean y'know, they give the guys a fair bit of a bashing, more than the sheilas usually. (Esther)

Some youths interpreted this to mean that "girls get better treatment from cops" (Rita). While others felt that while girls may not have been physically abused, they were more likely than boys to be "hassled" by police:

Guys have a lot more mates and they look older. It's harder for girls to get away with being eighteen. Guys are heroes if they're kicked out of home, but shielas are dogs. Police treat us a bit lighter - give us a go. (Claire)

It's the same cos the cops are finding out a lot of girls are under age and they hassle them a lot - they don't belt them up, but they question them. (Ian).

I reckon the coppers hassle them because they reckon they're hookers and that sort of thing. (Andy)

Jacks hassle girls more, cos they figure out they're on the run from somewhere like Winlotion and so they think "we'll run up a few more warrants here". (Cheryl)

### Summary

Preliminary interviews, with homeless youth and people working with them, carried out by the Principal Investigators of this research, had led them to anticipate that police would be reported as one of the sources of violence. However the extent, nature and consistency of such reports was one of the most startling features of the research findings.

Forty-seven percent of females and fifty-eight percent of males reported having been physically hurt by police. The incidents predominantly involved the use of fists and/or hands, but also involved kicking and general "pushing around". The yellow pages of the telephone directory were frequently reported as having been used. Use of other weapons was not often mentioned, although handcuffs were used in some incidents and a baton and a baseball bat were mentioned in two other separate incidents. Verbal abuse and general intimidation accompanied the physical abuse. In most instances more than one police officer was reported to be involved; most incidents involved at least two officers, but incidents were reported which involved up to four officers. The officers involved were most often males, but a couple of incidents were reported to have involved female officers. While most incidents began with police/youth contact "on the streets", the physical abuse was most often reported to have occurred in police stations.

The young people reported not always co-operating with the requests of police and understood this to antagonize the officers. They felt that the police were also antagonistic to homeless youth and generally harrassed them. Their comments made it clear that police violence was an expected part of police/youth relations. Youth tended to underestimate the significance of the assault and sometimes attempted to justify the police action.

The prevalence of reports of police violence and fears of police violence, cannot simply be explained away by reference to antagonistic and prejudicial youth sub-cultural norms. Accounts were consistent across youth reports from various locations, by young people who did not know each other, frequented different places, had different backgrounds and different friends. Further these accounts were frequently given early in the interview before any reference was made to violence or physical assault and in response to general questions such as, "Have you been physically hurt since you left home?" Further, in recounting incidents of police violence, the youths were frequently not antagonistic to police, but rather took the behaviour as a given, or offered justifications for the alleged assault.

These findings were initially discussed with Mr Bryan Harding, Secretary, Victoria Police Association. Mr Harding has acknowledged the difficulties of police/youth relations and has proceeded to take positive steps in relation to this issue. The Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police, Mr. Kel Glare, invited the principal investigators to meet with himself and other senior police, and their response indicated a commitment to taking both remedial and preventative action (see Conclusion and Appendix iii).

## 7. REPORTING AND AVOIDING VIOLENCE

### Seeking Help

Most of the young people (58%) had sought help from some other person or agency since leaving home. However, a disturbingly high proportion (42%) said that they had not sought help from anyone (Table 19). In fact, just over half (52%) of the young women did not look for outside assistance; young men were more likely (68%) than the young women to approach other people for help.

**Table 19** Percentage of Homeless Youth who have Sought Help from an Agency (by sex)

|       | Males | Females | Total |
|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| Yes   | 68    | 48      | 58    |
| No    | 32    | 52      | 42    |
| Total | 100   | 100     | 100   |
| n =   | 25    | 21      | 46    |

In general, when homeless young people are in need of help, they go to friends. However, young women are more likely (83%) than young men (55%) to seek help from their friends. (Table 20).

**Table 20** Go to Friends for Help by Sex (in percent)

|       | Males | Females | Total |
|-------|-------|---------|-------|
| Yes   | 55    | 83      | 70    |
| No    | 45    | 17      | 30    |
| Total | 100   | 100     | 100   |
| n =   | 20    | 23      | 43    |

While in general many young people had been to others for assistance, very few (20%) had reported to anyone the violent incidents of which they were victims (Table 21).

**Table 21** Percentage of Violent Incidents Reported to Anyone

|       |     |
|-------|-----|
| Yes   | 20  |
| No    | 80  |
| Total | 100 |
| n =   | 69  |

While most of the violent incidents were never reported to anyone as such, many of the young people (63%) had attended hospital as a result of their injuries (Table 22). Males were slightly more likely (68%) than females (57%) to have attended hospital.

