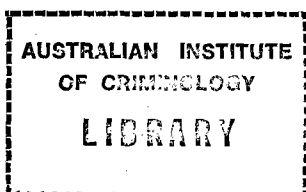


YOUTH AND SOCIAL CONTROL

Report by
Philippa Chapman

Canberra 17-21 February 1975

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INTRODUCTION

The factors that contribute to the prevention and control of juvenile crime and delinquency was the subject of Training Project No.9 'Youth and Social Control' conducted by the Australian Institute of Criminology from 17 to 21 February 1975.

A representative group from all Australian States, the Australian Capital Territory and Norfolk Island, Fiji, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea and the United States of America examined many aspects of the theme 'Youth and Social Control'. The fifty-four participants included experts in youth, community services, educationists, legislators, judges, magistrates, police, correctional personnel, criminologists, sociologists and senior high school students.

The task was to formulate suggestions and recommendations for the development of more effective policies and programmes for the prevention and control of juvenile crime and the treatment of young offenders. The mutual exchange generated gave the seminar a rich background of theory and practical experience in approaching the subject.

The programme was an interchange of formal talks, group discussions, and open forums. The seminar benefited from the wealth of knowledge, experience and expertise of the various speakers and from the ensuing time for questions. The opportunity afforded in the small groups for the free exchange of ideas was fully used, so too were the informal gatherings during the week. The subject matter for the group discussions was not structured and the groups were free to discuss the areas most relevant to their members.

For the purposes of this seminar 'youth' was taken to mean the age group up to twenty-one years. In corrections terminology, this includes both juvenile delinquents and young offenders, although the term was intended to encompass the entire range of youth and not concentrate on the non-conforming members of that group. The term 'youth' was not specified but it covered the social group of considerable importance and growing statistical significance in the total population and the subject of special consideration in crime control.

While there was no formal business session or consideration of resolutions, topics for discussion included: 'Urban Youth and Formal Control'; 'The Role of the Youth Worker in the Prevention of Adolescent Delinquency'; 'The Adolescent Girl: Problems in Social Control' and 'The Role of the Welfare Agency'.

Pictures of different cultural patterns in social control were presented by the visitors to Australia who participated in the seminar.

The following summary of the week's proceedings should prove of value to legislators, professional and para-professional personnel, educationists and all concerned citizens interested in the welfare of youth in our rapidly changing society.

YOUTH IN SOCIETY

The seminar examined the social and economic place of youth in society with particular attention to ethnic differences, social deprivation, the inequalities of opportunity and the general social disorganisation resulting in the possible destruction of social controls for society as a whole. Recent studies of juvenile crime in Australia have revealed that adolescents are twice as likely to be involved in more serious crimes than other age groups. It was argued that the rapid rate of social change challenges the formal social controls. This social change occurs at a faster rate than the adaptations to the formal social controls and the controls are therefore unable to match the changes.

Though there is some general awareness of the situation in the community as a whole, the question as to how people become actively involved in acquiring and applying such knowledge produced much stimulating discussion. Many of the younger members of the seminar asserted there was no problem in the acquisition of knowledge but the difficulty lay in its application, particularly by the adult community.

Within a period of a very few years young people have become a distinct social group which cannot be ignored. There is a trend towards the acceptance of the rights of youth to be heard and to participate in social planning and programming. But what do young people want? They see their demands as very simple. They want to have a say in the decisions which affect them. They believe they have something worthwhile to contribute to the decision-making process in society and offer a direct challenge to the older generation to re-examine its systems and attitudes.

In the process of the criminal justice system the arbitrary separation between juveniles and adults is out of step with this trend of youth responsibility. It was considered the only controls that were in any way effective were the internal controls which were built into the individual's personality from a very early age. The concept of an emotional source of control likened to a bank was put forward by one of the speakers. This consisted of adults putting in deposits of care, affection and trust and only making withdrawals, or demands on youth when the occasion was sufficiently warranted. By so doing the reserve would not be drained unnecessarily for reasons of a petty nature. This would avoid the delinquency situation as a response to the frustrations created when the possibility of lawfully attaining ideals is denied to youth because of the inadequacy of the resources and the over-emphasis on unimportant trivia that is all too often placed on youth out of all proportion to its value.

