

# Themes in young people's accounts of wellbeing in their lives

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an overview of the two-year, Health Research Council-funded project *Theorising Youth Mental Health Promotion* (HRC 00/256).

The research aims related to this report were to:

- Gather accounts of what constitutes mental health from young people of Maori, Samoan and Pakeha ethnicity in Counties/Manukau.
- Investigate the experiences of health promoting and health demoting social, cultural and community environments among these participants.

Qualitative methods were used to gather data from 30 people in 3 ethnic groups – Maori, Samoan, and Pakeha – aged between 12 and 25 years, and resident in Counties/Manukau. Analyses focussed on themes that appeared in the talk of participants.

Key insights within each ethnic module are reported within broad domains that reflect the importance of youth environments to wellbeing:

- Social; culture, family, peer group, school, sport, work, church.
- Physical; place, public space, transport, accommodation, venue.

In addition there was a range of generic issues that young people talked about as important in their lives within these environments:

- Identity, health, emotions, drugs, sexuality, death, spirituality, risk, bodies, bullying, and coping.

The materials presented here are meta-level accounts derived from thematic summaries within each ethnic module. The material has been presented in this way so that the vast sweep of data gathered by the project can be available in a single accessible, comprehensive, if summary document.

The project is continuing analyses in order to develop theory that will inform local projects and practices around:

- Maori and Pacific models of wellbeing.
- Positive Youth Development.

## INTRODUCTION

This report provides an overview of the two-year, Health Research Council-funded project *Theorising Youth Mental Health Promotion* (HRC 00/256), which was conducted in Counties/Manukau. This study was conducted by staff at the Alcohol and Public Health Research Unit/Whariki of Auckland University's Faculty of Medicine and Health Science between July 2000 and July 2002. The aim of the project was to gather data that would inform and elaborate existing theories of mental health into a theoretical framework for mental health promotion among young people. As well as reviewing literatures on mental health theory and health and mental health promotion the project sought data from youth participants as expressed in two of the specific project objectives from the HRC grant proposal:

- To gather accounts of what constitutes mental health from young people of Maori, Pacific and Pakeha ethnicity in Counties/Manukau.
- To investigate the experiences of health promoting and health demoting social, cultural and community environments among these participants.

Here we will outline the rationale and methods used and provide a summary of the findings from the youth data. Our purpose is to give the reader a sense of the project as a whole and we note that with publication already achieved (Arae et al., 2002) and several more papers in advanced stages of preparation, that there will shortly be considerable detail available to supplement and elaborate the current report. We begin with a sketch of key issues in the literature concerning mental health and youth mental health in particular.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **MENTAL ILLNESS**

The mental health status of New Zealanders is of major importance in political, social, ethical and economic terms. Poor mental health and mental illness contribute significantly to the burden of disease in Aotearoa/New Zealand. In addition mental health problems have major negative impacts on work, education, general health, families, communities and society at large, adding an element of lost “opportunity cost” to the social and fiscal scales.

A study by Oakley-Browne et al. (1989) in New Zealand showed that around 20% of the population has a diagnosable mental illness (including drug & alcohol disorders) at any one time. Ministry of Health figures suggest that approximately 3% of the total population and 5% of the child and youth population have “serious, ongoing and disabling mental illness” requiring specialist intervention (Mental Health Commission, 1998). Moreover 17% of the adult population and 15% of the youth and child population have chronic low-level mental illness problems that impact on the lives of the afflicted and their families and other networks.

A further powerful indicator is contained in figures that suggest that approximately 224,000 people in the country are dependent on alcohol and that smaller numbers are dependent on other substances (Ministerial Committee on Drug Policy, 1999). Mental health issues are at the forefront of the health difficulties facing indigenous peoples world wide especially in the wake of colonial processes (Smith, 1998). Ethnic minorities, displaced or migrating between or within countries in reaction to the colonial world order, have been similarly afflicted (Anae, 1998; 1999). Mental illness issues have been described as the major health problem facing Maori (Te Pumanawa Hauora, 1995). While studies are needed to establish prevalence rates for Maori, it is also noted that Maori have much higher rates of presentation to crisis, acute and forensic services than non-Maori (Mental Health Commission, 1998). Maori admissions to psychiatric hospitals have doubled since 1995, Maori admission rates are 40% higher than non-Maori, and multiple indicators (including suicide, offending and alcohol-related problems) suggest an overall pattern of poor mental health in Maori communities (Health Funding Authority, 1999). The rate of Maori youth suicide was 33.9 per 100,000 compared to the non-Maori rate of 24.2 per 100,000 (Ministry of Health, 1999). Dyal (1997a; 1997b) highlights the absence of national data on Maori mental health needs, a likely under-reporting of as much as 30%, and the increasing prioritisation of mental health by Maori and their orientation to ‘by Maori for Maori’ approaches.

The mental health status of Pacific peoples in New Zealand is likewise a matter for concern (Anae, 1999; Tamasese et al., 1997). Studies by Dawson (1988) and Bathgate (1994) show that Pacific people have higher rates of re-admission to psychiatric institutions than other groups. There is a higher prevalence of complications arising from late presentation (stemming in part from efforts to use traditional or secular approaches to mental health problems) compared with the whole population. First admission rates to psychiatric institutions were strongly elevated for Pacific youth (15-24) with schizophrenic disorders and elevated for affective psychoses compared with Palagi<sup>1</sup> (Bathgate, 1994).