**Table 22** Percentage of Homeless Youth (by sex) who have been to Hospital as a Result of being Physically Hurt by Someone

|       | Males<br>% | Females<br>% | Total<br>% |
|-------|------------|--------------|------------|
| Yes   | 68         | 57           | 63         |
| No    | 32         | 43           | 37         |
| Total | 100        | 100          | 100        |
| n =   | 28         | 21           | 49         |

However, despite injuries or even serious illness, there were young people who did not seek medical assistance.

I had been in pain for days with my stomach and when we got fighting and he punched me in the stomach, I just collapsed.

Why didn't you go to the doctor when you had a pain in the stomach?  
Wasn't it that bad?

I just didn't worry about it. (Hamish)

Hospital medical staff received both bouquets...

What do you think of doctors in hospitals?

Well you know, if you need help they help you a lot. (Ben)

In general, what do you think of doctors in hospitals?

Ah, they're alright. I s'pose they treat you alright. I've never been treated bad. (Des)

and brickbats:

What do you think of doctors in hospitals?

They're dickheads. (Laughs)

You don't like doctors?

No I don't. They talk shit.

Like what sort of shit?

Oh, if you go in there cold turkey, they try and tell you you're not cold turkey, y'know, it's your imagination. (Helen)

They shit me. Everything takes too long. (Geoff)

For some, it was the hospital environment which was most off-putting:

Doctors are alright but I hate hospitals - they make me sick when I walk in the door - the smell of the joint! (Esther)

A number of young people made reference to disliking the questions which were asked when they attended hospital.

In general, what do you think of doctors in hospitals?

Don't like them?

Why?

I don't know, I suppose they're just too nose-y. They want to know everything, "Why this?", "Why that?"...I'm the sort of person that doesn't like people like that. (Cheryl)

They hassle too much; too much bullshit. You can't just go to hospital and just ask for help. You need your Medicare card, your health benefit card. How do you get that when your parents have it and they won't give it to ya? (Kev)

Interviewees could remember times when they thought they should have gone to hospital but did not. A fear of hospitals calling in the police was often the reason.

Because I was scared y'know, because it was for drugs and with me wrist as well, so I thought they were going to bring in the police. (Cheryl)

Are there times you thought you should have gone to the hospital but you didn't?

Oh, yeah. A couple of times.

When?

Oh, in fights and that. When you go to hospital and then they ask how you got into the fight, sometimes they call the cops.

Why didn't you go?

Because I thought they were going to call the cops in plus I'd been in drugs a bit and if they call the cops I don't know whether the cops are going to bust me for that or not.

In general, what do you think of doctors at the hospital?

They're O.K. I've had no hassles. (Andy)

I thought I'd get busted. (Warren)

While many of these young people had been injured seriously enough to attend hospital since leaving home, throughout the interviews a general reluctance was expressed to seek medical assistance. This reluctance was expressed in terms of distrust and uncertainty about hospitals. As will become evident in the following, young people were also reluctant to go to the police for help.

### Reporting to Police

The majority of interviewees (76%) did not report their violent victimisation to the police. When examined as a function of gender, males (90%) were more reluctant than females (57%) to seek formal redress (see Table 23).



**Table 23** Percentage who Reported Violent Incidents to Police by Sex

|       | Female | Male | Total |
|-------|--------|------|-------|
| Yes   | 43     | 10   | 23    |
| No    | 57     | 90   | 76    |
| Total | 100    | 100  | 100   |
| n =   | 14     | 20   | 34    |

Owen described an incident in which he was attacked by five youths on the beach. Despite incurring facial injuries which needed medical attention, he did not report the assault to police.

You'll get more of a hassle going to report it to the police than you will not doin' nothin' about it at all. (Owen)

Attitudes toward the police and an expectation that they would not be sympathetic, were commonly claimed reasons for not reporting violent attacks. For example, Ben ended up in hospital for a couple of nights after being attacked with a beer bottle. He did not report the incident, as he believed, "it takes them a couple of days to do anything you know, if you're in trouble." Elliot did not report being gang bashed at a railway station: "I didn't tell the police - they'd just laugh at me". (Elliot)

In some instances, young people are unwilling to report victimisation because of previous experiences with police.

Have you ever been to the police after you've been physically hurt, or been scared of being physically hurt?

A few times. When you go tell them that you're scared of something, they just laugh in your face, saying "get out of here - don't waste our time"...I suppose they think you're bullshitting, wanting attention or something.

Why do you think they might think that you're bullshitting or wanting attention? Because you're out on the streets.

Have there been times when you thought you should have gone but you didn't?

Yeah...One bloke said he was going to come after me; he didn't like me for some reason. I was going to go to the cops and I thought about it from past experience so I didn't go and tell them and he got me! (Des)

They said they'd do things, they'd be looking out for it and that. They wrote it down on their report paper. You'd turn around and hear them screw it up and throw it in the bin. (Andy)

I wouldn't trust the police ever any more because they stuffed up on me two times already. (Barb)

### Seeking Police Assistance

Given youths' perceptions of police/youth relations reflected in the above material, it is not surprising that they do not trust the police and very rarely go to them for assistance. When asked whether or not they had ever been to the police for help, 76% of respondents responded negatively (Table 24).

