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User Report

*The Police Response to
Youth At Risk*

No. 1991-08

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Solicitor General Canada
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Tullio Caputo
and
Colleen Ryan

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**The Police Response to
Youth At Risk**

No. 1991-08

The views expressed in this working paper are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Ministry of the Solicitor General of Canada.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Objectives of the Research

The following research was designed to assess the usefulness and implications of the concept of "youth at risk" for criminal justice and community-based policy and programs. Attention was also directed at the potential for interagency collaboration in addressing the problem of "youth at risk" and the role that the police might play in such an initiative. It was believed that the information gathered would provide a valuable resource for policing policy, including ongoing initiatives in community based policing, crime prevention, and the development of "youth at risk" profiles aimed at enhancing community-based police responses and resource deployment.

Organization of the Research

The information for this report was derived from three primary sources including: i) a review of criminal justice literature; ii) site visits to selected locations throughout the country; and iii) key actor interviews with professionals in educational, social service and police agencies that deal with the issue of "youth at risk". Each of the three components of the research focused on the concept of "youth at risk", in terms of how "youth" and "at risk" were understood and applied in the context of service delivery, programming and policy development.

Findings

- **Understanding and Use of the Term "Youth"**

A wide variation was found in the understanding and use of the term "youth". The term "youth" was applied to young people from birth to 24 years of age. Chronological age, however, was neither the only nor the most important factor used in making this distinction. Existing juvenile justice and child welfare legislation, as well as the mandates of individual organizations dealing with young people were important variables. The level of independence and maturity exhibited by a young person was also deemed to be a vital component for defining the status of a person.

- **Understanding and Use of the Term "At Risk"**

The term "at risk" was used extensively to refer to behaviours or situations that were potentially harmful to young people. Specifically, this included such things as child physical and sexual abuse, substance abuse, family violence, and the dangers resulting from exposure to life on the streets. Street life "risks" included violence, prostitution, AIDS, and involvement in such criminal activities as drug trafficking, shoplifting and break and enter. There was some indication that the level of risk was related to the repertoire of the individual and their ability to deal with various situations. Some segments of the population were identified as being especially "vulnerable". These included native youth, recent immigrants and the very young.

- **At Risk "Of" versus At Risk "To"**

An important distinction was drawn between those young people at risk of being victimized and those that were at risk to becoming long term clients of the criminal justice or social service system. This distinction reflects the different perspectives that

various agencies in the community have of the problems facing young people. For some agencies, "at risk" referred to those young people most susceptible to abuse and neglect. Other agencies, however, were primarily concerned with young people who were in conflict with the law and whose behaviour patterns identified them as having a potential to become further involved in illegal activities.

- **Recognition of a Common Client Population**

One of the themes that emerged was the recognition that youth at risk "of" victimization are often the same people that are at risk "to" become involved in criminal activity. Victims of child abuse, for example, are "at risk" of becoming abusers themselves later in life. Similarly, young people living on the streets and engaging in prostitution, drug trafficking, and other dangerous activities are increasingly being defined as being both victims and perpetrators of harm.

- **The Need for a Broad, Community-Based Response**

The complexity of the problem of "youth at risk" cuts across the boundaries of a number of agencies providing services to young people. A multidisciplinary, interagency, community-based approach was widely held to be essential for responding appropriately to the problem of "youth at risk".

Broad based interagency networks were seen as useful for gaining public visibility for an issue and for mobilizing financial and political support. They were seen as less effective for designing and implementing specific responses. Issue specific networks were seen as more focused and better suited to providing direct services however, they often lack the necessary resources to be successful.

An institution such as a school or a community centre was seen as an ideal place to house an interagency initiative since these are already recognized as important sites in most

communities. This would also give an interagency initiative some visibility and access to those most likely to require the services of the interagency network.

- **Education and the Sharing of Information**

A recurring theme was the need to recognize the problem of "youth at risk" as community based and not the fault of specific groups or individuals. Both the problem of "youth at risk" and its resolution were seen to require broader community action and resources. The need to provide education, information, and resources to enable community members to address their own problems was identified as a vital part of the process of responding to the problem of "youth at risk".

Implications for Policing Policy, Practice and Programs

- **Developing Appropriate Protocols**

The development of appropriate protocols for those professionals that deal with problems such as child abuse was emphasized. This requires the involvement and cooperation of all of the agencies in the community that provide services to young people. Other areas discussed with respect to the need for developing appropriate protocols included missing and runaway youth, suicide and suicide attempts, youth gangs, and satanism and the occult.

- **The Participation of the Police in Interagency Networks**

The police were seen as providing both protective and law enforcement services. Some concern was expressed about the contradictions that these two roles might have for police participation in interagency networks. Other questions focused on issues such as confidentiality and the sharing of information between organizations.

- **Training Police and Other Professionals in the Community**

The training requirements for police officers dealing with "youth at risk" was specifically examined. Suggestions included providing police officers with more exposure to social service professionals and educators in order to present the police with a more comprehensive view of the client population they are dealing with.

- **Early and Preventative Intervention Strategies**

The need for early identification and intervention was frequently expressed. Strategies that avoid undue labelling are required, especially if official agents such as the police become involved with young people. The benefits of early intervention, however, were seen to outweigh the potential consequences of labelling, especially if the intervention strategy reflected a proactive, preventative approach rather than a reactive, punitive one. Preventative programs could be directed at groups of young people as opposed to specific individuals experiencing problems.

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INTRODUCTION

During the last several years, the problems of children and youth have received increasing attention from community, social service and criminal justice agencies. This has led to the generation of a growing body of research in areas such as child abuse and child sexual abuse (Rogers, 1990; Health and Welfare Canada, 1989; Sigurdson et al., 1988; Hotaling and Finkelor, 1988; Badgley, 1984); juvenile prostitution (Weisberg, 1984; Silbert and Pines, 1982); runaways and street youth (Kufeldt, 1987; Kufeldt and Nimmo, 1987; Solicitor General of Canada, 1986); and youth gangs (Spergel, 1990; Huff, 1989; Morash, 1983).

Various responses aimed at young people with problems have also been developed. These have ranged from programs designed to address specific problems such as drug and alcohol abuse or juvenile suicide, to broader initiatives dealing with policing strategies, educational programs, and community based crime prevention efforts. In addition, there has been a growing recognition of the need for effective intervention prior to or shortly after contact with official agencies. In particular, the important role played by the police as a primary contact agency for young people experiencing problems has been emphasized. Within this context, the concept of "youth at risk" is increasingly being used to identify specific groups of young people "at risk" of long term or chronic involvement with criminal justice or social service agencies.

The growing use of the concept of "youth at risk" has had an important influence on the way that problems that young people face are defined and understood. In particular, this concept has emphasized the need for a broad approach which goes beyond a focus on the immediate behaviour that has brought a young person to the attention of the authorities. Such a broad based approach identifies the problems faced by many young people as symptomatic of larger, more deep seated social problems. Similarly, solutions are seen to require a strategy that goes beyond the needs of any particular individual or group to

address the problems of the community as a whole.

The current study has examined the way various professionals who work with young people with problems understand and use the concept of "youth at risk". This is essential for identifying the parameters of the concept and assessing the implications it has for various agencies involved in providing services to young people. The nature and usefulness of community-based, interagency collaboration was also addressed in this study. Initial assessments of both the usefulness of the concept of "youth at risk" and the viability of an interagency approach are based on an extensive review of the literature and previous research conducted in this area.

This report presents the results of an exploratory study of the way that police, social service professionals, educators, and academics, who deal with young people understand and respond to the problem of "youth at risk". It was not intended to be exhaustive or comprehensive. A convenience sample was drawn from a list of key actors in different communities across the country. These individuals were identified on the basis of their reported experience or expertise in addressing the problem of "youth at risk". This study was designed to provide useful information for policy and program development and to serve as the basis for future research in this area.

An extensive literature review was conducted and a semi-structured questionnaire developed on the basis of this material. Face to face, in-depth interviews were conducted during site visits to Vancouver, Kelowna, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, and Halifax. These sites were selected on the basis of the existence of: specific programs aimed at young people with problems; interagency networks responding to the problem of "youth at risk"; or particular types of youth related problems such as juvenile prostitution, youth gangs, or large numbers of street youth. The face to face interviews were augmented with telephone interviews conducted with key actors who were unavailable during site visits or who were in centres not visited.

FOCUSING ON YOUTH: AN OVERVIEW

The problems of children and youth have been the focus of widespread attention over the last decade both in Canada and around the world. Much of the work conducted in this area in recent years has been directed at developing a better understanding and a more effective response to the problems young people face. During the 1980s, issues facing young people received a great deal of attention in Canada, as a result of the extensive research conducted by the Badgley Commission (1984). This research indicated that all children are at risk. Much public concern revolved around data collected by the Commission through a National Population Survey that found that about one-third of the males and just over one-half of the females surveyed reported being victims of at least one unwanted sexual act.

The focus on young people received considerable support internationally as a result of the efforts of the United Nations. The United Nations has been particularly effective in drawing attention to the needs of children and youth. Their declaration of the Year of the Child in 1979 provided an important impetus for this effort. The United Nations has also been instrumental in asserting children's rights and establishing international standards for the fair and equitable treatment of young people. These goals are expressed in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). They were also emphasized at a World Summit for Children held at the United Nations in 1990, in which the rights and needs of children and youth were affirmed by numerous world leaders in attendance.

Public concern over the problems facing young people have resulted in a number of studies in Canada. In December of 1985, for example, The Missing Children Research Project was undertaken as part of the Federal Solicitor General's missing children initiative. This research project was designed to increase public understanding of the problem of missing children while providing police and social service agencies with

information that could assist them in devising effective operational strategies. The results of this research project indicated that the majority (86%) of missing children cases reported to the police were runaways, and that a significant proportion of these were repeat runners.

In 1986 the Ministry of the Solicitor General, in cooperation with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (R.C.M.P.), established a national Missing Children's Registry. The purpose of this registry was to provide information and assistance to police forces and other agencies across the country in dealing with the problem of missing children. The attention directed at missing children led to a focus on issues of family violence, non-custodial parent abduction, child physical and sexual abuse, runaways, and street youth. Various research initiatives were undertaken and the need for staff training and the development of appropriate protocols for front-line staff working in this area were identified.

In August of 1987, a Special Advisor to the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Rix Rogers, was appointed with a mandate to prepare a report on the long range direction of federal initiatives regarding child sexual abuse, their implementation, and coordination. The Special Advisor's report was released in June of 1990 and contained over 70 recommendations, all recognizing the important value of Canadian children and emphasizing action to protect them and their rights (Rogers, 1990).