In the international setting studies show problems with mental health in New Zealand are at approximately the same levels as other industrialised countries (Albee, 1992; Charlesworth and Nathan, 1987; Institute of Medicine, 1994; Stephens, 1998). World Health Organisation figures (Murray and Lopez, 1996) indicate that mental illness accounts for 11% of the total global burden of disease and that this (especially in the form of unipolar depression) is expected to rise to 15% by 2020.

### **YOUTH MENTAL ILLNESS**

Clearly such projections have major implications for the mental health and wellbeing of young people and future generations, and even current youth mental health statistics are a grave cause of concern. Suicide is the second most common cause of death in people aged under 25 and the rate of youth suicide has doubled since 1985 (Ministry of Health, 1999). McGee et al. (1990) found 26% of adolescent girls and 18% of adolescent boys had mental health problems including anxiety conduct

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<sup>1</sup> Palagi is a Samoan word for a person of European descent.

disorders and phobias. The Dunedin and Christchurch studies showed prevalence of psychiatric disorder between ages 15 and 18 increased from 22% to 36% (Feehan et al., 1994) and from 24% to 35% (Fergusson et al., 1993) respectively.

A study by Gray (1994) suggests some of the dimensions that contribute to the mental health of young people in their community environments. Interviews with 234 young people showed that the issues for them included depression, stress, sexuality, abuse, and drugs and alcohol. For Maori, smoking, violence and abuse were particular problems while Pacific participants identified sexuality and drugs and alcohol as major issues.

In Aotearoa New Zealand two longitudinal research projects involving large birth cohorts provide some of the strongest data on the development and wellbeing of young people. The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study provides an important window on the development of young people and shows that the family has a central role in influencing the life experiences and choices available to the young participants (Silva and Stanton, 1996). Multiple measures were made on a variety of parenting and family domains to study their impact on the wellbeing of the child cohort at various age levels producing correlations between negative family environment ratings and problems in the children. For example at age 15 a focussed study (Nada-Raja et al., 1992) linked level of attachment to parents with measures of youth wellbeing. In general it is reported that the impacts of weak or negative family environments may be expressed as a wide range of distress, disorder and disadvantage with long-lasting effects on the lives of young people (Pryor and Woodward, 1996).

The Christchurch Longitudinal Study (Fergusson and Horwood, 2001) has reported repeated measures of correlation between family style and stressors and incidence of mental illness and other forms of social difficulty. Most of the findings from this longitudinal study relate specifically to mental illness in the cohort and correlate such outcomes to parental separation and divorce, childhood sexual and physical abuse at moderate levels, and to other aspects of family functioning such as inter-parental violence, parental alcohol problems, and recombined families. Examination of the backgrounds of children who, by the age of fifteen years, showed major mental illness problems found:

“childhoods marked by multiple social and family disadvantages that spanned economic disadvantage, family dysfunction, impaired parenting and limited life opportunities” (p292).

Comparison of the most disadvantaged 5% of the sample with the most advantaged 5% showed risks of developing mental health problems elevated 100 fold.

## **PUBLIC HEALTH AND YOUTH MENTAL ILLNESS**

Policy to address these concerns has been developed and now exists in the form of the *National Mental Health Strategy* (Mental Health Commission, 1999), the *National Mental Health Plan* (Ministry of Health, 1997), *Kia Tu Kia Puawai* (Health Funding Authority, 1999), the *National Workplan for Child and Youth Mental Health Services* (Health Funding Authority, 2000) and related documents. These policies take the lead in the efforts to raise government targets of service provision to the most “in need” which they define as 3% of adults and 5% of children. Yet the data above and Maori and Samoan research (Anae, 1999, Bathgate, 1994, Dawson, 1988, Mental Health Commission, 1998, Tamasese et al., 1997, Te Pumanawa Hauora, 1995) suggest that, given the existing and projected levels of distress, even if these targets are reached it will not have a major impact on the experience of the afflicted or on the cost to the wider population. There is also a lack of fit where ‘mainstream’ services attempt to meet the needs of Maori and Pacific peoples in relation to mental illness (Bathgate, 1994, Dyall, 1997a, Dyall, 1997b).

We acknowledge that the burden of mental illness upon individuals, families and communities is dire (Ministry of Health, 1996) and applaud the efforts and progress made within the treatment and service provision sectors under very difficult conditions. However, the statistics and research findings represent mental illness, poor mental health and general degradation of the well-being of the youth population rather than mental health. The data therefore underline the urgent need for research-based knowledge on the social, psychological, environmental and economic determinants of mental health, in order that society can work effectively for improvements in this area. Concerted efforts to address these levels of distress require major well-planned interventions. To avoid piecemeal, ad hoc approaches coherent theory needs to underpin action.

Both locally and internationally there is a growing recognition that, as levels of mental illness continue to rise, clinical services which are already overburdened, will be increasingly unable to meet the need (Murray and Lopez, 1996, MacDonald and O'Hara, 1998, Raeburn, 2001). However as Friedli (2001) points out, statistics about mental illness and problems provide nothing that is of utility in attempting to measure wellbeing.

Unfortunately, as we have argued elsewhere (Arae et al., 2002) established medical and psychiatric theory (eg Antonovsky, 1996, Caplan, 1964, Mrazek and Haggerty, 1994) in relation to the prevention of mental illness is radically under-developed and in particular has little to say on the areas with the most potential – population level, public health and health promotion approaches to mental health (Friedli, 2001, Friedli, 1999, Hart, 1999, Herron and Trent, 2000, MacDonald and O'Hara, 1998).

Within our current research project we have attempted to approach mental health from a positive perspective. We sought to focus neither on the tragedies nor the 'tall poppies', opting instead to pitch our study at the level of the everyday lives of 'ordinary' young people to hear about their dreams and fears, their commonplace victories and defeats, in context. Our interest was in the health promoting features of the social and physical environments in which most young people, most of the time, thrive and grow.