Social control can be approached by two different basic methods. The first relies on the individual's enforcing rules on himself, that is the internal controls of the individual which produce a high degree of emotional response between the person and the group. The second relies on the threat of punishment and is aimed at impressing the individual with the power of the group to influence his or her actions. Each of these relies on different psychological mechanisms to produce results and can be depicted as

'awe and fear' V 'shame and guilt'

The importance of the period of early socialisation which forms the preparation for the roles adopted in later life was stressed. It was also shown that the emphasis for this important function was shifting away from the family and being focused in other social institutions. Many of the stresses evident in modern industrialised society were the outcome of this shift in emphasis and the inability and inadequacy of the various systems and social institutions to develop techniques evolved over centuries and formerly regarded as the prerogative of the primary socialising unit, the family.

The adoption of the deviant role was therefore the resultant malfunctioning of a long social transaction and breakdown in role performance on the part of youth and their ability to internalise the values of society due to the confused role preparation they had been exposed to. This was evidenced by their social breakdown and having to sustain the subsequent rejection by society, that is their family and significant adults in their life. For too many this occasioned the initial entrance into the correctional system with the outcome varying in degrees of success for both the individual and the system.

CORRECTIONAL PROGRAMMES, ATTITUDE CHANGE AND SOCIAL CONTROL

The detection and apprehension of offenders was discussed and the system of police warnings, official and otherwise as practised in Victoria, was examined in one session. One of the attractive features of the system allows the apprehended youth to be dealt with soon after committing the offence. The immediacy of justice can be seen as a powerful and useful implement of law enforcement. However, sometimes sad delay between the offence and the intended salutary official warning causes much of its effectiveness to be lost, as a youth may not recall his specific actions some months later when he is being officially cautioned for his conduct.

The use of warnings related to certain factors such as family, educational and employment situations was considered and the growing incidence of shoplifting offences noted. Overall there seems to be a general rise in the use of warnings to deal with young offenders. From the well documented research presented the warnings provided, in many cases, the necessary deterrent in keeping many youths out of the courts.

What happens to a person once he or she enters the 'system'? Various types of correctional programmes were discussed from the closed total institution of the prison through the group home treatment programme to a transactional analysis programme. The inauguration, implementation and assessment of the famous Highfields programme for boys was also presented. Sessions were given over to the discussion of each one of these and their merits or demerits in the question of rehabilitation advanced for close scrutiny.

With regard to the total institution of the prison the major factor militating against the salutary effect of detention, was felt to be the strong inmate culture established in prison. It was argued that the injustices of the correctional system far outweighed the injustices of the

deviant act and that society had almost a basic drive to punish disproportionately to the need to prevent crime. Again, it was argued that society placed unrealistic expectations on the correctional system as an instrument of rehabilitation that were beyond the competence of such a closed system to fulfil effectively.

The hitherto unexplored question of youth services involving youth themselves was raised and received general support, particularly from the youth panel which followed this session.

The importance of relationships in a resocialisation programme based on a simulated family model and the alteration of a deviant role to a normative one was presented and discussed. The session focused on the development of knowledge, skills, ability and motivation of the adolescent in this process. A key factor in the programme is the correctional worker and the extent to which he or she is prepared to risk himself 'in relationship' with the young offender. In this way one can hope to supplement the deficiency in previous unsatisfactory relationships and in so doing reverse the pattern of inadequate and maladaptive role performance.