**Table 24 Percentage of Homeless Youth who would Go to Police for Help**

|        | %   |
|--------|-----|
| Yes    | 24  |
| No     | 76  |
| Total  | 100 |
| n = 46 |     |

When asked why they did not go to police for help most youths referred to their lack of trust in police: "I wouldn't really trust them", "I don't really trust them". Other comments included:

You've got to be kidding! (Kev)

Have you ever been to the police for help?

No.

Why?

Cause I don't like 'em for some reason. Um, they're alright but I can't, I don't feel comfortable talkin' to them.

Would you ever go to the police for help?

If I really needed to.

If it was a crisis?

Mm. (Judy)

Would you ever go to the police for help?

No never. I don't trust them any more.

Do you know any kids who have gone to the police for help?

No. No-one trusts them. They're supposed to be there for help but all they do is bash us. (Hamish)

Have you ever been to the police for help?

Yeah, once. I was depressed, I don't know why, and I was walkin' down the street and there was a cop shop there and I thought "oh well, I'll just go in and talk to one of them". I went in and I said. "Oh, can I just talk to someone", y'know, and they said "we've got a social worker here, just sit down and wait" and I was still waiting in two hours time and, umm, so I just got up and left. (Ross)

Would you ever go to the police for help?

No.

Why not?

Because they wouldn't help me.

How can you be so sure?

Because I've got a criminal record and they know me. (Jason)

Young people who believe themselves denied access to police help, may end up feeling they should take natural justice into their own hands.

You just get 'em back your own way and that's it. (Ben)

### Reporting Police Assaults

Homeless youth do not report incidents of police assaults. In part this is explained by the tendency of youths to underestimate, accept, or think the assaults justifiable. However, a range of other explanations were also offered. Some young people expressed fear of retaliation:

They'd just get you twice as worse again. (Elliot)

You couldn't really report it because the cops would probably come back after ya if ya dobbed on them. (Andy)

After the police officers hit you did you tell anyone?

Yeah.

Who did you tell?

Friends.

Did you ever go to any sort of authority to...?

No.

And why is that?

Because they'd get me again; they'd come after ya for sure. (Geoff)

I said I wasn't treated O.K. and a copper came up behind me and grabbed me and punched me near the neck and said "You've been treated O.K." I just wanted to go so I said "Yes". (Elliot)

Others felt a sense of powerlessness in terms of the value of their report as opposed to that of the police:

I was on the run...I gave them a bodgey name and they just sort of whacked me in the mouth...

Did you report that to anyone?

No, I mean, what can you do? If you go in and say "this copper hit me", I mean I got proof, y'know my mates were there but I'm sure they're all on each other's side, the coppers. You can't do nothin', it's a waste of time. It sucks. I wouldn't waste my time, really, just going through all that. If I knew they'd do something about it I would y'know, cos I reckon it's wrong. But they do sweet f...a... (Esther)

My word against two. (Phillip)

The last time I got a broken leg, broken ribs, couldn't see out of one of my eyes for quite a while, bad concussion and fractured jaw and nose. They kicked shit out of me, punching me...It was going on about ten minutes...They just put me in the cell, waited until morning when they called an ambulance and they told the ambulance "so, he just walked into the door".

Rang up the head cop...nothing you can do unless you've got witnesses -it's your word against theirs. (Andy)

Those who did attempt to complain still saw a futility in the exercise:

Yeah, I complained but there was a lot of the police officers there and they just said "Oh, we didn't see nothing happen"; they all stuck up for each other. I mean it's alright for the police to criticise us but we're not allowed to give them cheek back and criticise them. If we do that we just get charged for insolence and get a clip around the earhole.

Who did you complain to?

I complained to one of the sergeants on duty there.

And what did he say?

He told me to sign the book and I didn't hear anything else about it. (Ian)

I've complained twice to internal complaints and they weazled out and did nothing. (Joe)

I wasn't charged. I tried to report it but I couldn't prove anything. (Adam)

Some young people were actively discouraged from reporting the assault by their professional advisers:

Who did you try to tell?

I said to my social worker about it, and the social worker said she couldn't do nothing because there was four police against one kid, and I've told me friend about it and she said "Just don't worry about it; next time make sure if you go to the police station to have someone with you". (Judy)

I told my social worker what happened and she said there's no way it is police brutality so I just forgot about it and let it pass. (Austin)

Generally they felt it was pointless reporting the assault to anyone because, as many youths said, "I can't prove it". The position taken by most of the young people is expressed by one young man who said:

Did you tell anybody about it, go to see anyone about it?

No.

You didn't?