As a result of the tensions between mental illness and mental health both in theory and at the level of everyday usage (Arae et al., 2002; Herron and Trent, 2000) and our interest in positive mental health, our focus from the outset was on data about the wellbeing of young people. Our interest in population level, public health theorising of interventions for the public good led us to ask what life was like for most of the people most of the time and to try and use this as a basis for building models of mental health promotion. Could we identify and describe features of people's lives, especially their environments, that enabled and facilitated wellbeing?

For these reasons, the data collection both in its recruitment of participants and in the style of interviewing, sought to gather the experiences of young people who were managing in their lives and engaging in the common activities of their cohort. We did not aim to seek out people, for example, who had contact with mental health services or the justice system or were in any other way identified as "at risk" (though may have included some incidentally). We used a snowballing technique starting personal contacts, from schools and community organizations within Counties/Manukau.

In keeping with the advice of locality-based research advisors, our literature based knowledge of the impact of culture, and the strengths and interests of the research team we adopted a research structure built around ethnic research modules that worked independently and collaboratively to gather equivalent data sets and utilise similar analytic tools. Each module had equal resourcing, a senior researcher and field researchers. The research teams met separately and as a whole group through-out the project to discuss, compare, negotiate and co-ordinate processes and progress.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### DATA COLLECTION

This was a qualitative research project that collected “lifestory” interviews (Anae, 1998, Bertaux and Bertaux-Wiame, 1981, Olson and Shopes, 1991) from young people living in the Counties/Manukau region of New Zealand during 2001. Eighty-seven interviews were recorded with young people aged between 12 and 27 years. There were equal numbers of males and females, and equal numbers<sup>2</sup> from each of the three ethnic groups – Maori, Samoan and Pakeha.

Individual interviews were conducted, using a modified version of the life story model with cultural and gender matching between interviewer and interviewee. The aim of this approach was to collect data that illuminate the environmental, contextual and process variables within which wellbeing is constituted. The interviewer gave an introduction to the project stressing our interest in wellbeing and the need to record both the dramatic and the mundane, covering any aspect of the personal narrative that might relate to wellbeing. Participants were asked to construct an outline of their life, beginning with their earliest memories and moving through timespans characterised by, but not exclusive to, broad educational levels – preschool, primary, intermediate, secondary, post-school/work. Interviewers encouraged participants to ‘talk out’ each stage until participants were satisfied with what they had offered and indicated a readiness to move on. The interviewer listened, clarified, probed, and if necessary brought up topics which were within the research focus but had not arisen spontaneously in the course of the conversation. Diversions from chronological order were welcomed, though once delivered, the interviewer would gently steer the interview back to the time structure. Typical interviews therefore consisted of the chronological narrative threaded with memories, anecdotes, emotional reactions and philosophical reflections in an apparently seamless, naturalistic account. Interviews ranged from 30-90 minutes and were transcribed verbatim, given pseudonyms and returned to participants for checking before inclusion in the project database.

Few interviewees seemed to have any overt difficulty with the task although there was a considerable range of verbal expression among participants and some of the younger participants seemed a bit ‘tongue-tied’ to begin with. A small number (four) of the total participant base became tearful during the interview process but all recovered in response to interviewer comforting and none sought further assistance from interviewers despite some revisits and the offer of backup counselling if required.

In gathering our data we did not ask participants about mental health directly except to say in the preamble to the interview that within the context of their lifestory narrative, we were interested among other things, in their general wellbeing. From this standpoint, our approach was to focus on the daily lives of ordinary people and to develop analytically within the chosen methodological framework, an everyday understanding of the ways in which their environments impact on their wellbeing.

### ANALYSES

Within each module, the data were loaded into QSR’s N4 software package then coded and analysed using thematic and discursive approaches (Patton, 1990, Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Working analyses (referred to here as ‘node summaries’) were produced in order to encapsulate the commonalities and variations in the young people’s stories within each ethnic group and these thematic descriptions are the basis of the findings presented in the current paper.

Analyses of the coded data took the form of a general discursive analysis modified from the methods developed by Potter and Wetherell (1987) for the description of interpretative repertoires. The emphasis is on multiple readings of bodies of text to develop understandings of the patterns and variations in the images and language used in talking about particular issues. Relevant excerpts from any interview were filed under loosely defined theme headings or nodes and interactively adjusted until the analyst was happy that the nodes were accurately reflecting the data and were reasonably stable.

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<sup>2</sup> Our youth interviews actually covered 30 individual Samoan and Pakeha and 27 Maori (87 in total) where 12 females and 15 males participated. In addition in each ethnic group we gathered 10 interviews from youth specialists – youth workers, teachers, police officers, welfare officers, community activists, church workers – in each ethnic group. These will be reported elsewhere.

The next stage is to intensively read the data at each node in order to develop a description of the multiple facets of talk around the topic. At this level of analysis one goal is to ensure that the voices of participants can be heard in the analysis, articulating issues in their own words and forms (Fine, 1992). These node summaries as products of this form of analysis are what Patton (1990) has termed “thick description” of data; rich, diverse, detailed accounts, often built around verbatim data excerpts, of the discursive resources drawn upon by speakers as they talk about the topic (McCreaon and Nairn; 2002, Irurita, 1996).

The analyses within each module are drawn from approximately five hundred pages of transcript data from which some 80 pages of node summaries (including exemplar quotes) were produced.