A number of developments in Canada during the last decade have had a significant impact on experiences of children and youth. The passage of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, for example, enshrined the rights of children in the nation's constitution. Furthermore, changes to Canada's juvenile justice system fundamentally altered the way we deal with young people in conflict with the law. These national developments have been complimented by local and regional initiatives to deal more effectively with the problems faced by young people. These have included educational programs and efforts to enhance the delivery of services to young people. In the criminal justice field, this

is visible in crime prevention initiatives, community policing strategies, and the development and implementation of effective law enforcement practices.

A great deal of support for a broader approach to the needs of young people grew out of the European and North American Conference on Urban Safety and Crime Prevention held in Montreal in 1989. At this conference, the complex nature of the issues facing young people was emphasized. The need for a coordinated, multi-faceted response involving various agencies in the community was stressed. This included information sharing, tracking individuals in the system, and linking police services with those offered by other community agencies. Such a coordinated strategy appears increasingly important in an era of diminishing financial resources.

The Research

This research project was initiated with two specific objectives in mind:

1. To examine the implications of the concept of "youth at risk" for the development and implementation of police policy, programs, and practices; and
2. To investigate the utility of an interagency, collaborative response to "youth at risk" in which the police would play a primary role.

Data reported in this study were derived from three separate sources including: i) a review of existing criminal justice literature; ii) site visits to selected locations throughout the country; and, iii) key actor interviews with police officials, social service professionals, educators, and academics that deal with the issue of "youth at risk".

The research focused on the concept of "youth at risk", in terms of how "youth" and "at risk" were understood and applied in the context of service delivery, programming and policy development. Following the identification of the existing perceptions of "youth at risk", an assessment was made of the types of responses which existed to address the needs of young people who are at risk. Again, particular attention was paid to the

expectations that the various agencies in the community that deal with "youth at risk" have of the police.

The relationship between the individual agencies and the police was explored, including an assessment of existing or potential interagency, community based, collaborative approaches to "youth at risk". This information was analyzed with specific reference to the policy implications it contained for the police response to "youth at risk".

The Concept of "Youth at Risk"

The findings reported in this study are based on interviews conducted with police officials, social service professionals, educators and academics who are familiar with the problem of "youth at risk". The literature in this area suggests that a variety of definitions of "youth" and "at risk" exist. In order to gain a better understanding of the meaning and use made of the concept of "youth at risk" by those working with young people, specific questions were asked about both of these concepts.

Another concern was the wide range of problems subsumed by the concept of "youth at risk". When a concept such as "youth at risk" passes into popular usage, it is applied to more and more individuals and situations. As a result, it can become more complicated and its value or usefulness diminished. In the case of "youth at risk", the sheer magnitude of the problems faced by young people can be daunting. This can become an excuse for some for not acting, or for defining the problem in very narrow terms. The data collected in this study, however, suggest that the problem of "youth at risk" is understood to be complex and broad based. A wider rather than narrower approach was identified as essential by those interviewed for responding effectively to the problem of "youth at risk".

Examining the Concept of "Youth"

The concept of "youth" was found to include a range of meanings. In general when people think about "youth", they see individuals who are in a period of transition from childhood to adulthood. They are not yet adults and are not quite ready to take on adult responsibilities. While they seek increasing autonomy and independence, youth do not receive the same treatment or consideration given to adults. Thus, "youth" refers a group of individuals who are in a stage of development and who have limited responsibilities.

The attributes of youth as a stage in the life cycle reflect, in part, the undervaluing of young people in our society. Since they are not given much responsibility, they are usually not taken very seriously. Moreover, youthful rebelliousness has also been negatively defined and the criminal activities of young people have caused much public concern (Pearson, 1983).

The negative image and undervaluing of youth in our society is contradictory, however, since the idealized notion of "youth" has been an important element of western culture for much of the latter half of the twentieth century. On the one hand, "youth" has been equated with vitality and beauty. Being young or youthful has been greatly valued and much sought after. On the other hand, young people themselves have not been valued. Limitations are placed on the amount of power and responsibility accorded them. Throughout this century, the period that young people are kept dependent has increased steadily.

The popular conception of "youth" results in a number of difficulties when trying to develop a clearer understanding of who we are referring to when we use the concept of "youth at risk". Our research showed that there are many and diverse definitions of the concept. Most of those interviewed defined the concept of youth within the context of

the work they do and the nature of the clientele they work with. Often this was determined by particular legislation relating to young people such as the federal Young Offenders Act provincial child welfare acts. In other cases, the clientele that an agency worked with was determined by a set of guidelines established by funding sources.

In addition to official definitions, a number of variables are used to define the meaning of the concept "youth". The most common of these is chronological age. Chronological age has always been a primary way of establishing or clarifying which group in the population is referred to in the operational mandates for programs, or services, or pieces of legislation. However, our research indicates that a broad range of ages are associated with the working definition of "youth". Those interviewed identified "youth" as ranging from birth to 24 years. Some of those interviewed suggested that under certain circumstances, people 30 or even 35 years of age could be considered "youth". These findings show that the age range associated with the concept "youth" is quite broad.

A variety of subsets of age groupings were identified by the respondents from the various agencies dealing with "youth at risk". Moreover, the age limits that exist for some agencies, appear to be arbitrarily assigned. For example, although some respondents indicated that the lower age limit for youth "at risk" may be as young as four or five, the programs they design and administer are mandated for youth between the ages of 16 and 24 years. As a consequence, a large number of "youth at risk" would not be included in the operating definition of "youth" employed by this particular agency.

Many respondents cited the restrictions imposed upon them by both organizational mandates and federal or provincial legislation. For instance, police forces across Canada define the concept of youth within their organizational mandate as those who fall between the ages of 12 and 17 years, as defined by the Young Offenders Act. Those under the age of 12 years are regarded as children and are dealt with by child welfare authorities. Those 18 years and older are defined as adults and dealt with in ordinary court.

Employment programs apply a different definition than that used by the police. They define youth as those between the ages of 16 and 24 years, given the age restrictions which exist for constituting employability. Programs for street youth often define youth as being between the ages of 12 and 24, for there are not many young people below the age of 12 living on the street. Housing programs or hostels define youth as being between the ages of 16 and 24. Although they recognize the need for similar services for younger people, they limit their definition because of the implications of provincial child welfare legislation. Other agencies who provide more general services such as counselling and referring tend to define the concept of youth more broadly, ranging from birth to 18 years of age.

The concepts of children and youth tend to be used interchangeably among those interviewed, however, there does appear to be some differentiation between children and youth. For instance, those under the age of 12 years were most commonly regarded as children by those we interviewed. Those 12 to 15 years old were classified as both children and youth, especially if they are considered children in developmental terms. Transitional age youth were regarded as young people between the ages of 18 and 24 years, while the term older adolescent was often used as catch all phrase for young people who are past being children, but who cannot be considered quite fully adults.

Establishing the age limits for the concept of "youth at risk" has important implications for who is included in the definition and what programs or services are provided. Both the literature reviewed and virtually all those interviewed indicated that a broader rather than a narrower definition of "youth at risk" was required. A broad definition was consistent with the early identification of problems and the provision of appropriate services. While the needs of "at risk" youth aged 12 to 15 may differ from those aged 16 or older, they both represent important problems and must be dealt with accordingly.

A number of respondents suggested that defining "youth" primarily on the basis of age alone is likely to be too restrictive. We found that various agencies utilized a number

of additional characteristics to assist them in defining "youth" and to identify the specific section of the "youth" population they were going to serve. These additional characteristics included such things as perceived level of functioning, the level of maturity or independence displayed, the parameters imposed by existing legislation, and the age limits defined and applied by related community agencies.

For many respondents, "youth" has a somewhat negative connotation when juxtaposed with "adult". It implies that the person is immature or behaving in a way that is inappropriate. For example a 24 year old who has not successfully completed high school, or working at a full time job, may be considered a youth. In this case, the concept has a pejorative connotation implying that the young person is immature, lazy, or lacking ambition. By contrast, a 24 year old who has successfully completed high school or university and is employed, may be considered a young adult. In this example, chronological age is neither the only nor the most important variable used in determining youth.

An even more negative stereotype than the one described above is often associated with youth. This stereotype identifies young people as trouble makers and potentially dangerous. The existence of such a negative stereotype limits the ability of those working with young people to arouse public sympathy and gain support for programs that deal with young people at risk. It is much easier to secure support for programs aimed at children who are victims of child abuse or neglect. The latter are seen as vulnerable while the former are threatening. While both groups of young people need assistance, the negative stereotype attached to older youth influences the way we define and respond to their needs.

Examining the Concept of "At Risk"

The understanding and use of the concept of "at risk" by those we interviewed was somewhat more uniform than that discovered in relation to the concept of "youth". To a certain degree, being young means being at risk. Young people are regularly exposed to factors which threatened a person's physical, psychological, or emotional well being. Many of the respondents identified being a victim of child physical or sexual abuse or neglect as examples of the risks young people face. The risks associated with street life such as prostitution, violence, drug abuse, sexually transmitted disease, and AIDS were also identified. Other risks included health and mental health risks and suicidal behaviour.

A key distinction was often made between the concept of "at risk" as it applies to those 15 to 24 years old as opposed to infants and children (generally understood as 0 to 12 years of age). Both age groups were regarded as being "at risk" of such things as physical, sexual, or emotional abuse and a variety of health and psychological problems. However, the older youth were seen to be at greater risk of becoming involved in criminal activities, violence, dropping out of school, drug abuse, prostitution, AIDS, and a multitude of other behaviours often associated with street life.

The distinction drawn between those young people "at risk" of being victimized and those "at risk" to becoming involved in dangerous or illegal behaviour was an important one. The perception of being "at risk" of victimization implies a certain degree of vulnerability and blamelessness. By contrast, the perception of being "at risk" to becoming involved in dangerous or illegal behaviour implies a degree of responsibility on the part of the individuals involved. While at risk to refers primarily to engaging in the types of activities most closely associated with street life, the staff of many of the agencies also used the concept to refer to those young people who engaged in self destructive activity, including suicidal behaviour.

The distinction between at risk "of" and at risk "to" is important for several reasons. Conceptually, it highlights the expectation that people are rational and should be held responsible for their actions. The assigning of blame or the willingness to assist depend, in part, on the way we assess responsibility. Helpless or vulnerable victims arouse sympathy and support while those who choose to engage in dangerous behaviour are deemed responsible for the consequences they suffer. While such an accounting may be appropriate in theory, it is less clear when applied to young people with problems.