Another method of resocialisation was presented in the form of a programme based on transactional analysis technique with groups of delinquent boys. By providing positive reinforcement a person's self image is enhanced so reducing the instances of negative behaviour and attention seeking. On the principle that even negative attention is better than none at all, the adolescent accustomed to seeking attention through anti-social behaviour, on experiencing recognition for behaviour other than deviant will adapt accordingly. The importance of encouraging the potential of young people to help themselves was stressed. By so doing we can help them become more autonomous and less likely to set themselves up to receive negative reinforcement and more likely to seek and give positive responses. The instances of their hurting themselves and other people can thus be reduced.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PROGRAMMES IN THE PREVENTION OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

While much time was given to discussing the problems of deviant adolescents, the participants, particularly the younger members, felt that insufficient attention was given to the 'silent majority' and to the exploration of possible avenues designed to stimulate their potential for healthy and constructive involvement in the building up of society.

Three formal sessions were devoted to the examination of community services and structures in the area of delinquency prevention. A radical approach outlining the role of government policy in shaping legislation and promoting broad developmental programmes designed to promote healthy social adjustment and interaction was discussed in one session. The importance of total social legislation was stressed along with the need to decentralise government services and spending. This would avoid the piecemeal, fragmented, compartmentalised and uncoordinated structure that has hitherto constituted our inherited and developed bureaucratic system.

Welfare services in this traditional system are provider oriented rather than consumer oriented, the crucial determinant being the blueprint of the bureaucracy projected onto the consumer rather than a response of the former to the needs of the latter.

The role of the welfare agency in the South Australian situation and its effect on social control with broad decentralised community based programmes was outlined. This is an effort to bring services closer to the people and help them realise such services are a right. Working on the assumption that each person has different needs, the welfare programme has developed its range of alternative care. It forms the response of society to support all its members, the weak as well as the strong.

Another session was devoted to the role of the youth worker in the community. He was seen primarily as a 'change agent' or 'catalyst' in the process of assisting the adolescent with his recognition, evaluation and choice of various value sets. The youth worker working within the parameters of his agency, can provide opportunities to develop a sense of competence, usefulness, belonging and potency. In a practical manner this could be channelled through provision for

- (a) shared responsibility and participation in the decision-making process in matters affecting and pertinent to youth,
- (b) involvement with other members of society through the opportunity to build significant relationships,
- (c) a share in success, that is the accomplishment of a legitimate role in society,
- (d) confidence and enhanced self image through community participation.

The opinion expressed by many participants was that for the majority of young people formalised youth clubs tended through their organised operating procedures to constrict rather than promote broad participation of youth. Often, young people were not attracted to the various activities designed to help them because of their rejection of being over-organised in such an environment.

THE WEAKENING OF CONTROLS IN THE FAMILY UNIT

There was general agreement on the growing evidence of the breakdown of controls within the family unit and the effects of this on adolescents. The younger members of the seminar felt parents generally showed a tendency to over-control their children and yet on the other hand showed little interest in their activities. It was also felt that many parents were unable to accept and respect the individuality of their children and allow them to develop and grow so as to achieve their potential. Thus, when children were unable to meet the sometimes unrealistic demands of parents in terms of role performance, the negative response of parents was interpreted by many children as rejection and an inability to allow self-actualisation.

It was further considered that unresolved conflict within the marital relationship was reflected in the inadequate problem-solving techniques employed by some parents in dealing with their children. The end result of such conflict was the breakdown in communication between adolescents and their parents and the increased reliance on peer group influence.

Attention was also directed at ways of strengthening the family as the basic socialising unit, and particularly assisting those parents exhibiting limitations in developing satisfactory control mechanisms in their children. The suggestion of family support systems was encouraged though at the same time it was recognised that the problem was one requiring skilful application without interference with the basic family right to autonomy.

INCREASED RELIANCE ON EDUCATION

With the weakening of some of the traditional social controls, for example the family, there was obvious support in the groups for increased reliance on the education system to build up social controls. However, one group felt that the school functions best as a vehicle for social change rather than as an instrument of social control. It was further observed that because of the opportunity for constructive teacher/student relationships the teacher is in a unique position to influence the attitudes and values of the student.