## **DATA PRESENTATION**

The materials presented here are meta-level thematic accounts derived from the node summaries referred to above within each ethnic module. Each theme reduces the material from the relevant node summaries from 3-6 pages to approximately half a page, in order that the vast sweep of data gathered by the project can be available in a single, accessible, comprehensive summary document. More detailed presentations of a range of topics arising from the node summaries are under preparation for publication in suitable refereed journals.

The thematic accounts present a mix of interwoven contexts and practices that constitute the experiences of our participants. In the broad sense, context means environment; the social, physical, economic and cultural settings within which our participants live and work. These settings are not fixed, passive ‘furniture’ in young people’s lives but dynamic, constitutive settings that shape and are shaped by the endlessly unfolding episodes of experience. As such they also have an evolving relationship to what we have termed practices; the myriad things that young people talk about ‘doing’ as they tell their lifestories. Meanings are understood to be contextualised and rendered in talk, in relation to the environments experienced, so that what our participants ‘do’ in terms of any of their diverse topics is implicitly (and sometimes explicitly) bound up with who, where and when. The summaries must be read with these points in mind as an overview that can nevertheless be tracked to node summaries and thence to transcripts to flesh out the detail of actual lives.

We have chosen to report from each ethnic module in turn because we are keen to respect the integrity of each research group and the data and analyses they have produced. In doing so we rely on the modules’ ability to speak to each other rather than taking a more categorical “compare and contrast” approach that might perhaps be a more conventional option. We present the Maori, Samoan and Pakeha youth data in that order and have attempted (in the face of some variability) to maintain a similar ordering of domains and themes within the modules.

## **MAORI DATA**

A total of 27 interviews were conducted with young people of Maori ethnicity living in Counties/Manukau. Twelve participants were female and fifteen participants were male and their ages ranged between 10 and 24 years. Some of the participants had lived in the area all their lives, with the majority in Mangere, Papakura, Otara, Manurewa, Papatoetoe and Otahuhu.

At the time of the interview, ten participants were still attending school, being at different stages of intermediate and secondary school while three participants were attending a tertiary institution. Nine participants reported that they were in full time employment and two participants reported being unemployed. Three females reported being at-home mothers.

## **ENVIRONMENTS**

### ***Culture***

The majority of youth participants felt that culture was important in their lives but that they and their parents had had limited exposure to what they saw as culture. There were concerns with how schools addressed their cultural aspirations. They felt cultural inclusion was ad hoc, marginalized and an 'add-on' that competed with other optional activities at school. They felt they had been disadvantaged by not having access to things that they identified as part of their culture; they felt that they lacked knowledge, which effected their participation and led to self-doubt.

Very few had regular contact with their marae due to travel distance and because most had their families living close to them within the urban boundaries. Many of the youth felt that awareness of ethnicity increases as people become older and notice differences, such as wealth, location and the different ways that people identify and interact. For example, at college many friendship groups were based on ethnic grounds and this carried through to out of school activities and to rivalries between groups. Kapa haka was identified as a collective experience that increased cultural awareness.

All the participants said that images including media representations meant that Maori were viewed by society, and by many Maori themselves, as an inferior people. They felt that in many instances it was embarrassing to be Maori but still wanted to identify as Maori. One of the positive cultural traits identified was collectivism. Being part of such a group was identified as a very fulfilling intergenerational experience.

### ***Physical location and growing up***

Many of the participants felt that they enjoyed their childhood more than any other part of their life. They felt their childhood was uncomplicated and full of fun. Parks were one of the most memorable places, providing freedom and space with the added attraction of resources to enjoy. Parks also allowed them to 'escape' their lives, as they found them relaxing and away from any perceived problems with family members in the home context.

The participants said they could tell where they sat on the social strata by their physical surroundings. By looking at their neighbourhood and comparing it to others they had seen they were able to determine whether they were rich or not. Added to this was the ability to compare their home environments with those of their friends living in the same neighbourhood. From this they were able to discern relative wealth and although they did not openly talk about this with their friends (so as not to cause embarrassment) they knew where each was on the scale. Those who had come from urban environments felt that rural environments did not provide them with enough stimulus and activity and they missed their friends. The rural participants who had come to Auckland largely did so due to parents finding employment in the city. The rural participants felt that the high cost of living in Auckland made it a very difficult place to exist in. Participants were all in agreement that the most traumatic experience of their youth was moving house or location and relocating somewhere else. The major disadvantage of this was leaving behind friends that they felt they would never see again due to physical distance. The young people talked of sadness at having to leave friends that they had bonded with. Many said that they were never consulted on the move but also felt that this would not have

made a huge difference. The participants also felt that they were not given enough time to prepare and even though moving for many became 'normal' it still frustrated them to leave friends behind.

The youth participants recalled their childhood and growing up years fondly and saw it as a time of less stress and more fun. They readily recalled significant happy events such as getting a bike, an important occasion and times when they were the centre of attention. They recalled believing in Santa, the tooth fairy and the Easter bunny. They recalled these memories fondly and thought that their worlds were imaginative in contrast to what they expressed as a reality check as they grew up. Childhood friendships were recalled as the most enjoyed by the participants.

A large part of growing up was associated with school, which is discussed in detail in subsequent sections. Memories from this location were not as happy because schools became sites of interpersonal struggle and competitiveness. Name-calling, embarrassment, failure and pressure associated with school featured heavily as the participants grew up.

Other memories of growing up for many centred round parents splitting up. This caused major turmoil in the lives of the participants as they were made to choose between parents, had no one they could talk to about the situation, and felt insecure and uncertain. The participants talked of growing up as a time of connectedness when they were connecting with a large variety of people, places (where they lived, friends' houses, parks) and things as they formed meaningful relationships. They talked of their feelings of anger, pain and frustration as the connectedness was removed and usually they were powerless to prevent it.