The policy implications of drawing a distinction between at risk "of" and at risk "to" are equally important. If this distinction rests solely on the basis of the organizational mandates of the agencies responding to the problem of "youth at risk", the likelihood is that a division will exist between those agencies that provide social services and those that engage in law enforcement. The recognition in the literature and among those we interviewed that "youth at risk" are often simultaneously victims and perpetrators makes the distinction between at risk "of" and at risk "to" arbitrary and artificial. For example, victims of child abuse are at risk of becoming abusers themselves later in life. Moreover, if a young person runs away from home to escape abuse (being victimized) should this person be defined as a victim or a potential perpetrator if they are living on the street? Many front-line workers indicated that social service and law enforcement agencies are dealing essentially with a common client group of at risk youth. Policies and programs should be based on this more holistic definition of "youth at risk".

In trying to assess the utility of the concept of "youth at risk" and place it into a meaningful context, it is necessary to consider the factors and processes that result in risk. To begin with, young people at risk "of" victimization were defined in a fundamentally different way than those at risk "to" become involved in dangerous or illegal activity. The identification of potential victims of abuse or neglect is seen as a question of early identification and appropriate intervention. These young people are seen as being vulnerable and in need of care and protection.

Youth at risk "to" becoming involved in dangerous or illegal behaviour are often confronted with a less supportive environment. While many of these young people may have experienced abuse or neglect at some point in their lives, they are now seen as being partially - if not entirely - responsible for their own fate. Their experience of victimization is overshadowed by the potential threat they represent both to themselves and to others. This is the case, for example, for those young people living on the street to escape an abusive home situation.

Many of those we interviewed noted that there is a certain degree of risk that we all have to deal with. These respondents were less concerned with the characteristics of any specific situation than they were with the way young people deal with potentially dangerous or risky situations. These respondents suggested that it was the repertoire of the person rather than the level of risk actually encountered that is important. Young people with adequate problem-solving skills may fair far better in difficult situations than those with less developed problem solving skills. Therefore, identifying who is most "at risk" should include an assessment of a person's ability or repertoire for dealing with potentially threatening situations.

The type and extensiveness of the repertoire that young people possess appears to be one of the key indicators of how "youth at risk" will respond to the threats they encounter. The development of repertoires is dependent upon the nature and extent of the socialization that the young people receive. With respect to the kinds of skills and resources that are necessary to constitute a good repertoire, a number of factors were identified. The most fundamental characteristic appears to be "self-esteem". Young people who have little or no self-esteem do not appear capable of making appropriate decisions. For instance, some young people may not be able to say "no" to certain kinds of people or avoid certain dangerous situations. Some respondents suggested that the locus of control is external as opposed to internal for these young people. As the locus of control moves farther and farther away, they increasingly feel unable to control their own situations and find themselves engaging in activities that threaten their physical,

mental, and emotional well-being. This results in a pattern of behaviour which continually places these young people "at risk".

An overwhelming consensus was discovered about which young people are most "at risk" in our society. Children are often regarded as the most vulnerable. They are the ones with the least amount of power and who have virtually no control over the world around them. Children's reliance on others and the extent to which they are or become "at risk" depends to a large extent on the repertoire and resources of those they depend upon. For this reason, children who are abused, either physically, sexually, emotionally or psychologically by people that they trust and rely upon, are also likely to be "at risk" of further victimization and of becoming perpetrators themselves.

A second group of children who are often considered extremely vulnerable are new Canadians and Native Canadians. In addition to the vulnerability experienced by all children, these children face the added burden of adjusting to a world characterized by racism, poverty, and violence. Those entrusted with their care often lack the skills or resources to assist them in successfully adapting to the society around them.

The third group of young people identified as being most "at risk" were those living on the street. Participation in street life exposes these young people to a myriad of potentially dangerous activities and risks including prostitution, drug abuse, violence, theft, trafficking, and AIDS. Frustration was voiced by a number of respondents over the inability of intervening either quickly enough or in such a way as to forestall the continued exposure to risk that these young people face on a daily basis. Some were also concerned that these young people are usually identified as actual or potential criminals as opposed to the vulnerable children that they are.

Implications for Using the Concept of "Youth at Risk"

Our research has shown that the concept of "youth at risk" encompasses a variety of diverse and complex phenomena. This was especially evident during our exploration of the way the concepts of "youth" and "at risk" were being defined and used by those who deal directly with young people. As noted above, factors such as organizational mandates, directives from funding sources, and existing federal and provincial legislation have an important influence on the way the various agencies included in our research define their respective client populations. However, most of those interviewed offered a broader rather than a narrower definition of the problem of "youth at risk". Few identified the problem as the result of the shortcomings or inadequacies of particular individuals. Regardless of the specific mandate of their organizations, most of those interviewed identified the sources and solutions to the problem of "youth at risk" as being community based.

The information garnered from our exploration of the meaning and use of the concepts of "youth" and "at risk" was used as a context for asking respondents to identify what they understood as the source of the problem of "youth at risk". Having established what group of young people they were talking about, and what specific meaning each attached to the concept "at risk", aided in focusing the answers we received. It was surprising, therefore, to discover such an overwhelming consensus on this question, especially given the variability we found in the existing definitions of "youth" and "at risk".

The problem of "youth at risk" was overwhelmingly defined as a community problem. The risks young people face were seen as a result of the failure of those institutions in society charged with their care. The family, the school, the police, and other institutions were seen as playing a pivotal role in contributing to or preventing the problems associated with "youth at risk". Part of this consensus was based on the expectation that a vital interrelationship should exist between the various groups in the community

responsible for the well-being of children and youth. This was expressed in the feeling that community has a shared responsibility for ensuring that young people have a safe and healthy environment in which to grow and develop. Since children and youth are vulnerable and relatively powerless, it is the responsibility of the adults around them to ensure their well-being. If problems develop in the family, or the school, adult members of the other institutions charged with the care of young people should intervene.

This orientation resulted in an interesting approach to the various institutions in the community. For example, when the family was mentioned as a primary location for the development of problems, it was not done so in negative terms in which blame was attached to specific dysfunctional families. Rather, the family was identified as only one part of the community whose general responsibility it is to meet the needs of young people. No attempt was made to identify particular individuals or specific families as the major contributors to the problem of "youth at risk". Instead, the problem of "youth at risk" was discussed as a larger concern facing the entire community and requiring collective action for its resolution. These included poverty, unemployment, racism, sexism, and a lack of resources such as day care centres or counselling services in the community.

The family was often mentioned in conjunction with the educational system, the social services system and the police as key institutions in the community providing for the needs of young people. If shortcomings were observed in any of these institutions, it was the responsibility of the others to mobilize resources and to respond in such a way as to assist the others in fulfilling their responsibilities more adequately. For example, if problems were identified in school, teachers should try to respond to these problems by using their own resources but also by calling in parents, social workers, or any other groups or individuals from the community that can help. If children are being neglected or mistreated at home, and teachers become aware of this, protocols exist for intervening to protect the young people. This does not extend, at the moment, to cases where the problem is not physical or emotional abuse per se, but poor or inadequate parenting. If

the lack of parenting skills is placing young people at risk, steps should be taken to provide parents with the help and training they require.

The extent to which the problem of "youth at risk" was defined as a community problem was remarkable given the emphasis that has been placed in the past on families and individuals as the principle source of problems such as "youth at risk". The recognition that structural problems such as poverty, unemployment, racism, and sexism have an impact on the entire community has important implications for the way we define and respond to "youth at risk". Although specific manifestations of these broader social problems may be seen in the behaviour of individuals or families, they require a much more comprehensive response. Consequently, the emphasis of intervention should not be entirely on individuals or families, but should address the wider problems facing a community. Moreover, family problems are not exclusively a lower class phenomenon since social problems such as poverty and racism affect all classes. Dysfunctional families and the lack of parenting skills are not restricted to the lower class since middle and upper class families experience the same problems. The strains brought about by two career families was mentioned in this regard.

A second issue that we discovered in response to our queries about the source of the problem of "youth at risk" dealt with the question of at risk "of" and at risk "to". It was repeatedly pointed out to us that the same group of young people are doubly at risk. They are at risk both as victims and as a result of their involvement in dangerous or illegal behaviour. For example, young people who run away from an abusive situation at home often end up living on the streets. The victimization they experienced at home is then compounded by the risks they encounter participating in street life. The examples given were street kids turning to prostitution, theft or selling drugs in order to meet their basic needs. Street life also exposes these young people to the threat of drug abuse, AIDS, and violence.

The idea that the young people at risk of being victimized are also the young people most likely to become involved with criminal behaviour raises a number of serious questions. The recognition that being "at risk" is a condition that refers to all aspects of a person's situation and it should not be associated with any particular type of behaviour or episode. The tendency for us is to respond to young people according to the labels we attach both to the individual and as a result of our professional affiliations.

The simultaneous experience of being at risk "of" and at risk "to" results in the potential for these young people having both protective services and law enforcement activities directed towards them. This contradictory response reflects the differences in the way that the problem is defined and responded to by agencies in the community. It fails to recognize that a young person at risk may be both a victim and a potential perpetrator. The fragmentation that exists in this regard, hinders the development of a coordinated, community-based response which accepts the broad based definition of the problem. The problem tends to be identified either as one in which an individual has been victimized and thus needs assistance, or that an individual is a potential criminal and should be dealt with accordingly. A broader definition of the problem, one which does not focus on the specific characteristics of an individual, is thus obscured.

These findings contain a number of important implications for policy and programming, especially as this relates to the role of the police. Three of the most salient implications are:

- (i) The need to understand the problem of "youth at risk" from a broad, community-based perspective versus an individualistic, behaviour specific one;
- (ii) The need for early identification, and the development and implementation of appropriate community-based responses; and
- (iii) The need to recognize a common client group including those "at risk" of and "at risk" to becoming involved in a criminal or dangerous activities.

We will discuss each of these in turn.

The first implication is one which places a premium on the effective mobilization of community resources. A broad view of the problem of "youth at risk" implicates the community as a whole as both the source and the solution of the problem. This suggests the need to develop a network of community agencies that can work in concert to provide a healthy climate in which young people can grow and develop. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, racism and sexism, that affect the community as a whole, are more likely to be addressed from this broad based approach rather than from one which emphasizes individual culpability. This type of analysis also requires that the community respond collectively to common problems it faces. Individual or family problems are defined in this conceptualization as symptoms of larger, structural problems that can only be dealt with at a structural level.

The need for early identification and the development of appropriate community-based responses to "youth at risk" follows directly from a broad, community-based definition of the problem. In this case, the emphasis is on the shared responsibility that the community has for providing a safe, healthy, supportive environment for young people. Through co-operation and coordinated action, problems can be identified and responded to while in their early stages, making the likelihood of success more probable. Effective preventative measures and the allocation of resources to those areas in the community most in need are two further advantages of such an approach. This also holds the potential for significant savings of scarce resources if problems can be resolved in their initial stages.