No, no I didn't. You can't really do much really because they, there's not too many places you can go about it if the coppers do punch you up, so you just take it and forget it. (Ben)

## Avoiding Violence

Young people were asked what they do to avoid situations which scare or threaten them. A majority of interviewees spoke of trying to walk or run away from dangerous situations:

I run from fights. (Judy)

Keep moving - keep on running. (Andy)

Walk away if they try to start an argument. (Phillip)

Just lie low - don't pick on anybody. (Warren)

Shut up, cross the road and keep out of the areas where you know there are a lot of druggies. (Fiona)

Many young people were wary if not distrustful of others and believed this helped protect them:

I just keep to myself. (Adam)

Mostly I stick to myself. I never told anybody anything personal. It keeps you out of a lot of trouble. (Jesse)

I don't let anybody get too close to me. It's hard for me to be friendly when you've been hurt in the past -pressure drives you away. (Di)

I keep to myself and don't talk to anyone, especially guys. (Gina)

It is widely assumed that young people "hang around" in groups to start trouble. Many respondents appear to congregate as a means of peer protection.

I'm never by myself. (Rita)

Stay with the group for protection. If you move away from the group you get gang-bashed. (Ian)

A lot of street kids you know, if you're on the streets, group together so it's like a family of their own kind. (Austin)

I stay with friends in a group. (Eve)

Young homeless people demonstrated an acute sense of "safe geography" and personally protective behaviours:

I don't walk down dark alleys or go out by myself at night. (Kate)

Stay away from trouble areas. (Andy)

I don't provoke anything if I just avoid something by not going near it. (Owen)

Stay away from drunk ones. (Ben)

A great deal of thought was given to choosing a place to sleep:

Don't sleep near pubs, in places with weirdos, some parks, drainpipes.  
(Elliot)

You've got to stay real quiet. Choose your places - never in the same place twice; sleep in the dark so you have time to get away. (Nick)

{Where} you're out of view, well, say a couple of metres away from the main road, but, if you are under a bush then nobody can see you then you feel sweet. (Steve)

I walk around for a while and check out all the places that are an option for me to lay down and rest, and pick out the best one, and usually the one I pick out no-one comes to like the Health Centre that I stayed at...a school would be alright, at the playground - not many people go there. The football oval I won't stay at 'cos you do get a few people hanging around the football oval and dogs too. Where else. Excellent spot behind cop shops... watching T.V. gave me the idea.  
(Austin)

### Summary

Many of the young people in this study had sought help from other people or agencies. More often, they looked to their friends for support. Young women in particular sought help from their friends; young men were more willing to seek assistance from others.

While close to two-thirds of these young people had suffered injuries serious enough to require medical assistance, very few of them reported to anyone the violent incidents of which they were a victim. Many expressed a reluctance to even seek medical assistance, despite serious injury or illness. The environment, the administration and the personal questions asked, were all discouraging to young people. They were also frightened that the police may be contacted as a result of a hospital visit.

While other members of the community might report violent incidents to the police, these young people rarely do so and do not go to the police for assistance of any kind. They do not trust the police and believe the police have a low opinion of them. Neither do they report incidents of police assault to anyone: they fear retaliation, feel they will not be able to prove their allegations, and they believe that nothing would be done in any case. Access to professional support does not appear to bolster their willingness to complain. In fact, some social workers seem to actively discourage the reporting of allegations about police violence.

Young people try to avoid violent incidents by walking or running away from potentially dangerous situations. They also develop a range of adaptive and self-protective behaviours: they are distrustful of others, but they also seek group protection. They view friends as a key source of protection and support.

## 8. CONCLUSION

Most of the young people in this study had been forced to leave home at an early age because of major conflicts with their parents which frequently involved physical and/or sexual violence. Having left home and school at an early age they had few resources and were vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Overseas and Australian victimisation studies suggest that this group of unemployed young people, who by necessity spend a lot of their time on the street, would be particularly vulnerable to violent crime. The findings of this research support that observation.

It is clear from this research that, contrary to some popular images, homelessness is not a carefree freedom enjoyed by rebellious teenagers. It is filled with anxieties about survival. Nearly all homeless youth spoke of feeling scared for their personal safety; they spoke of a vulnerability to violence as a major source of fear.

The findings also indicate that this fear is well grounded: these young people are victims of a particularly high level of violence. Most of the young people in the study had been physically hurt by someone since they had left home. However, the overall experience of homelessness and the pattern of violent victimisation varied by the sex of the young person.

For the young males in this study, violence most often involved a physical attack by other young males - a fight. These frequently took place in the locations where they spent most of their time, that is, public spaces such as the street, railway stations and near pubs. These fights sometimes involved other males who were known to the victim, and less often with a male referred to as a "friend". Other assaults were described as unprovoked attacks by a stranger.

Public space is the "private backyard" of these young men, but it is not safe. They cannot afford the leisure options of other peers. The refuges are closed during the day and their general situation means that school or employment are not options. Thus they gather during the day in public spaces and assemble in groups with protective loyalties. They are scared, they are bored, and individual and group conflicts erupt.