### ***Employment and occupation***

The majority of participants wanted to go further than their parents had in employment. None wanted to be employed in manual labour. While respecting parents' efforts participants felt that the jobs that their parents had would be embarrassing to them. This reflected the view that the job you do carries status and the job you ultimately find yourself in designates class status. Participants had many ideas about what they wanted to do or be but were largely unsure how they might achieve this. Their aim was to ensure a well paying job that carried with it status that identified them as successful rather than poor. The participants wanted to experience something different from what their parents' status offered them. The participants also wanted to work fewer hours than their parents. Weaving in and out of the data was the notion of working less and earning more. This was balanced by the notion that any job would be acceptable but it had to yield a high income to balance potential embarrassment. In many of these discussions the participants compared themselves and their aims to what they had seen their parents achieve; in most cases they wanted to do 'better'. Participants that hadn't already had children did not anticipate that they would ever be fulltime parents.

Another over-riding issue that drove the employment debate was the high cost of living in Auckland. The youth believed that Auckland was an expensive place to live and grow up in. A central issue for youth was the absence of their parents from home; usually as part of their employment and to meet economic costs. The participants felt a variety of negative emotions about work and jobs that might entail them being alone at home for extended periods. Many of the participants had part time jobs that they had found themselves. These jobs were mainly low skilled jobs but the participants felt that they met their short term needs in terms of providing cash to spend on clothing, their physical appearance and transport and to enable them to attend various functions. The need for money to maintain status was an important theme in these discussions.

Those that were working, were not in the professions that they had envisaged or were not happy with their current jobs. The choice to stay in these jobs was driven by the shortage of opportunity, lack of required skills and their current need for money. Many at this stage felt that life offered them little. However, they had become resigned to the situation and were not taking action to bring about changes.

### ***Economics***

Needing money to survive was a strong theme expressed by the participants. The younger participants, either still at school or with no financial commitments saw money as a means of escape from their monotonous and mundane existence, so that for a period they could 'enjoy' life. Money was a means by which they could do this. The participants that had financial obligations saw money as a necessary

evil that allowed them to eventually achieve independence and control over their lives. They saw such things as mortgages as the means by which they could eventually work less and be 'secure.' Although they did not want to be reliant on money and jobs they thought that financial arrangements like mortgages would mean that they would not be so reliant on financial reward. Economic power was directly related to personal power through enabling choices; to work or not, where or where not to live, and where to shop and what to buy. The purchasing power of the participants was a major factor in striving for economic power and independence. For many of the participants the ability to earn and have economic power signified a change in status and many felt that they could be accepted as adult because they had the ability to earn. This had the reverse effect on those that did not have economic or purchasing power. The notions of being young, dysfunctional, less than and incapable were associated with those without the economic and earning capacity. For the majority of the participants the dialogue around employment and economic future was brief. There was a noticeable dislike of discussing this topic in depth. This may have in part been due to fear; for many this was about believing that they would be less than successful in finding employment and being resigned to having little economic wealth. The economic wealth and consequent choices of many of the youth rested with parents. It was the parents who determined how much money to give their children. Many participants found this extremely frustrating. They felt they had few choices and felt uncomfortable at being dependant on others for what they perceived as their happiness and enjoyment of their life. Economic power was of huge importance to the youth and none could see any alternative to lives driven by economic power and the ability to be independent of others and ultimately of capitalism itself. All this could only be achieved they believed by first being a capitalist with economic power.

## **EDUCATION**

### ***Primary***

Primary school memories were of “playing, playing and more playing’. Sports and exercise were a large part of primary school life and participants felt comfortable and enjoyed this part of their curriculum. At this level it was a lot less competitive than secondary school. Rewards such as being on road patrol or a monitor were spoken of and those who didn’t achieve these felt left out.

Changing or moving school was described as a harrowing experience, especially changing schools. The participants described the turmoil they felt at shifting house and how this was compounded by feelings of loneliness when they moved to another school and were the only person in the class that didn’t know anyone.

### ***Intermediate***

Participants’ memories of intermediate schools were more clear than those of primary schools. The intermediate years were described as fun and as enjoyable. A part of this was the interaction of similar age groups, the opportunity to wear a uniform and the feeling that they were young adults. Intermediate was also about beginning to see the opposite sex in a new and different light. It was identified as a time of experimentation of things such as alcohol, sex and smoking. It also represented a period when the youth began to challenge the authority of others; teachers, siblings or parents.

It was felt that there had been more ‘good’ teachers than ‘bad.’ Participants could all identify what a good teacher was; someone who cared, showed an interest and who could relate with them at their level. This was described as coming across to the students rather than the students having to come across to the teacher. It was also important that the teachers knew the latest language, looks, phrases, music and things that were seen as integral parts of Maori youth culture. Teachers identified as bad were those that were grumpy and didn’t relate to their students. All participants had experienced a positive teacher in their lives that stood out for them as a person who had particular significance in their lives.

### ***Secondary***

The move from intermediate, where they went into a new and bigger school where they were the youngest, was a concern for many. Participants chose their schools not on reputation but on where their friends were going; wishing to remain connected to a known group. Some were very upset when their parents told them that they were going to a school not of their choice. Many feared for their survival in the education system because of the environments created by school. This meant that some planned their leaving before they even arrived at secondary school. For many, secondary school provided the first involvement in what they saw as things Maori, from language and whanau classes through to kapa haka. Many participants enjoyed new opportunities that offered excitement, such as music and musicals, art and sports.