The final implication outlined above is related to the first two, to the extent that it reasserts both the broad based nature of the problem and the need for a coordinated, community-based approach. If we are essentially dealing with the same young people as both victims and perpetrators, we should tailor our responses to this reality. It is clear that these young people need protection from the "risky" situations they are exposed to. It is also clear, however, that these young people are likely to be the subject of law enforcement activities. This recognition raises a number of important issues for those

charged with providing these services. For example, should the same agency and group of professionals be involved in providing both protective and law enforcement services or should these be separated? Secondly, should one of these needs override the other?

It was clear from our research that the need for both protection and law enforcement services in the community were very real. What was less clear, however, was the need to maintain the existing fragmentation in the provision of these two different types of services. Many people recognize the fact that the illegal activities of this group of young people are potentially very serious both for them and for the community as a whole. However, these activities were defined as secondary or derivative of the primary demands of living on the street. Many young people are on the street in response to earlier episodes of victimization and their involvement in criminal behaviour is related to their lifestyle and their efforts to satisfy basic needs. Petty theft, prostitution and drug dealing were given as examples of this type of behaviour. The question is this: would these secondary, illegal activities stop or not start in the first place if the initial incidents of victimizations were responded to quickly and appropriately by the community? The possibility exists, at least in theory, that many of the problems young people face could be dealt with earlier and more effectively, thereby reducing the numbers that are "at risk" because they are living on the streets.

The type of orientation described above suggests that while law enforcement activities are necessary, much more effort and greater community resources should be allocated toward responding effectively to primary problems including the victimization of children and youth. Furthermore, while not wishing to minimize the harm caused by the illegal acts of young people "at risk", some consideration should be given to their status as victims. This would result in a different response by the community and especially by the representatives of the criminal justice system. Restorative practices and preventative programs would become increasingly emphasized in this approach while punitive and reactive responses would be minimized.

Summary

The implications of the research discussed above reflect the overwhelming consensus that a broad definition of the problem of "youth at risk" is necessary. Repeatedly, the problem of "youth at risk" was identified as community-based, requiring a coordinated community-based response. The very real need that many young people have for protection from harm both in their homes or on the streets was emphasized over and over again. The difficulty for the police in providing protection was noted. In some cases, this was due to the fear that young people may have of reporting abuse especially when it involves a parent, guardian, or other authority figure. For other young people, especially those living on the street, suspicion of the police prevents them from seeking assistance.

There was a recognition that besides being in need of protection, young people are involved in illegal activities that pose a threat to the community and to themselves. The questions raised in this context dealt with how the police and other agencies could provide these protective services while ensuring that the law was being enforced. This is clearly an issue for the police but it was also recognized by those agencies who realize that they are dealing with a client group that is likely to be involved in dangerous or illegal activities.

RESPONDING TO "YOUTH AT RISK"

The Response of the Police

In interviews with police, social services and education professionals, a series of questions were asked regarding the role of the police in responding to the problem of "youth at risk". Once again, the dual needs of protection and law enforcement were cited as the primary expectations people had of the police. There was widespread acknowledgement of the difficulties that these conflicting demands could have on the police and a number of suggestions for dealing with these difficulties were offered.

One suggestion was that social service professionals be used by the police in situations where protective services as opposed to law enforcement is required. Others, however, argued that police personnel could adequately perform both roles. This would require police to take a much more proactive approach to providing protection and it would require the police to become more familiar with the social service agencies that deal with young people. This was seen as one way of giving police some insight into what these agencies do. Another suggestion was that police become more familiar with the young people themselves in order to understand them and their needs more fully. Some frustration was expressed over the policy of many police departments to transfer people from one assignment to another. This was thought to be undesirable in the case of officers working with youth since it takes a long time for police officers to get to know and gain the trust of young people in a given area. This trust and understanding was deemed crucial for police officers working with "youth at risk".

The police should play an important role in the community in assisting in the effective socialization of young people. It was suggested that this should consist of more than asking police officers to be good role models or to give young people in school lectures on public safety or the dangers of drugs. Police should be adults in the community that

young people can turn to for advice and information as well as help with specific problems.

The police role in preventing young people from becoming involved in risky behaviour was also discussed. Various examples were given of programs in which police became involved with young people in athletic or social programs. It was suggested that more of this type of community service could be built into the policing role. Police should know the young people in their communities and they should be seen as someone who can be trusted and who cares about young people. Early signs of trouble would be easier to detect if police personnel were more closely involved with the young people in their communities and responses could be designed for the specific individuals involved.

Finally, the police response could benefit from a broader perspective of the problem of "youth at risk". The extent to which "youth at risk" are involved in illegal and dangerous behaviour means that the police usually come into contact with them as perpetrators of criminal acts. Conversely, the police can also come into contact with these young people as victims of abuse. Neither of these contacts presents the police with the holistic view of these young people that many think necessary. It was suggested that an appropriate police response should take into account the fact that "youth at risk" are often both victims and perpetrators. This, in turn, should result in a different type of response from the police and the other members of the criminal justice system. A greater emphasis on prevention was discussed in this context as was the need to link the police response to that of other agencies in the community providing services to these young people.

The Response of the Social Services System

Representatives from a variety of social service agencies were interviewed in the course of this study. As was noted above, a high level of consensus was found regarding the

definition of the problem of "youth at risk". This held true with respect to the response identified for the social service system. The problem of "youth at risk" must be addressed with a coordinated, community-based response. The shortage of available resources with which to mount such a response must also be recognized, however, some resources do exist in the community that can be directed at this problem.

Several specific issues were identified regarding the response of the social service system to "youth at risk". One of the most important of these issues was the fragmentation that exists in the way services are currently being delivered. The fragmentation of services was discussed briefly above in relation to the provision of protective services versus the need to carry out law enforcement activities. Some concern was also expressed over the gaps in existing social services. For instance, the difficulties encountered by young people once they pass from the jurisdiction of the child welfare system and enter the adult welfare system were identified. Moreover, the social service landscape is dotted with agencies that arise to meet identified service gaps that exist in various communities. Some concern was expressed, however, that addressing service delivery gaps in this way is inappropriate. Groups providing shelter to street youth were given as one example while those offering information and counselling about AIDS was another. Shelter for street youth and AIDS counselling are important services whose provision should not be handled in an unsystematic or ad hoc way. Expecting agencies from the community to rise up to meet service needs presupposes the existence of groups or individuals both capable of identifying what these needs are and resources and skills to respond effectively.

One of the central problems related to service delivery was that agencies and specific programs were seen as susceptible to a changing environment. Agencies and programs could be placed in competition with each other for both resources and clients. Competition was minimized in those centres that had an informal network that monitored developments in the social service delivery system. However, competition proved very divisive in places that lacked such a network since agencies and programs were usually

competing for the same limited pool of resources. We were told that funding agencies, including governments, often responded to the competition by meeting claims for resources in an ad hoc and arbitrary fashion. This funding strategy was particularly frustrating for the smaller social service agencies since it meant constant financial insecurity and the need to spend valuable resources in ongoing efforts to secure future funding. The larger and more established agencies also objected to a piece-meal approach to funding since it results in constant disruptions of services and the exploitation of those working in the social service field.

Another issue concerning the response of the social service system to the problem of "youth at risk" focused on the frustration many expressed with only being able to respond to symptoms of the problem. Since young people are exposed to serious risks on an ongoing basis, many agencies feel obligated to devote a large proportion of their resources to meeting the short-term or immediate needs of their clients. Responding to short-term demands means that there are few additional resources available for addressing the underlying sources of the problem. For example, the resources required to do preventative work are limited. Similarly, the funds to establish ongoing interagency contacts to facilitate client tracking are not available in many communities. In some agencies, extensive case files are kept and used in case management but are not analyzed since the resources required to do this work are not available. Basic service inventories were available in one form or another in most centres, but few were kept up-to-date on an ongoing basis. Most were designed to be used as basic reference guides and outside of personal experience, most people usually had little direct contact or knowledge about the other agencies in the community. Knowledge about the system and information about clients could be very useful for evaluating existing programs and designing new ones aimed at resolving the underlying sources of the problem of "youth at risk".

The criticisms about the lack of coordination and competition in service delivery were tempered somewhat by the general agreement that exists among many social service professionals about what the social service system should be doing. There is a shared

understanding among these workers that problems such as poverty and unemployment are long term, societal problems and that the social services are limited in what they can do about them. Nevertheless, the dominant sentiment we encountered was that the professionals working in the social services field know what is needed and how to provide the service if sufficient resources were available to do the job.

The recognition that additional resources are unlikely in the foreseeable future led to calls for the more efficient and creative use of existing resources. This was often discussed with respect to the need for a more coordinated, community-based response involving a variety of community agencies including the educational system, the social service system, and the police. This strategy was identified as the most plausible response in the short term while more effective preventative programs were cited as a way of achieving longer term objectives.

The Response of the Educational System

The educational system was identified as a primary agency in the community for dealing with the problem of "youth at risk". In particular, the role that teachers can play in the early identification of problems was noted. Moreover, teachers and other professionals working within schools were seen as being ideally situated for providing services to both young people and their families. These workers represent an important link between young people and other institutions and organizations in the community.

The broad range of resources available in the educational system was seen as making it a particularly attractive site for responding to young people with problems. The combination of educational, social, and athletic opportunities that schools provide was mentioned as a way of reaching a difficult to serve population. School personnel are the adults in the community that young people have most contact with after parents or guardians. As such, they are in an excellent position to establish relationships with

young people, to get to know them as individuals, to be able to assess the nature of the difficulties each is facing, and to help to design and administer intervention strategies that are appropriate for individual youth.

In addition to the positive characteristics described above, a number of concerns were raised about the ability of the educational system to respond to the problem of "youth at risk". To begin with, many young people first express symptoms of deeper problems in the school environment. In some cases, this takes the form of undesirable behaviour placing the student in conflict with school authorities. For some students, the school experience takes on very negative connotations and becomes one of continual failure. In this situation, the school ceases to be a place of safety and support and school officials lose their ability to intervene effectively with these young people.

A second issue related to the role of the school system is the potential impact that peers have on a person's behaviour. Association with peers with anti-social tendencies may exacerbate existing difficulties. Schools are a site where young people establish primary social relations. These relationships often represent very strong attachments which are difficult to change. Those working with young people with problems often find it extremely difficult to have to compete with counter demands being made by members of a person's peer group.

The enormous influence that a peer group can have on young people may be even greater for those young people who lack other primary relations. In this case, peers take the place of family and serve as a source of emotional and social support. Any attempt to challenge the views of the peer group by adults can be defined in hostile ways. This results in a further lack of trust in adults and makes it harder and harder to address the problems faced by "youth at risk".