The education system was seen as a potential delinquency-prevention agency through provision of

- (a) broader education for 'life', that is imparting values, developing interpersonal relationships, self-awareness, and studies in sociology,
- (b) concentration on the development of peer group values and standards, as these were seen to be the strongest controls on adolescent behaviour.

DISCUSSION GROUPS

The subject matter for the group discussions was left entirely to the groups to organise. It was interesting to note the different approaches adopted by the groups to the marked consensus evident in the diverse issues discussed during the sessions reserved for formal discussion.

Topics included: the importance of personal relationships; the function of the school in modern society; the weakening of controls in the basic socialising unit, the family; the use of volunteers in the rehabilitation of offenders; the efficacy of children's courts and juvenile aid panels

as against court appearances for youths; examination of the problem of juvenile crime and deviancy and ways of dealing with it; the importance of involving youth in the planning and implementation of activities of the social order, particularly in areas directly affecting their welfare.

OPEN FORUM

The final session of the seminar took the form of an open forum. The question of police records and the necessity of clarifying the policies and procedures needed to ensure the legitimate use of records by police and research personnel while providing adequate protection for the offender and respecting his right to confidentiality was a significant issue. It was further stated that information collected for record purposes should be relevant and precise.

Particular concern was voiced over the practice in some States of retaining records of juvenile offences into the offender's adult years and the accessibility of those records for use in court proceedings for later offences.

It was suggested that a future seminar could well be held on 'records in a changing mechanised and technological society'.

Discussion also focused on the stigma attached to court appearances whether from juvenile panels or adult courts.

Finally, the question of cultural differences constituting significant factors in the problem of crime for minority and ethnic groups was considered. It would be generally accepted that crime was the expression of a maladjustment and only indirectly related to ethnic differences.

CONCLUSIONS

Discussion was reported from all groups of the existing methods of handling juvenile offenders in the various States of Australia and consideration of the alternatives to treatment available to magistrates and Child Welfare Departments. A number of significant differences existed but there was consensus about the need to establish some features common to all States.

It was agreed that there were good reasons for providing a larger range of options for juvenile assessment than for adults. These should include: unofficial warning; official warning; juvenile aid panels and family (not children's) courts.

It was agreed that juveniles should have the option of demanding an appearance before a panel or court when an official warning was proposed by police. A panel constituted by a police officer, a social worker and

a citizen of the local community (along the lines of the New Zealand model), received widespread approval.

Concern was expressed for the size of institutions, the need for smaller institutions and improved programmes, and establishment of family group homes. Other suggestions included a 'crash bed' centre, twenty-four hours being the usual length of stay and this project to be staffed by adolescents.

There was little support from the groups for the inference regarding the value systems of contemporary youth being substantially different from, or worse than, those of previous generations.

It was agreed that the situation and the problems of the adolescent girl are far more complex than those of the adolescent boy.

The wider recognition by governments for the establishment of community based welfare programmes received strong support.

The participants recommended that the proceedings of the seminar receive widespread publicity as a means of educating the public and so raising the level of awareness and deepening the perception of the aspirations and problems of youth. This, it was hoped, would counteract the sometimes erroneous picture presented of youth in a delinquent state without due reference to the pressures generated by contemporary society and the diminishing support systems available to youth in their efforts to cope with these pressures.

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

APPENDIX I

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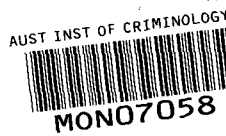
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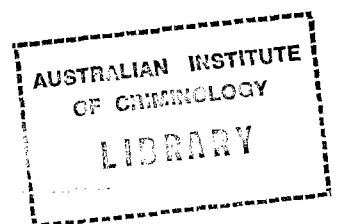
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R. Quintal	Youth Leader, Norfolk Island.



Detective Inspector F. Rames	Police Department, New South Wales.
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