Most felt threatened by school reports and the ‘meet the teacher’ evenings. Participants feared parent’s reactions to reports and many were upset by their parents not turning up at these evenings. They were concerned about judgments that teachers might make about their families and also how they saw themselves as being valued by their parents and in their teachers’ eyes. Secondary school assessment in the ‘big’ years, 5<sup>th</sup> – 7<sup>th</sup> form created a lot of pressure. Participants felt that to not achieve in these years meant they had no show of doing anything much in their lives. For some this meant that they felt that their life chances were disappearing at ages 15-17. Family pressure and personal desires to achieve and be better than others combined to place very high demands on the participants.

At secondary school there was a distinct cultural shift, as groups of the same ethnic identities started to interact together on a more regular basis. Some felt that they were unable to participate fully because they didn’t have the necessary skills and attributes that they perceived to be a prerequisite to belonging to these groups. Consequently many were put off and this impacted on their identity. Some said that they were a minority in their schools compared to Pacific people. This sometimes went along with feeling teased and put down by these groups.

For many the kapa haka environment offered at secondary school was a very positive and exciting experience that provided a contact with an aspect of their culture. The opportunity to be among peers of both sexes was also enjoyed and many relationships were formed through kapa haka.

In many schools, ad hoc events were organised and played out between groups of different ethnicities, for example a game of lunchtime rugby league, Maori versus Samoan. Intermediate pupils had worn uniforms with a sense of personal pride at their achievement and status. By secondary school this changed and uniforms were seen as controlling and were despised to the extent that flouting uniform codes was expected.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

Relationships were a major topic of discussion, with belonging and having a family to belong to being seen as very important. Having relationships that provided opportunities for interaction and to be loved were regarded by the youth as a necessity for their well being. They also spoke of pressures that came with some of these relationships; the pressure to conform to certain behaviours such as smoking, drinking or taking other drugs while in the company of friends, family or extended family because that was the norm. When the participants felt low, mentors or other significant people in their lives provided a welcome source of support.

### ***Parents***

The most influential and positive relationships were with mothers who were described as nurturing and listeners. Relationships with fathers were described as less positive. This was put down to the inability of fathers to be patient and understanding. Participants often blamed their parents for difficulties that they experienced. Because many of the participants were from single parent families this meant that one person bore much of this blame. Interactions between parents and participants provided opportunities to share and for the youth to feel respected and valued. The most common support described was when parents and other family watched the participants play sports. Participants described feeling cared for and respected. This also came with some pressure because the desire to perform in front of family was also a big issue.

### ***Whanau***

Relationships with extended family members were more common while young. The participants found that as people moved, grew and had their own families they did not always maintain ties. However, celebrations such as birthdays, weddings or 21sts were times when extended families pulled together. The strongest relationships with wider whanau were with aunts, uncles and grand parents. Male participants who had strong ties with their grandfathers sometimes described them as having a tough exterior that made communication difficult.

### ***Peers***

Relationships with friends were particularly important for those from split homes or families that were not close. These relationships were viewed as positive but came with rules and codes for behaviour and expectations that in many instances required people to do things that they did not see as positive. Relationships with the opposite sex took on more importance as the youth got older. Males found relationships with their girlfriends' parents difficult and said that the parents were not appreciative of their daughter having a boyfriend. On the other hand the females felt comfortable with their boyfriends' families.

Some relationships resulted in children. Some participants said that their parents did not react well on hearing of some pregnancies. They felt this was because the parents were concerned about what others would think of the parents or of the family. Pressure also came on after the children were born. Financial and other responsibilities were discussed; for example the changes in behaviour and attitude that were needed to raise children. Participants who were parents described their relationships with their children as positive and life changing.

## **ISSUES**

### ***Identity/self/belonging***

The participants all felt that identity was important to them and that the biggest influence on their identity was the human relationships that they experienced. These shaped how they acted and behaved. They felt that their identity was strongly determined by conforming to behaviour that their social groups accepted as desirable; this included the clothes they wore, the way they spoke, what they ate and who they liked. However, they also saw identity as something that made them unique and individual. Many felt that although they identified as Maori, they did not 'fully qualify' because they did not possess some of what they perceived to be 'Maori traits'; for example the ability to speak Maori, regularly returning to their marae, etc. The participants wanted to be able to identify more strongly as Maori and to be accepted by others as Maori. A key to identity was having a sense of belonging; of being part of a bigger group. For many this carried over into socialising and social groups. Social activities formed a large part of their identity and also provided a sense of belonging.

### ***Alcohol and drugs***

Alcohol consumption was greater than other drug use. Participants had varying experiences of drugs and said that they recognised the negative sides to drug use. Reasons given for using were the desire to experiment and experience. Others said that alcohol and other drug use was a part of socialising with others.

### ***Violence***

The participants that had experienced physical violence said that this happened usually within the family. Many said that they themselves had been victims at a young age. Many of the males said that they were violent and one of the more commonly recalled memories was of reacting to an older sibling or father's dominant role by reacting physically to break this role. Most of the violence that the participants experienced occurred when alcohol was present. Many of the males said that fear was good and natural. They said that fear was coupled with excitement when they did something new that carried the risk of punishment. Others talked of fear coming from the knowledge that they had acted inappropriately and that punishment was imminent; this punishment was usually physical.