Most often the fights evolved out of interpersonal aggravation - one male "mouths off" at another; a male "bumps into" another or plays his music too loud. The interactions which provoked attacks or which led to fights resulting in quite serious injury, might at first appear "trivial" to others. However they are threats to status, to reputation, for young males who have few other sources of identity or dignity. They occur between males who are in a situation where little things mean a lot; in situations where they are also tired, hungry, scared, alone, and probably unwell. Young women are involved in physical fights both with other young women and less frequently, with other young men. However, physical fights are predominantly a male phenomena. The inevitability of males being involved in physical fighting was recognised by both young women and young men as one of the most difficult features of life on the street for young men. These altercations are tests of masculinity in a society where the accepted "masculine" man must adopt the values of male superiority (Rutherford 1988:24).

Physical fighting between males is to some extent accepted as inevitable by the community in general - 'boys will be boys'. Since it has not been considered "problematic", we have not studied more closely the nature of the interactions: Who becomes involved? Why don't some men become involved? How are they avoided? How do fights start/escalate? How are they stopped? If we are concerned about violence in our society we will need to address these issues as well as confront the conception of masculinity which underlies the acceptance of such behaviour.

The violent experiences of the young women in this study were most often quite different to those of the young men. The aspect which they shared with their male peers was that their assailants were also most often male. However for the young women, these males were often the "friends" to whom they looked for support and comfort - their "boyfriends".

Unfortunately, we learnt less about these violent incidents in the research than we did about other forms of violence. Both the interviewers and the young women being interviewed were reluctant to talk about such personal matters. We did learn from practical experience in this project what feminist scholars, particularly in England, have recently been documenting - women are often reluctant or unable to discuss, or even define as criminally violent, assaults on them by their male partners. Women tend to minimize, to treat as inconsequential and forget these assaults.

As a consequence, not only do we know less about the nature of the violence experienced by the young women, we must also advise caution in interpreting the overall finding of this research that young men claimed more incidents of violent victimization than young women. The important factor is that they "claimed" more violent incidents to the interviewer, we do not know that they were in fact more likely to be the victim of violence than young women.

Young women were more likely to indicate having been sexually assaulted than young men. This is consistent with the general observation of both the young men and women in this study that one of the major differences in the experiences of homelessness for young men and women was that women were more likely to be raped. Young women were also more likely than young men to speak of sexual harassment, particularly in staffed residential settings - the hostels and refuges they look to for help. However, it is also likely that the extent of sexual assault of young men is underreported in the study. Again both young men and young women commented on the particular difficulties for young men in acknowledging that they had been the victim of a (most probably) homosexual rape.

It was not only similarly situated young men or "boyfriends" who were the key sources of violence for this group of young people; policemen were the second major source of violence for both young women and young men. Policewomen were sometimes mentioned, but overwhelmingly the incidents involved more than one policeman. Before formally beginning this research, the Principal Investigators conducted interviews with homeless youths and people working with them. These interviews led us to anticipate that police would be mentioned as one of the sources of violence. However the extent, nature and consistency of these reports was one of the most startling features of the research findings.

Confrontations between youths and police most often begin in public spaces, although the assault most often occurs after the young person has been taken back to a police station. It would appear that young people in groups in public places are targeted for pro-active policing which in practice entails moving the young people on in order to prevent assumed potential trouble and to cater to an assumed intimidated public. The young people perceive this as a denial of their legitimate right to occupy public space. Their sense of the injustice of the police action becomes a powerful catalyst for hostility toward police. Especially for young people whose homeless status testifies to a history of actual or perceived injustice, an illegitimate demand to "move on" may fuel a mind set which understands their general situation as one of being buffeted by forces which do not care or understand. Such a young person may not simply co-operate with the police request. In the public arena, the police officer may then become involved in a dynamic of asserting police, or his personal, authority.



The sometimes antagonistic approach of homeless young people to police probably further aggravates police and their response to young people. Studies both here and overseas indicate the type of police response to young people is to a large extent determined by the young person's perceived "co-operation" with the police officer (O'Connor and Sweetapple 1988; Piliavin and Briar 1964) : the co-operation expected can sometimes involve the young person forgoing common rights.

However while there are two sides to this interaction, it needs to be remembered that it is not an interaction between equals. James and Polk (1989) have argued that such violent dynamics in fact represent attempts by police to redress a non-recognition of their authority. The fact that encounters between police and these young people are likely to commence on the street further aggravates the initial situation, as the public arena intensifies the need of police to maintain an image of control. O'Connor and Sweetapple (1988) argue that: "The physical and psychological enforcement of submission creates a new domain of conflict and struggle centred not upon illegal activities per se but on the relationship between police and youth. It is on the streets, literally, that the struggle between police and young people is at its most explicit and aggressive".