A third point was the enormity of the role currently played by the educational system. This was seen as particularly difficult in the current period of diminishing resources for

education. Many respondents noted that the school system has been asked to take on more and more responsibility during the last two decades. No longer are schools charged solely with the task of providing pupils with a basic education. Today's educational system is also involved in delivering basic health care, mental health care, the socialization of youth, career counselling, family related services, and athletic opportunities. It is in this sense that schools have been asked to play an increasingly important role in the community. This has led to some criticism about the ability of the school system to meet its mandate to teach fundamentals. A "back to basics" movement stressing fundamental skills training has emerged in response to this type of criticism. At the other end of the spectrum, schools are continually being asked to add to their already enormous curriculum. For example, they are being asked to deal with students with special needs through increased programming. From special needs classes, to alternative schools, to drug and alcohol programs, and those aimed at eliminating drunk driving by teenagers, the schools have attempted to respond to the demands being placed on them in a variety of ways. As a consequence, those responsible for educational programming are responding to new requests in a guarded manner.

Persuading school authorities to address the problem of "youth at risk" by doing any more than they are already doing may be quite difficult. This is especially the case if these requests are not accompanied by the promise of additional resources with which to carry them out. Even with an offer of additional resources, school authorities may be reluctant to consider additional programs. Teaching and support staff are already taxed and implementing programs aimed at "youth at risk" would only add to a heavy burden.

A combination of positive and negative characteristics associated with the potential response of the educational system to the problem of "youth at risk" were identified. The overall assessment, however, was that the educational system is a vital institution in the community. It should be a major site for responding to the problems associated with "youth at risk". The response should not be the sole responsibility of the educational system but should be a coordinated one involving a number of agencies in

the community. If community-based programs aimed at "youth at risk" are located within schools, care should be taken that they are not defined as the sole or primary responsibility of the educational system.

INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION ON THE PROBLEM OF "YOUTH AT RISK"

One of the major components of this research was an examination of the possibility for interagency collaboration in responding to the problem of "youth at risk". Specific emphasis was placed on the potential for police involvement in such an interagency approach. Questions were asked about existing networks as well as people's broader experience with this approach. In addition, information was sought about the various forms that interagency collaboration could take. Information was also gathered about the process involved in establishing and maintaining an interagency network.

As was noted above, a considerable degree of consensus was found with respect to the need to define the problem of "youth at risk" in broad terms and as a community problem. Similarly, there was a great deal of agreement on the need for a coordinated, community-based response involving various agencies in the community. It was not clear, however, what these concepts meant in practical terms. For example, does a community-based response depend upon interagency collaboration? Can individual agencies work independently at resolving the same problem as long as they inform other agencies in the community about what they are doing? Are there any specific implications for having the police participate in an interagency network? These and related questions were addressed in this section of the research.

The Structure and Process of Interagency Collaboration

One of the central questions dealt with people's experience with collaborative, interagency networks. Specific information was sought regarding the consequences of establishing networks with different types of structures. For example, the consequences of having a formal versus an informal structure were explored. Similarly, questions were asked about people's experience with groups that were broadly constituted as opposed to

those being organized around specific issues.

Formal versus Informal Networks

Formal Networks

The questions concerning form uncovered both benefits and drawbacks associated with formal and informal network structures. However, some general views of network structure were discovered. For example, formal structures were seen as useful for focusing attention on an issue and for mobilizing political and financial resources. Networks with formal structures were seen as less flexible, however, and less able to respond quickly to changing environments. The need to include a broad range of community agencies for primarily political reasons was seen as a major drawback of formal networks. This often meant that groups with conflicting views or with little interest in the particular issue at hand would be involved. Decision making under these circumstances could be a slow and difficult process.

This was also true of decisions dealing with the allocation of resources. In a formal network, participants with unequal resources and varying degrees of political pressure on them, face making decisions in public about resources or support for particular programs. Some agencies may be unwilling to be put in this type of situation and choose to employ various tactics to forestall decisions. This may be especially true for larger agencies in which decisions regarding resources or policy have to be passed through a management hierarchy before being approved. This process takes time and effort and depends on the case made by the agencies representative to the network for support.

Informal Networks

Informal networks were also identified as having strengths and weaknesses. On the positive side, informal networks usually arise precisely because of the common concern of the participants. These types of networks make few formal demands of the agencies involved and are seen, therefore, as much less politically volatile. This makes generating ideas, and devising and implementing programs much easier. Moreover, informal networks are much more flexible and resources can be brought to bear quickly as situations change.

Many of the strengths of the informal network approach depend upon the willingness of individuals within participating agencies to lend their time and energy to collective goals. This personal dimension, in a very real sense, reflects both the dynamism of informal networks as well as one of their greatest weaknesses. The personal contacts created, the sharing of information, and the willingness of people to work together towards identifiable goals are all benefits that depend on the individuals involved. On the other hand, we were informed that the lack of a formal structure can result in problems of discontinuity especially in the social services field where personnel turnover can be quite high in some agencies. People can also be transferred, become over-burdened, lose interest, or drop out of the network. Another problem is that it may be more difficult for informal networks to mobilize resources or effectively garner public support for the issues they wish to deal with.

Broad Based versus Issue Specific

A second issue related to the form that collaborative networks take is whether they should be issue specific or have a broad orientation. Once again, both benefits and limitations of each approach were identified. For example, issue specific networks were seen as much more effective for achieving desired ends than were those with a broad

orientation. This was due to the fact that decision making is more focused in issue specific networks, especially since these presume that those participating know in advance what they will be dealing with and are prepared to work with the other agencies in the network.

Issue specific networks were seen as having a greater likelihood of succeeding than broad issue networks. This was based on the perception that interagency collaboration is difficult at the best of times and that having an interest in a common issue helps to overcome divisive forces in a group. Specific issue networks, however, were seen as being subject to variable support as particular projects gained or lost their priority in individual agencies. By contrast, broad based networks have the ability to maintain member interest by being involved in a range of issues that can offer some reason for each to continue participating.

Creating and Maintaining Networks

Questions related to the process of establishing and maintaining an interagency network comprise the second dimension of this part of the study. Aspects of these questions have already been addressed in our discussion of the efficacy of the forms that various interagency networks can take. Clearly, the process of establishing a formal network is very different from that required for an informal network. However, there was some agreement on several basic points. To begin with, a number of respondents felt that small, informal networks that are issue specific have the greatest likelihood of achieving practical goals. These types of networks were described as valuable to the participants and, therefore, contained a built-in incentive. It was also suggested that the energy, commitment, and success of these smaller networks could be the basis for establishing larger, more formal, and more broad based networks. They could form a solid core that could minimize some of the difficulties of formal networks described above.

One of the key elements identified in this part of the research was the need for the participants to develop mutual trust and respect. This process was seen as taking considerable time, making the establishment of informal networks consisting of people who know each other more successful. The political nature of large formal networks was seen as requiring careful and ongoing nurturing if they are to succeed. Some front-line workers were dubious about the energy and effort required to establish and maintain large, formal networks. Some who had experience with interagency collaboration echoed this view. They strongly favoured smaller, informal networks since these were seen as working more effectively.

Challenges in Working Together

The importance of collective versus individual strategies was emphasized repeatedly in defining responses to "youth at risk". It was recognized that many of these young people possess a number of problems that cross a host of agency lines. Working together to address the related issues of "youth at risk" is not only favourable but necessary. While cooperation between agencies may focus on overcoming fragmentation, duplication of services, pooling of resources, and overlap of responsibility, it is more commonly employed as a means of instilling efficient, effective interaction and communication among related organizations.

The experiences witnessed suggest that those involved in such collaborative initiatives should be aware that the path ahead is not always smooth. There are a number of basic challenges which have to be addressed and dealt with in order to make these interagency, collaborative strategies successful:

- Being clear and realistic about what can be accomplished. Many networks get caught up in the need to make dramatic changes quickly. This kind of thinking only produces a great deal of frustration among the participating members. The

ideal strategy is to establish small, practical and achievable goals, which will ultimately produce the same intended results or perceptions of dramatic change, but with much less frustration and more cohesiveness.

- Reaching a common understanding and commitment to address an issue. This is an important first step. Although each agency may adhere to a common goal, agencies often perceive problems and their solution in different ways. As well, the way organizations can respond to a problem is often limited by their mandates, resources or other constraints.
- Being clear and up front about the responsibilities of each organization. These duties can often cause conflict if they are not discussed and sorted out early in the process. A common problem witnessed is the fact that social service agencies are often expected to respect the confidentiality of their clients, while the police are sworn to investigate crime they are aware of. How do collaborators reconcile these requirements while at the same time working towards the solution to the problem? Such concerns need to be addressed by participating agencies at the outset of joint ventures.
- Making sure that the response to the problem agreed upon does not have any negative effects on other groups living in the community. That is, making sure that the answer "fits" the community in question and does not leave any relevant members of the community out of the picture.

CONCLUSIONS

This research was designed to assess the usefulness of the concept of "youth at risk" for policing policy, strategies, and programs. Attention was also directed at the potential for interagency collaboration on the problem of "youth at risk" and the role that the police might play in such an initiative. A high degree of consensus was discovered on these issues. In particular, there was wide agreement on the need to define the problem of "youth at risk" in broad terms and as being community-based.

It was clear that the meaning attached to the concept of "youth at risk" can be politically charged. This is understandable since the definition of "youth at risk" encompasses issues such as child abuse, juvenile prostitution, the threat of AIDS, and the recent increase in youth gang activity. This range of issues reflects the variability encountered in the way that different agencies define and use the concepts of "youth" and "at risk". The most significant difference we discovered was whether young people were identified as being "at risk" of being victims of harm or whether they were seen as being "at risk" to becoming further involved with criminal behaviour.

The differences noted over the meaning and use of the concept of "youth at risk" were large. However, the benefits of having a concept such as "youth at risk", when proper parameters are established, far outweigh the problems that were encountered. For example, the concept of "youth" could be made more specific by substituting the word "children" when a younger age group, i.e. 12 years of age and under, is specified. More importantly, young people can be at risk from birth through their early twenties and beyond. Chronological age was neither the only nor even the most decisive variable used in making this distinction. To many respondents, recognizing the vulnerability of young people was seen as more important than worrying about a precise definition of youth, especially since these definitions are often based on arbitrary ages dictated by funding agencies, organizational mandates or legislation.