Violence among siblings and cousins was seen as a natural and normal part of family behaviour. This was often of a physical nature and centred round disputes of property, space and rights. Many felt powerless when they were victims of abuse and vented their anger by withdrawing, destroying property or getting drunk and fighting. Violence among peers often involved issues of image and group respect. Some respondents said that they would "get smart" to others and that this might result in verbal or physical fights. Males talked more about being involved in illegal activities than females. They said that they engaged in this behaviour because of the thrill and risk. The participants felt that suicide was not an option and looked on it negatively.

### ***Social activities***

The participants talked of socialising as being with members of the same sex. Although they interacted as a group with the opposite sex, they always had the support and guidance of same sex social groups. Common activities included movies, church and shopping. 'Hanging out' or 'mucking around.' were common activities that were not defined but were described as unplanned. The older participants' social habits were centred around going out on Friday and Saturday nights. For many of the female participants shopping malls were a common location for socialising.

### ***Coping strategies***

Participants saw being able to handle anger as a key life skill. When they were younger they had reacted with tantrums and sulking, but felt that they had developed more skills such as time out, relaxing with friends and spending time alone that helped them to cope. Some found that if they were angry and in an environment where alcohol was around they would drink, where, had they not been angry, they probably wouldn't have. They said that they did this because they had an attitude of not caring and not thinking beyond that moment; their anger became the present emotion that was all

consuming. Anger was coped with through taking action to address the anger. Feelings of sadness were coped with by non-action. Participants said anger was a short-term thing and sadness was longer term and had the ability to make them weak. When they felt sad, participants said that they had to get safely to the bottom, wherever that was for them, before they could get it out and then slowly come back from it. They did this by listening to music, watching TV or videos, staying closer to family than normal, sleeping and in some cases hanging out with mates. They said that signs of sadness or anger were obvious in people's behaviour; engaging in activities out of character or withdrawing into themselves.

When relationships with partners ended this was dealt with by hanging out with friends of the same sex. Males found it harder than females when 'dumped' and it was seen as easier for younger people rather than young adults to deal with. They said this was because as you get older you give more and so the hurt is more. Very few talked to their parents about these emotions or saw them as a source of support in this area, mainly due to fear and embarrassment. The youth felt that they were too close.

The major cause of pressure for the participants was being compelled to do something and this caused a lot of frustration in human relationships; for example doing dishes, school certificate, and homework. They said this was because everyone just assumes that they have to do these things and no one genuinely requests. The youth talked of 'handling it' with the most successful strategy for coping with things being taking time; time to absorb and act (or not act). The youth did not believe they had been prepared appropriately enough for the many of the challenges that they faced. They felt they were prepared for things other people prioritised, but not for failure, disappointment, rejection, anger and other emotions. They felt that if they had had these skills a lot of things would have been different for them.

### ***Death and grieving***

For many of the Maori youth it was through the death of grandparents that they were brought into contact with their ancestral roots. For many this required them to return to marae to bury their elders. This also meant that the limited experience they had of their marae was surrounded in grief and despair. As a result many still held a myriad of thoughts and feelings towards their marae that affected their sense of connection with it and their identity as Maori. Many of the participants felt that although these times of grief were difficult, their families bonded together strongly to fulfil their requirements in meeting the duties to their elders. A large number of youth also enjoyed the ability to openly grieve and shed tears. Both males and females spoke of tangi as a time of open grieving and crying. For males this provided an experience where they would not be judged or labelled if they openly cried. To do so in other contexts was to risk a number of labels being applied and others making negative judgements. The participants felt that in some settings, society attached negative values to this behaviour and saw it as a sign of weakness. By far the strongest memory the youth had of their ancestral belongings was through death and cemeteries. The vast majority of the loss was suffered while the participants were young and so many grew up without the influence of elders in their lives. The minimal contact with marae and the connection through death meant that many of the youth did not view their marae as a vibrant living place.

### ***Spirituality***

When the subject of spirituality was discussed the participants all talked of Christian doctrine and the church. None talked of Maori spirituality. The few that did see Christianity as important in their lives felt that this offered them boundaries and principles for living.

### ***Recreation***

Participants still at school were involved in sport through their schools. The most common and popular sport was touch rugby. At the school level sport was played for fun and as a way of being with friends. Sport was also a way for families to interact through supporting each other. It was widely recognised by male participants that sport was a vehicle for being accepted and popular and for achieving success, by being acknowledged and held in high esteem by others. With this came pressure to continually perform well to maintain this level of popularity. Males in particular felt pressure in team sports not to let other team mates down. While they did not like 'failing' they said they were able to bounce back

from disappointments. Participants discussed lunchtime games being played between groups of students of different ethnicities.

Very few played sport after leaving school citing a lack of connection to local clubs, a change in focus away from sport and not wanting to meet the commitment requirements needed to participate. Some participants felt they had activities or spare time interests but these were not what they termed hobbies; interests involved participating but for many also included watching and support roles.

Many wanted to experience overseas travel. They felt that New Zealand could not offer them the opportunities and variety of experiences that they could experience elsewhere. Friends and media representation of overseas places and destinations were a strong influence on these perceptions.

## SAMOAN DATA

A total of thirty interviews were conducted with young people of Samoan ethnicity living in the Counties, Manukau region of New Zealand. Participants were equal numbers of males and females, aged between 13 and 27 years.

Seventeen participants were born and brought up in New Zealand and thirteen participants were born in Samoa and migrated to New Zealand at a young age. All lived in Mangere, Papakura, Otara, Manurewa, Papatoetoe or Otahuhu.

At the time of the interview, twelve participants were still attending school, being at different stages of intermediate and secondary school while four participants were attending a tertiary institution. Ten participants reported that they were in full time employment and four participants reported being unemployed. Of those unemployed, two females reported being 'stay at home' mothers whose husbands were in full time employment.