Before the completion of this report, the Principal Investigators were invited to present these findings to the Chief Commissioner of the Victoria Police, Mr Kel Glare, and his Assistant Commissioners. The findings were also discussed with the Secretary of the Victoria Police Association, Mr Bryan Harding, and they have been publicly commented upon by the Premier of Victoria, Mr John Cain. In none of these instances were the findings of the research disputed. They have each indicated that steps will be taken to enhance the training of police to enable them to respond non-aggressively to the difficult situations involving young people. The Chief Commissioner has also expressed a commitment to improving the standard of supervision in police stations. In the meeting with the Assistant Commissioners, community workers were strongly encouraged to utilize existing procedures for anonymously reporting incidents: the difficulties for young people in lodging formal complaints and in providing corroborative evidence, was acknowledged.

A further most disturbing feature of the research findings was the extent to which these young people suffer their violent victimisation without seeking assistance or reporting the incidents to anyone. Feelings of powerlessness and fear of retaliation make understandable the failure to report police assaults. However many young people expressed a reluctance even to seek medical assistance despite serious illness or injury. Most of the young people in this study had sought help from some person or agency in terms of their general situation. But they were more often likely to turn to their friends for help. In general these young people struggle alone with the difficulties of their situation. This is a serious indictment of the social /health service systems which are presumed to be offered for such young people. We need to know far more about why these young people do not seek assistance, why they do not report incidents of violence to others. This research suggests that feelings of hopelessness, that nobody really cares and fear of notification of parents or police are all significant factors.

With reference to health services specifically, it appears young people are deterred by the setting and process as well as the fear of police involvement. Proposals to establish young peoples' health services will need to recognise the particular needs of homeless youth and incorporate crisis access.

A number of policy issues are raised by this research. First and foremost is the recommendation that the government has to address the economic, educational and welfare policies which deny youth the possibility of living safe, independent lives. Young people living away from home should be assisted with access to the employment, education and housing opportunities, and the welfare benefits, that are available to other adults or to young people living at home. To deny them such access is to structurally determine their vulnerability to exploitation, abuse and violence.

One issue raised by this research which has to be addressed if we are to deal with violence in our society is the construction of masculinity and the gender stratification which it maintains and reproduces. This is obviously not something that can be changed tomorrow by government decree. However, we need to specifically address this issue, to try to understand more about the various constructions of masculinity and their relationship to the control and expression of violence (Alder 1989). We will have to consider the re-definition and the re-construction of masculinity so that it no longer entails the resort to violence and misogyny to maintain a sense of coherence (Rutherford and Chapman 1988:18).

In the immediate future a number of other specific policy recommendations present themselves. Each day young people are struggling with the exigencies of their situation; they deserve every effort be made to alleviate their immediate situation. These recommendations will be briefly outlined in terms of the general issues which stand out in the research: (i) housing options for young women; (ii) the daily dilemma; (iii) policing problems; and (iv) health/service access and response.

**(i) Housing Options for Young Women.** Young women in our society are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse and exploitation. In the research, they spoke of sexual harassment and sometimes sexual assault in hostels and refuges. There urgently needs to be an increase in the availability of safe housing options for young women.

**(ii) The Daily Dilemma.** Young people who are out of work and school and who are not able to stay in refuges and hostels during the day, have to have somewhere to go during the day where they are safe and free from harassment. Public policies with respect to the accessibility of public space for young people need to be reviewed. Strategies are needed to facilitate dispersion rather than concentration of groups.

All levels of government need to review the range of youth services to ensure the availability of services which allow homeless youth to spend their time safely and constructively. Programmes are needed which recognise that homeless young people due to their circumstances, are not in a position to make longer term commitments to jobs, education or even programmes such as Skillshare.

**(iii) Policing.** A number of recommendations flow from the findings with respect to police handling of young people. We recommend that:

Police organisations review their general policies, objectives and procedures relating to the policing of youth in public spaces.

Police training programmes ensure inclusion of skills focussed programmes to develop non-aggressive techniques for handling difficult situations with young people.

Police organisations review standards of supervision and accountability in police stations.

State governments establish procedures which are publicly accountable for the investigation of young people's allegations of police maltreatment. Such procedures need to be designed to acknowledge the specific disincentives to personal complaint faced by homeless youth.

State governments fund programmes to provide independent witnesses to attend whenever young people are brought into police custody. Young people generally and homeless youth specifically should have the legislated right to nominate the presence of such an individual or solicitor in preference or addition to a family member.

(iv) **Health/Service Access and Response.** One of the most disturbing findings of the research was that young people frequently do not report the violent incidents of which they are a victim, and do not seek advice. They felt they were often discouraged from pursuing their complaints, especially in cases of police assault. We therefore recommend:

Statutory and voluntary agencies which deal with homeless young people develop policies and protocols to guide staff in their decision-making and advice to young people who report violent victimisation.