A similar argument can be made in the case of the concept of "at risk". In this instance, however, there was much more agreement on what the various agencies meant by the concept. The major difference here, again revolved around the principles of "at risk" of and "at risk" to. The specific definition attached to the concept of "at risk" was reflected in the different priorities each of the agencies had established. For schools, truancy was defined as an important issue. This held much less salience for police, however, since they were dealing with what they considered, much more serious problems such as child abuse and youth gangs. Although dealing with essentially the same clientele, agencies often perceived the seriousness of certain problems and the solutions to these problems in different ways. This example demonstrates how a problem that is a top priority for one agency is seen as a low priority by another agency.

The differences reported in the meaning and use of the concept of "at risk" resulted in calls for interagency collaboration and a broad definition of the problem. These themes permeated the investigation and seemed to be widely supported by representatives from most agencies in the community. The role of primary up-take agencies such as the educational system, some agencies in the social services system such as the Children's Aid Society, and the police were singled out for playing a particularly important role if an effective response to the problem of "youth at risk" is to be found.

The police were seen as a vital community institution. In many places, they are the only twenty-four hour a day source of service available to people. As a primary up-take agency, the police have a vital role to play in any community-based, interagency responses that develop. And, since the police are involved in both protection and law enforcement, the services they provide allow them to have a link with many of the other agencies providing services to young people in the community.

The adoption of a more proactive strategy has a number of implications for policing policy and practice. It suggests that police officers and their organizations implement practices which emphasize the importance of protection and crime prevention. This

strategy includes closer cooperation and the coordination of services by the various agencies in the community that deal with "youth at risk" such as the police, educational system, social service system and health care system. A proactive approach is called for emphasizing strategies aimed at reducing or preventing harmful or criminal behaviour. These strategies include the provisions of services to young people who, without these services, might become involved in risky behaviour, such as prostitution, drugs, and gang activity. Police can play an important role in identifying and responding to the problem of "youth at risk" and in referring young people with problems to other social service agencies in the community.

This broader and more proactive form of policing has implications for the definitions that police officers have of themselves and the way in which the entire organization is defined and perceived. To date, the emphasis of much police work has been on the protective rather than service component of the police mandate. This emphasis on law enforcement as the focal point of police work has been determined and guided by the institutional structure of most police departments. Any changes or alterations in the way in which policing is defined and implemented, must come from the top down. It is of little use to have police officers prepared and willing to balance the focus of their police work between protection and service, if the organization itself is unwilling to provide the resources and leadership required. The police organization as a whole must begin to examine the need to shift its resources and emphasis towards a more balanced, proactive approach. This is especially important if the police are going to be an integral part of the solution to the problem of "youth at risk".

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APPENDIX I

METHODOLOGY

Objectives of the Research

The following research was designed to assess the usefulness and implications of the concept of "youth at risk" for criminal justice and community-based policy and programs. Attention was also directed at the potential for interagency collaboration in addressing the needs of "youth at risk" and the role that the police might play in such an initiative. It was believed that the information gathered would provide a valuable resource for policing policy, including ongoing initiatives in community policing, crime prevention and the development of "youth at risk" profiles aimed at enhancing community-based police responses and resource deployment.

Organization of the Research

Information required for a comprehensive assessment of the issue of "youth at risk" was derived from three primary sources including:

- (i) A review of criminal justice literature;
- (ii) Site visits to selected locations throughout the country; and
- (iii) Key actor interviews with professionals in educational, social service and police agencies that deal with the issue of "youth at risk".

Each of the three components of the research focused on the concept of "youth at risk", in terms of how "youth" and "at risk" were understood and applied in the context of service delivery, programming and policy development.

The research was conducted during a four month period from November, 1990 to February, 1991. An assessment of the existing perceptions of "youth at risk" and responses to the issue was collated through the three identified mechanisms. A manual search of criminal justice research literature on the problems facing children and youth formed the basis of the initial assessment of what constitutes "youth at risk". This

process was augmented by a computer assisted search which identified areas of research related to the concept of "youth at risk". In addition, related literature and program materials that have been developed and implemented in Canada by police, social service, and community agencies were collected and examined.

A series of site visits were conducted to Vancouver, Kelowna, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax. These sites were selected on the basis of the community having one or more of the following criteria:

- . A variety of youth related issues and concerns that exist within each of these communities - e.g. the Asian youth gang related activities in Vancouver, the transient youth problem in Kelowna, concerns with runaway and street youth in Winnipeg and Toronto, etc.
- . The existence of or interest in developing interagency collaborative strategies to address youth related concerns.
- . At different stages of development in addressing the issue of "youth at risk" through interagency collaborative mechanisms - e.g. while some communities have been actively involved in dealing with a host of interagency related activities concerning youth for decades, others have only recently (within the last 5 years) begun to collectively respond to the issue.
- . Local police forces involved in addressing the communities' youth related problems.

Site visits provided an additional and valuable source of information. An interview schedule consisting of semi-structured, open ended questions was devised and used for each site visit. The questions focused on the respondent's views on six basic issues.

These included:

1. The nature and meaning of the concept of "youth";
2. The nature and meaning of the concept of "at risk";
3. The source of the problem of "youth at risk";
4. Solutions to the problem of "youth at risk";

5. Expectations about the role of the police in responding to the problem of "youth at risk"; and
6. The respondent's experience with and their assessment of the viability of various types of community-based, interagency networks for responding to the problem of "youth at risk".

Through a series of in-depth, face to face interviews with directors of agencies or programs as well as front line staff that deal with young people "at risk", the researchers had an opportunity to gain a grounded understanding of the problem of "youth at risk". This was based on a first hand appraisal of the way that the issue is being dealt with across the country by those directly involved with it on a daily basis. Those consulted included police, educators, social service professionals, and academics.

Finally, a series of telephone interviews were conducted with key actors from across the country. Those interviewed were representatives from agencies that could not be involved in site visits because of their location or lack of availability at time of travel. Such contacts with experts from a variety of related fields provided an important reference for identifying the most salient issues in this field in terms of policy, programming, and future research directions.

Throughout each component of the research, emphasis was placed on the identification of the existing understanding of "youth at risk". In addition, an assessment was made of the types of responses individual agencies made as well as community-based, interagency approaches that address the needs of "young at risk". The relationship between the individual agencies and the police was explored and the nature of the relationship was assessed in light of existing or potential interagency, community-based, collaborative approaches to "youth at risk" involving the police. This information was analyzed with specific reference to the policy implications it contained for the police response to "youth at risk".

APPENDIX II

A SUMMARY OF SITE VISITS

The summaries of the site visits carried out as part of this research project are provided in this appendix. We have attempted to present an overview of the more significant ideas and issues raised in each of the communities in response to our questions about "youth at risk". In particular, we focused on the following four key questions:

- 1) How is the concept "youth at risk" understood and used in each of the communities by people in the police, social services and educational fields? Attention here was centred on delineating the meaning of the concepts of "youth" and "at risk".
- 2) What was identified in each of the communities as the source of the problem of "youth at risk"? How were the respective organizations in each of the communities responding to the problems they identified?
- 3) What has the experience in the community been with interagency networks designed to address problems such as "youth at risk"? Would such an approach be viable in their particular community?
- 4) Do the police have a role to play in an interagency, community based response to "youth at risk"? What positive contributions could they make? What obstacles are perceived for police participation in an interagency, community-based initiative?

The key findings to these questions are summarized for each of the communities. While there was a great deal of consistency in the answers we received in the different communities, each provided a unique perspective of the problem of "youth at risk" based on their own experiences. Each community also offered a response based on their own history, their particular definition of the problem, and the different resources that were being mobilized including police, social services or education responses.

WINNIPEG

Youth At Risk

The respondents interviewed in Winnipeg provided a broad definition of the concept of "youth". This focused primarily on the mandated age of individual agencies but also reflected a broader definition that includes individuals from birth to twenty four years of age. Factors identified as important in distinguishing youth from adults included level of independence and maturity as well as chronological age.

There were a number of problems facing young people in Winnipeg that were of particular concern to the respondents. An important issue in Winnipeg had to do with the situation confronting many native youth. Poverty, unemployment, substance abuse, alcoholism, and health problems were mentioned in this regard. The lack of resources such as drop in centres, shelters, and recreational facilities in inner city neighbourhoods was also cited as an important obstacle for native youth. In addition to the problems facing native youth, the large numbers of street youth and runaways, juvenile prostitution, Asian youth gangs, middle class youth at risk, child sexual abuse, and satanism were specific problems discussed by the interviewees. Some concern was expressed over the sensationalism associated with many of these behaviours since it diverted attention away from the structural inequities underlying many of these problems.

Responding to Youth At Risk

There appeared to be an ongoing debate in Winnipeg over the appropriate way to respond to the problem of youth at risk. One particularly contentious issue centred on the provision of emergency shelter for youth and the way that this should be handled. Some agencies had opted for a large facility while others preferred a series of smaller safe houses located across the city. This reflected a serious criticism expressed by some of those interviewed with the ad hoc manner in which programmes for "youth at risk" were being funded. This funding arrangement led to a fragmentation of services and insecurity among the service providers, especially those from smaller organizations.

Some sentiment was expressed that change in the community had to begin at the top since that is where the political and financial decisions are made. This was discussed with reference to the larger organizations in the community including the police. This was also mentioned in relation to the existence of interagency networks since Winnipeg has long had a series of issue specific, community based interagency networks in operation. A broader network that could respond to the larger questions facing the community was sought by a number of respondents.

The Role of the Police

There was strong support for interagency collaboration involving the police with other community organizations. A number of respondents referred to the dual roles played by the police in responding to the needs of youth at risk. This included protective services, such as in the case of child abuse victims or young people that have been victims of violence. This also included enforcing the law when dealing with youth involved in criminal behaviour. Some concern was expressed that those police officers providing "services" to young people "at risk" were not really doing police work. This view was held despite the fact that these officers provided very important services in the community. This orientation to what constitutes "real police work" reflects the difference between reactive policing that focuses on law enforcement and proactive community-based policing that stresses the provision of a wide range of services to the community by the police.

VANCOUVER

Youth At Risk

The definition of youth "at risk" in the Vancouver community reflects a current growing concern over the complex multicultural nature of their society. Recent statistics indicated that there are approximately 200,000 South East Asians in Vancouver and that approximately 53% of the school population are E.S.L. youth. Such a large population enables the Asian community to stay together and remain self-sufficient outside of Vancouver's mainstream Canadian society. Such a situation often perpetuates a problem whereby a large multicultural community does not understand the Canadian system; a system which does not sufficiently address its multicultural needs.

According to those consulted, all young people are "at risk" of becoming involved in gang activity and at a much earlier time than has been thought. Those most "at risk" of joining gangs, however, are: immigrant and visible minority youth; individuals with low self-esteem; those who have been alienated from families, school or friends; and those who lack adequate access to required services. Essentially, those most apt to join gangs are those young people who have a variety of needs that are not being met by other means, but that are sought from fellow gang members.

Responding to Youth at Risk

Vancouver's recent gang statistics indicate that there are approximately 500 identified Asian gang members with about 1000 "want-to-be's" and approximately 1000 others involved in non-Asian gangs. Those interviewed indicated that once an individual joins a gang, it is virtually hopeless to assist them. Many of the existing multicultural gangs are impossible to break into and therefore, we remain ignorant about the nature of the problem and are unable to effectively address the issue. Therefore, the emphasis of this community's response to its youth "at risk" concerns has centred on the "want-to-be's" and those who are "at risk" of becoming "want-to-be's".

A number of programs are designed to address the underlying reasons for why some young people get involved in gangs. Others focus on helping young people to fully understand the implications of gang involvement. It is well understood that all young people are "at risk" of becoming involved in gang activity, but those who actually become involved do so because they often lack access to appropriate required services. Therefore, the services that are most successful are those that have the following key elements: (1) they are based on the premise that the clientele they serve have little if any understanding of the institutions that serve them, for example, the criminal justice system; and (2) they staff their organizations with people that have an understanding of

those they serve and they are able to communicate with these individuals and understand their cultures.

A recent program entitled "Where's Winston" has been developed for the schools to teach young people about the implications of gang involvement. This program is composed of both a video and classroom lessons dealing with a true incident of a gang murder in Vancouver. The film shows the real consequences of gang involvement whereby a young boy was tried in adult court and sentenced to eight years in prison for the shooting of a rival gang member. The classroom lessons are planned around values and the consequences of gang activity and developing an understanding of the notion of "not fitting in".

Recently, an Interministerial Committee on Criminal Gangs has been formed to address the issue of youth gangs. This committee reflects the recognition of the need for collective strategies to address Vancouver's gang problem. This group is spending a great deal of time trying to better understand the problem since it is difficult to plan if those involved do not share a common starting point. A position that is frequently expressed is that the interministerial committee is so broadly based and so widely focused that it is going to be difficult transforming proposed plans into action. Many members of the committee believe that it is imperative that they work together, but are anxious to stop talking about it and start doing something to help area young people.

The Role of the Police

Many of the relevant agencies dealing with youth "at risk" in the Vancouver area have a great deal of respect and admiration for the police. Many key agencies such as the schools have a good working relationship with the police and emphasize the importance of continuing to work together to effectively address the gang problem. There is some understanding amongst the police themselves that they have been largely reactive in their response to "youth at risk" and have worked for too long on their own in trying to address the problem. The gang problem has almost always had a primary police focus. All related agencies look to the police for answers. In addition, gang activity is so newsworthy that there has always been a tremendous amount of public pressure on the police to do something. In order to effectively begin to address gang activity, the police are going to have to adjust their methods to more directly suit the needs of the community. But there is also an understanding that the community is going to have to meet the police halfway.

In addition to the need to work more closely with the community, the Vancouver police recognize the need to try to better understand the multicultural nature of their community. Police officers' training has been based on an understanding of mainstream Canadians. Now, the Vancouver police recognize the need to have people on staff that understand a variety of cultures who can educate other officers to more effectively

address the problems which have arisen as a result of the growing multicultural community in which they live and work.

KELOWNA

Youth At Risk

There was widespread recognition amongst those interviewed that although different agencies may define the concept of "at risk" differently, they are all essentially talking about the same young people. Many emphasized the need for establishing a very broad definition that encompasses all the different kinds of elements that constitute "at risk".

The elements of "at risk" identified by the Kelowna community dealt primary with those characteristics that often drive young people out onto the streets. Once on the streets, these youth are subject to a number of risks including: substance abuse, criminal activity, prostitution, AIDS, and other harmful behaviour. It was noted by those interviewed, however, that these young people are often subject to a great deal of danger before they even leave the home including such things as physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, neglect, and other harmful behaviour.

Responding to Youth At Risk

Kelowna has a relatively large outreach program. This kind of programming is designed to enable workers to reach out to the young people on the streets in an attempt to better meet their needs and reduce the risks that they are exposed to as part of street life. Such programs as Reconnect, TRACK, coordinated by the Kelowna Boys and Girls Club, work closely with area police and the staff of the Ministry of Housing and Social Services in order to address the needs of the areas street youth. A large population of Kelowna's street youth are Natives. The Native Friendship Centre of Kelowna is presently devising a set of programs designed to meet the unique and special needs of these Native young people.

One of the most prominent characteristics of this city was the sense of mutual respect and admiration that each agency evidently had for other similar agencies dealing with youth "at risk". This kind of consideration for the work that each agency does has made the development of interagency mechanisms far more feasible. In recent years, a network of agencies developed a interagency committee entitle YOUTH NET to assist in the development of more cooperative strategies to address youth related concerns. To date, this group has largely been a forum for information sharing and networking and has been regarded as effective in doing just that.

One of the community's most recent endeavours involved the collaboration of a host of youth related agencies including the R.C.M.P., Kelowna Boys & Girls Club, Kelowna Youth & Family Services, Ministry of Housing & Social Services, etc., in the development and implementation of a summer drop-in centre for youth in the

community's downtown core. The evaluation of the apparent success of the program was somewhat split. The centre was deemed successful in reaching out to the community's street youth, but was also deemed responsible for the creation of a number of problems for area police.

The Role of the Police

The Kelowna community recognizes the important role to be played by the police in addressing the city's youth "at risk" concerns. The community also recognizes, however, that the legislation that governs the actions of the police in dealing with young people, namely the Young Offenders Act, often puts the police in an awkward situation where they may want to get involved in community endeavours but their hands may be tied. The recognition and appreciation for the limited discretion that the R.C.M.P. have, indicates that this community is well on its way to developing some appropriate collaborative responses to "youth at risk".

One of the main concerns voiced by those interviewed was ascertaining the level of risk or the point at which intervention is necessary - also known as the "just beer" phenomena. Each agency dealing with youth have had to set priorities because of the volume they are dealing with. Unfortunately, it is often the case that the degree of risk described by one agency, such as the schools, may not be considered as in need of immediate attention relative to other "at risk" issues. All agencies including the R.C.M.P. wish they had the liberty to just be concerned in order to take action, but this is not the case as all agencies try to stay out of hot water by keeping very clear on their mandates.

In recent years, the R.C.M.P. have become more involved in dealing with a variety of "at risk" situations that they didn't concern themselves with even five years ago. They have begun to work closely with the street outreach workers and have established a good working rapport with the Ministry of Housing and Social Services. In addition, two emergency care workers have been hired by Kelowna Boys & Girls Club who provide the R.C.M.P. with 24 hour resources for the young people they may come into contact with during their work. The R.C.M.P. have undoubtedly begun to take on a more elaborate policing role in their attempt to work more closely with the community in addressing its youth "at risk" concerns.

TORONTO

Youth at Risk

The site visits to Toronto revealed many of the same problems found in other Canadian communities but in greater quantity and intensity. There are numerous groups in Toronto responding to the problem of "youth at risk" with many competing for the same resources. This can lead to a fragmentation of services when several small organizations arise in response to a perceived need. A duplication of services can also occur if larger organizations provide essentially the same service in their programs. Emergency shelter is a case in point since several organizations have emerged to respond to the needs of Toronto's street youth population.

The definition of youth found during the Toronto site visits reflected the general pattern discovered in this study in so far as legal, financial, or agency specific mandates delineated what client group each agency worked with. However, there was a widespread view that "youth" encompasses people from birth up to age twenty four. Once again, emotional and social maturity as well as the ability to function independently were identified as factors that helped to distinguish "youth" from either children or adults. Many respondents stated that vulnerability is greater for the younger members of the youth population. Moreover, prevention and intervention programs aimed at "youth at risk" should be initiated as early as possible.

Responding to Youth At Risk

A whole range of services are available in Toronto for youth at risk. In particular, street outreach and emergency shelters were available. Additionally, mental health services, educational and employment programs were also being offered. The educational system was especially active in the Toronto area in responding to the needs of youth at risk including cooperating with the police in educational programs as well as in addressing issues such as violence in the schools. Specialized programs were also available to address some of the more serious concerns facing the community. For example, programs had been established to teach young people and especially those on the street about the threat of AIDS. Similarly, a needle exchange program was operating in the city to help prevent the spread of AIDS among intravenous drug users, who include many in the "youth at risk" population.

Unlike many of the communities we visited, Toronto has had a long experience with interagency networks. We discovered an array of both issue specific and broad based networks dealing with various aspects of the "youth at risk" problem. A city wide mayor's task force was just completing a major report during our visit. This group had looked more broadly at the problems facing young people in the community. At the

same time, issue specific networks were in operation around questions such as emergency shelters for youth and the emerging problem of violence in the schools. The police appear to play an important role in these interagency networks and their participation was viewed favourably by most of the people we spoke to.

The Role of the Police

The police in Toronto are responding to the problem of youth at risk in a variety of ways. They have specialized units for dealing with youth including store front operations in a number of communities. There is also close cooperation with the schools where the police provide information, law enforcement and protective services. The question of proactive policing was raised and the importance of police working with young people and in a school environment was discussed. The importance of these types of police service work was stressed as was the need to have this recognized by the police administration. Here, as in other jurisdictions, the success of police working with youth in an interagency setting such as the schools was seen as dependant upon the characteristics and commitment of the individual officers involved. The selection procedures and training of officers for these types of assignments was seen as crucial if community based, interagency responses to "youth at risk" were to succeed and expand.

HALIFAX

Youth at Risk

The prominent at risk population in Halifax appears to be those that the community does "not know how to help". Many of the young people "at risk" in the Halifax community are "at risk" of becoming or being further involved in criminal activity. In addition, many of these young people are "at risk" to themselves and others through their involvement in street life whereby they become absorbed in prostitution, drug and alcohol abuse, and other related "at risk" behaviours. Many of these young people have a host of problems that are quite complex and often point to a number of common underlying characteristics. One of the most common contributing factors noted by those interviewed is sexual abuse. Almost 80% of the young women in a local treatment centre were sexually abused and it is believed that the majority of the young prostitutes in the city have also been victims of sexual abused.

Responding to Youth at Risk

A variety of programs exist within the community which are designed to target "youth at risk". These programs are provided for young people with behaviour problems observed in the home or school, programs for prostitutes, street youth, substance abusers, victims of physical, sexual or emotional abuse, and young people in need of protection. An interesting component of the program for prostitutes is based upon the fact that it is "user directed". Those services required and noted by area prostitutes are generally provided by the program. The police work very closely with a number of these programs, but not with others which poses problems for all agencies involved. Recently, the police have become increasing involved in both the schools and programs for prostitutes.