Training of human services professionals explicitly include information and provide skills in advocacy processes and techniques.

Health departments and hospitals examine their policies and procedures to increase the likelihood of homeless youth seeking medical assistance. A particular issue to be addressed is the ramification of involving police. Services need to consider the access difficulties faced by homeless youth.

In terms of the policy responses to the research, a concern of the Principal Investigators is that the information about the extent of violent victimization of young people will be misused to promote the use of protective incarceration of young people. It is important to recognize that their vulnerability to violence is a consequence of our failure to provide young people with access to the economic and social supports for independent living which are available to other members of the community. Rather than the use of institutional confinement, which we cannot presume is free of physical and psychological violence, we recommend the extension and development of services which tackle the sources of vulnerability such as employment, income and housing.

In conclusion, while the research concerned young people who are presently in Melbourne, the Burdekin Report and the research of O'Connor (1988, 1989), and our discussions with participants at the National Conference on Violence (Canberra, November, 1989), indicate that these problems are not only found in Victoria. We therefore recommend that the National Committee on Violence and the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission encourage all levels of government to implement the above recommendations.

Our experience of working directly with young homeless people in all stages of the research process has reinforced our commitment to youth participation. We strongly recommend that young people in general and homeless youth particularly, are resourced to play an active not simply token role in the planning, implementation, publicity and evaluation of policies and programs which affect them.

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APPENDIX i

Question Guide

Question Guide

Sex: Male      Female

Age: 12    13    14    15    16    17    18

Age first left home:

In School? Yes....What level are you in?  
No.....What level were you in when you left?

Working now? Yes....P/T. F/T  
How long?

No.....Have you had any jobs since you left  
home? Yes..... about how many?  
No

Right now are you on any sort of court order?  
Yes.....What sort?  
No.....Have you ever been in the past?

Do you have a worker?      Who  
Where  
How often do you see her/him  
Do you go to her for help?  
What sorts of things to you see her  
Has s/he been helpful?

---

WORK EXPERIENCE

If the person has had a job ask -

What sort of jobs have you had?

Why did you leave your job/s?

Have you ever been ripped off at work?

Have you ever not been paid proper wages  
or Asked to work more than you had agreed  
or Just somehow been taken advantage of?

PROBE: Exactly what happened? How much were you being  
paid? What was the agreement you had at first?

What did you do about it?

#### LEAVING HOME

Why did you leave home in the first place?

When did you last stay at home?

Where have you stayed since you left home?

Have you ever lived or stayed with friends ?

What was that like?

Why did you leave?

Where did you stay last night?

In general what problems have you had in trying to find somewhere to live?

Do you think its harder being male/female to find somewhere to stay?

Have you ever had to stay with someone that you didn't want to because you had nowhere else to stay?

PROBE: Why

What actually happened

Have you ever stayed in a refuge or hostel?

Yes.....What did you think of it?

Have you ever had any trouble while you were staying in a refuge/hostel?

Yes.... details

---

#### INCOME

How do you get money to live to live on?

Are there any other ways that you get money?



Have you ever had to do anything illegal to get money to live on?

DURING DAY?

What do you normally do during the day?

Who.....guys/girls/mix  
Where  
What

Do you have any friends that you would go to for help or advice?

Are they in the same position as you?

-

---

DRINKING / DRUGS

Have you ever been into drinking or tried drugs?

Drinking- What  
How often  
How much

What drugs have you tried?  
How often

Have you ever thought that you had a problem with drugs or alcohol?

Have you ever asked for help with this? Who? What happened?

---

WORRIES

What are the best things that are happening in your life right now?

worst things?

What worries you most? What keeps you awake worrying at night?

What worries you most about not having anywhere to stay?

FEARS

Are you ever scared/frightened for your safety? Do you ever feel threatened?

Yes.... what of, when, where

Any particular places in which you feel most frightened?  
Any times?

---

HURT

Have you ever been hurt by anyone since you left home?

Have you ever been physically hurt by anyone since you left

home? Yes..... What happened

When

Where

Who

How did it start

How many people

How badly were you hurt

What happened to end it

What did you do afterwards

Did you report it to anyone

Are there any other times when you have been physically hurt?

What was the worst time?

-

Have you ever been to the POLICE for help?

Yes....What for  
What happened

No..... Would you ever  
Why not

In general how do you get on with the police? Details

Have you ever been taken to the police station? (Last time)

Yes...Why  
What happened  
How many police officers  
Did you tell anyone

Have you ever been physically hurt by the police?

Have you ever been strip searched?

What about TRANSIT COPS?RIDERS... how do you get on with them?

What do they do?

Have you ever been physically hurt by them

Are there any OTHER ADULTS who you have to deal with who  
cause you problems, or have physically hurt you? details

What about DRUG DEALERS? details

What about OTHER KIDS?.. are you ever frightened by them?  
have you ever been physically hurt  
by any other kid?

what about fights? Who  
How start  
How finish

Have you ever deliberately tried to hurt YOURSELF?