The complexity of the problems of Halifax's "at risk" youth population has posed some real difficulties for area agencies. All those interviewed recognized that the complicated nature of their concerns requires a multi-faceted interagency approach. To date, a variety of networks have been devised to address some of these complexities. These networks are largely made up of representatives from the educational and social service systems and are fairly informal in nature. It is interesting to note the much smaller role played by local police and other criminal justice agencies. Some of those consulted felt that they, as a community, were further behind than most other Canadian cities in responding collectively to the problem of "youth at risk". Many partnerships have yet to be explored and nurtured. Some agencies, however, have been more actively involved in developing working relationships with related agencies including the police.

The Role of the Police

In the last few years, the Halifax Police Department has been making some very major shifts in its activities toward the community-based model of policing. Police reception of these changes has been diverse. Some have accepted and applauded the move. Others have been much more cautious about such a major change in the role of the police. Part of this move to community-based policing has been to work more closely with both the community and related community agencies. This approach has been very positive from the view of some agencies dealing with "youth at risk". Others, however, were less optimistic based upon their experiences to date. All agencies, however, encourage and support the notion of working more closely with area police in order to effectively address the Halifax community's "youth at risk" concerns.

CALGARY

Youth At Risk

The definition of the concept of "youth" varied according to the organizational mandate of those interviewed. These definitions relied primarily on the limitations extant under existing legislation such as the Young Offenders Act, Child Welfare Act, or legislation governing schools. When queried about their broader understanding of the concept, most respondents defined "youth" as ranging from 12 to 24 years of age. It was pointed out that as many as twenty-five percent of "street kids" are 21-22 years of age. Those above 24 were identified as adults while those below 12 were regarded as children. Some discussion focused on factors other than legislation which influenced the definition of who is considered a "youth". This included a consideration of a person's emotional as well as social maturity.

The concept of "at risk" was defined primarily in terms of a person's vulnerability to being victimized. In this regard, child abuse and child sexual abuse were identified as serious risk factors. More generally, a young person's ability to cope with the demands of their environments whether this be in the home, at school, or in the community were noted. Elementary school children were deemed to be most "at risk" since these young people are less able to respond to the challenges they face. This was supported by the repeated call for early and effective intervention to prevent victimization and the potential problems which can result. The forms of risky behaviour discussed included running, living on the street, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution and involvement in various forms of criminal activity including violence. One of the concerns expressed by several respondents dealt with the youth gang phenomenon. In this community, concern over gang related activities was related to conventional gang behaviour, middle class youth gangs, and Asian youth gangs. The latter two types of gangs had received considered press coverage during the period preceding the site visit and while not deemed overwhelming, it was seen as worrisome by a number of those interviewed.

Responding to Youth At Risk

Community responses included a variety of programs sponsored by both large and small organizations. For example, the larger organizations in the community provide a wide variety of resources and programs ranging from residential placements to safe houses and street outreach services. Smaller organizations also run a variety of programs aimed at specific needs such as the problems experienced by immigrant youth, victim-offender reconciliation programs, and life skills training. The community has a history of interagency cooperation although this has been limited to issue specific networks. Some concern was expressed over the difficulties encountered when smaller agencies attempt

to work with larger ones. The latter have ongoing budgetary needs related to their size and fixed operating expenses that make working with other agencies difficult if this affects funding.

The Role of the Police

The police in Calgary are particularly active in responding to youth and offer several unique and innovative programs. These range from a program which places uniformed officers in elementary, junior and senior high schools, to a specialized unit for dealing with youth. This also includes specialized programs such as Serious Habitual Offenders Comprehensive Action Program (S.H.O.C.A.P.) that responds to serious habitual juvenile offenders, and the Citizens' Response to Adolescent Street Hoodlums (C.R.A.S.H.) program which is designed to deal with the problem of youth gangs. While these two programs are currently directed by the police, there has been considerable contact and cooperation with various agencies in the community. In this regard, while no single, broad-based interagency network currently exists in this community, there are a number of issue specific committees in operation and there is some interest in establishing an umbrella group to deal with youth related issues.

APPENDIX III

Key Quotes from Consultations

"Youth At Risk"

- . "Any kid that spends 24 hours on the street is at risk."
- . "These kids are at risk because of others' crimes."
- . "They lack the confidence and the skills to function adequately...they are very needy."
- . "On the streets, they are at risk of coming into contact with those who they will become victimized by."
- . "Low social skills and no way of dealing with their emotions."
- . "Most of these kids are victims of sexual assault."
- . "Look at how these kids are usually judged...seen as having deficits. But if you take the average person from a suburb and put them on the streets, they won't last five days...some of these kids survive on the streets for five years...there is a tremendous amount of ingenuity and strength in these kids."
- . "Struggling with the concept (at risk) for years and will probably continue to do so for many more years."
- . "Those most at risk are those we just don't know how to help."
- . "The term (at risk) had some meaning in the beginning, but has since been debased...become a divisive element...an excuse for not doing something."
- . "Being an adolescent means being "at risk"."
- . "The needs of youth at risk of any age are basically the same, that's why anything that is based on age alone is incredibly naive."
- . "People throughout different agencies may define the concept of "at risk" differently...a national definition is going to be tricky."

"The definition has to be very broad to encompass all the different kinds of elements that constitute "at risk".

"If a child possesses all the skills necessary to problem solve in a way that is not adverse to him/herself or society, he/she may not be at risk in what often constitutes a risky situation."

"Native people do have a different outlook on the concept of "at risk"...we share the same risks as non-native kids, but we respond to them differently."

"We (natives) are lacking the same kind of parental guidance...native parents don't put that much importance on school...don't have the encouragement at home to stay in school and are, therefore, more at risk of dropping out."

"Native students lose their sense of security once they step off the reserve...are often labelled for being different."

"There are different degrees of "at risk"."

Responding to Youth At Risk

"Rent-A-Friend" becomes part of our job."

"Most have a real attitude problem when they walk in."

"They get used to methods of survival, fast money... impulsive....got to slow them down."

"Have to teach them the basic life skills, as opposed to survival skills."

"Have to assist them to reach their potential for independence."

"They (the youth) are sometimes unrealistic about what you can do for them."

"There are some real gaps between our (social service) agencies and the mental health system."

"Some kids are at risk, but are not seen by some agencies as being at risk enough...It is often only a matter of time before they reach that point of enough."

"Prioritizing who really needs the help most would not be determined by the situation they are in but the way the child handles or perceives they situation."

"I don't think the education system, media, etc., (society) has predicted the outcome...it has therefore not made sure that all of us learn to control our own lives."

"Important that we now look into the future and say "we've always had physical abuse and sexual abuse, but our ways of dealing with it socially have been different." What is it going to be like in twenty years?"

"We have to start looking at those who are just going into school and start looking beyond academic achievement."

"People are looking to redo or undo what had already been done...we have to get to these kids earlier."

"Have to look at ways of making these kids less vulnerable."

"So much of what passes for maladjustment in youth is caused by abuse."

"Unless you have the bodies, people just won't respond."

"Maybe we have it right but just not enough of it...have to increase our capacity and fill in the gaps."

"Amazing to find the very minor role that schools and organized religion have played in the lives of youth...should have a greater responsibility in their full development."

"When dealing with kids at risk, the variety of definitions that could be associated with a child at risk should correspond to the response, which should be as varied as the kids we are talking about."

"When these children grow, we grow. We are not above the children, we are with them."

"There is a lot of misunderstanding about who we are as a native people...school systems have forgotten or omitted this...native people have to integrate in order to survive."

"The Native Friendship Centre is trying to bridge the gap...have a long way to go."

Police Response

"They (the police) are terribly frustrated...don't know how to deal with the number of kids that they are seeing."

"Older guys, are still law enforcement oriented. The younger guys appear to really want to work with the kids."

"Should have officers trained as social workers...could work more closely with these kinds of officers."

"They could win support of the community by working directly in the environment of those they serve."

"Would be nice if they were more aware of what we do."

"When we call, sometimes they come quickly other times they don't...no standard response...we sometimes have different perceptions of a crisis situation."

"We got three or four generations operating in the police institution."

"Can't be all things to all people...not part of their job to be able to walk on water."

"Specialization is counter-productive. We can't continue to work in situations where people see less and less of the whole picture...law enforcement is not the whole picture of what police should do."

"Police forces need to be resourced to provide information on certain services if they can't provide the service themselves."

"Have to move away from a paramilitary organization ...need to be visible in the community...provide a sense that the police are theirs (the community's)."

"Need to work out a better definition of what community involvement is, what community policing is."

"We have to sit down and look at the discretionary power, particularly as it relates to children and youth."

"Difficult to have a national answer (response) for policing. The composition of the police force has moved towards representing the composition of the community."

"Keep officers in a particular community for longer periods of time in order to establish effective relationships with the community...got to be more flexible."

"One or two weeks of police training is dedicated to native and aboriginal peoples. How much can you learn about these peoples in one or two weeks, especially when some of these people, e.g. Regina, will be dealing with these people all the time...need one whole component of the training program to be on understanding native peoples, their culture and on reserve and off reserve natives."

Interagency Collaboration

"Don't have a sense of community and without a sense of community, we have no way of responding appropriately and comprehensively to these kids."

"We have to continue to communicate knowledge in understandable language to each relevant field and across fields...but this takes time."

"Have to start to build the pie which we call the community...encourage all relevant agencies, such as the police, to take one piece...have to give up a lot of power to build a sense of community."

"Our city has a very rich history of interagency collaboration...we have the weakest planning infrastructure, yet we provide the most programs and have been very innovative...without a formal structure, we can be free ranging, no constraints to what we can do."

"Ad hoc groups are often issue based...fields differently than a planning body telling you what to do...subtle difference but an important one."

"I think the 90's will be the era of "the deal"...rather than being protective of our turfs, we'll be moving towards joint ventures."

"Look for agencies that are driven by the same things."

"Issue based and broad based committees both work...just dealing with different dynamics."

"Our city has one of the highest levels of collaboration...first we have collaboration within our agency and then between agencies."

"The feasibility of a dysfunctional agency being successfully involved in a functional interagency collaborative effort is virtually impossible."

"Its the non-structure that causes structure...we are allowed to be autonomous and to make decisions."

"We get groups of people together to play a game of football, half the group thinks we're playing Canadian football, the other half thinks we're playing American football...whole set of different rules with the same set of objectives in mind...problem is compounded by the way they perceive the people they serve."

"Collaborative approaches are necessary, but before we get together, let's be sure individually what our overall philosophy or belief system is and what our perception of the problem is."

APPENDIX IV

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