---

This next question might be a bit hard to talk about, so if you don't want to you don't have to answer?

Have you ever been sexually assaulted?

---

SEX DIFFS

Do you think there are any differences for guys and girls who are living away from home?

Do you think they are treated any differently by other kids?  
police  
transit cops  
workers  
other adults

---

HELP

Have you ever been to seek help from anyone/agency?

Yes...who  
what for  
what happened

Have you ever had to go to hospital because you have been physically hurt by someone? What happened?

Are there times you thought perhaps you should have gone but you didn't? When? Why didn't you go?

In general what do you think of doctors/hospitals?

Have you ever been to anyone else - Police/worker/ other adult- for help after you have been physically hurt or have been scared of being physically hurt?

Yes.....what happened  
No.....why didnt you go

AVOID.

What sorts of things do you do to try to avoid being threatened or hurt, or to avoid the situations which scare you?

---

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about what it is like having nowhere permanent to live?

If you could talk to Bob Hawke tomorrow, what advice would you give him about what he should do for kids in the same situation as you?

CHECK ASKED ALL QUESTIONS

In the past 12 months, have you been physically assaulted?

APPENDIX ii

CONSENT FORM

We are trying to find out about what it's like for young people who don't really have anywhere to live.

I would like to talk with you for about one hour and after the interview I will give you \$10 as payment for taking the time to talk with me.

I would also like to tape record the interview, but if there's anything you want to say but don't want taped, I will stop the tape recorder at any time you ask.

During the interview we won't use your name so that no-one will know its you. We are interviewing about 60 kids and when we write about what we found , we will never use names.

If you agree to all of this, please sign your name at the bottom of the page. I'll sign my name too so that you know it's an agreement between the two of us. This form will be kept under lock and key security so that no-one, outside of Danny, Christine and I, will know you were interviewed.

Thank You

Person interviewed..... Date.....

Interviewer ..... Date.....

Interviewers name .....

APPENDIX iii



# The Police Association

43 MacKENZIE STREET, MELBOURNE, VICTORIA 3000

Our Ref.:

PHONE: 662 2433

662 2657

ANSAFON: 662 2339

Your Ref.:

24th October 1989

FAXED: 344 5104 (24/10/89)

Dr. C. Alder, PH.D.  
Senior Lecturer  
University of Melbourne  
Swanston Street  
PARKVILLE 3053

Dear Dr Alder

Thank you for your letter of 17th October, 1989, in respect of your research on "Homeless Streetkids as Victims of Violence."

The Police Association has a very positive view on the importance of education and training to policing practices. The Association is of the view that police management has generally failed in providing appropriate training to youthful police officers to cope with the contemporary social environment. The criticism of police practices, implicit in your letter, is shared by the Association and Mr Justice Muirhead in his preliminary recommendations arising from the Deaths in Custody Commission.

The question of Police training and accreditation of Police skills was referred from the last Police Federation of Australia and New Zealand Conference to the Industrial Planning Committee of the Federation. The Federation is firmly of the view that, because of the perceived failure by police administrations to provide adequate training, the area of training should no longer remain the sole province of police departments.

Your letter reinforces our view that police training and education requires a radical review. Particularly, in areas involving our indigenous people, new citizens, the disaffected, disadvantaged and deprived. We recognise that police departments are not responsible for socio-economic factors, but they are responsible for training police officers to cope efficiently and humanely with all the difficulties attendant upon interacting with the categories I have mentioned above. As well as humanness and efficiency they have a duty from an occupational health and safety, professional and legal standpoint to train and educate police officers for their extremely difficult role. I agree with you that a strategy to seek out single perpetrators through a focus on complaints is counter-productive.





Ltr. to Dr. Alder (Contd.,) dd 24/10/89

2

The meeting of the Industrial Planning Committee which met in Melbourne on the 16th and 17th October 1989, resolved that affiliates seek to include in industrial agreements under the Structural Efficiency Principle of the Industrial Relations Commission the following clause :-

"THAT THE PARTIES AGREE TO A JOINT STATE/FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE COMMISSIONER'S CONFERENCE) AND POLICE UNION (UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE POLICE FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND) STUDY TEAM TO DEVELOP A NATIONAL APPROACH TO POLICE TRAINING, QUALIFICATIONS AND ACCREDITATIONS AND THE STRUCTURE OF LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THIS COUNTRY TO ASSESS WHETHER THE POLICE FORCES OF AUSTRALIA ARE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY PLACED TO MEET THE CHALLENGES CONTEMPORANEOUSLY AND POTENTIALLY FACING THE POLICE PROFESSION."

I would hope that people like yourself would assist, in the future, in structuring police training and education to better equip police officers to cope with their difficult work environment.

Yours faithfully

  
Bryan G. Harding  
SECRETARY