## ENVIRONMENTS

### *Fa'asamoa*<sup>3</sup>

Fa'asamoa, the Samoan way, embraces the strength of structures and values embedded within the Samoan culture. Participants drew a clear distinction between what they perceived to be values of fa'asamoa such as respect, submission to authority, perceptions of gender roles (differential treatment of boys and girls); and the cultural practices or institutions of fa'asamoa such as faalavelaves<sup>4</sup> or the tradition of giving money to the immediate and extended aiga<sup>5</sup> or to the church, doing feaus<sup>6</sup> or tasks around the home, customary practices/protocol and knowledge of the language. All participants acknowledged that fa'asamoa took the form of both values and cultural practices and that both were equally important in identifying with their Samoan heritage. These values and principles were instilled in participants by their parents from a young age and reinforced by the church, their peers and their extended aiga.

Most participants agreed that fa'asamoa is a 'way of life' and dictates how participants act and react to issues and concerns that they face in everyday life. Since it governs much of what is done within their family, their home and the wider Samoan community, participants 'automatically' understood the importance of upholding their cultural values and were generally aware of the consequences for failing to comply with cultural norms, as well as support from aiga for appropriate behaviours.

An important issue for participants is respect - respect for their parents and respect for their elders. As the child, participants accepted that they were not allowed to do certain things such as questioning their parents' or elders' authority as to do so would be disrespectful. This was seen as a major problem for many participants as they often felt forced into obeying their parents wishes even when they differed from their own. With limited room to negotiate or compromise with their parents, many participants expressed feelings of pressure, anger and frustration at not being able to voice their own opinions and concerns.

However, many of the older participants agreed that as they have grown older, their parents have become less controlling of their affairs and are increasingly able to voice their opinions in family discussions. This was seen as being a positive development for participants as they have become more involved in the decision making process of family and personal affairs.

Although many participants expressed negative views on the notion of respect, the data clearly indicates that participants valued respect. Having respect was valued, as being respectful made them 'good', 'polite' people. For example, several participants spoke of seeing friends or peers answering back to their parents or elders, and commented that they did not like this as it was disrespectful and

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<sup>3</sup> The Samoan way of life.

<sup>4</sup> Literally 'disruptions in daily lives'. In this sense, it is used to describe the financial assistance given to family for occasions such as weddings, funerals etc.

<sup>5</sup> Family

<sup>6</sup> Work or tasks

displayed poor manners. Therefore, although participants felt that being 'respectful' was a desirable value, they understood that some elders could take advantage of it to exert unreasonable control and power over their children.

The notion of 'respect' in the fa'asamoa, particularly with regard to parents was also a major theme in key informant interviews. Many acknowledged the frustrations and anger young people experience as a direct result of not being able to challenge their parents' authority, and their sense of obligation and duty to obey their parents. This aspect of fa'asamoa was seen as the major source of conflict with young people, particularly when they want to do things that may be against their parents' wishes. Participants also felt that although parental attitudes towards respect were the major problem, parents cannot be blamed for this because it was part of the fa'asamoa and therefore difficult to change. For the most part, participants felt that the best way to deal with it was to try and get young people to understand the cultural values which bound their parents to this notion. The point that parents 'are only doing the best they know' was often reported by key participants. Teaching Samoan young people ways of dealing with these problems by getting them to understand and look at it from a cultural view and from their parents' perspectives was seen as the way to allow young people to understand and make sense of their experiences.

Other aspects of fa'asamoa frequently discussed by participants were fa'alavelaves and gender roles. In relation to fa'alavelaves, all participants reported the cultural obligations on their families and themselves to give money to fa'alavelaves such as weddings or funerals that arose within their extended aiga or church family. Many participants reported that while they agreed with the family support system and helping each other in times of need, they also felt that there was a tendency for their parents, and Samoan people in general to give more than they could afford. As a result of this, many participants often viewed that generally, fa'alavelaves were a strain and financial burden on their families. Many felt that 'giving' should always reflect their own financial abilities. Unfortunately, several participants felt that their parents always gave too much money, and because of this they would often struggle to pay their own bills and household expenses.

Female participants commented on the issue of gender roles in the fa'asamoa more so than male participants. Specifically, female participants felt that they were not treated equally with their male siblings or cousins when it came to such things as going out, having intimate partners or doing feaus. Though most female participants expressed anger and frustration at the differential treatment of boys and girls, most accepted this as being part of fa'asamoa and that every Samoan girl is subject to the same rule.

### **Community**

Participants expressed differing opinions regarding their community or physical location. The data reflects that participants' opinions were based largely on the perceptions that the wider community had of South Auckland, the negative experiences participants had with their peers at school and around the neighbourhood. Many participants felt that the negative perception of South Auckland held by wider society was attributable to media coverage focusing primarily on negative issues such as crime, poverty and underachievement.

A few participants reported that the value of education and its perceived benefits was a major factor in determining which secondary school they attended. These participants reported that their parents sent them to out of zone schools which they thought would be better academically than their local schools. Reasons for this included the poor academic results of students attending schools in south Auckland, poor disciplinary issues, and the widely held belief that south Auckland was full of 'poor Polynesian under achievers'. A few participants felt that if they had attended school in South Auckland, they would not have the same tertiary and employment opportunities as those who attended schools in other localities.

Several participants had positive views of growing up in South Auckland, because of the cultural diversity of the community, and their friends. The cultural diversity contributed to a sense of 'belonging' based both on familiarity with their surroundings, but more importantly familiarity with their peers and their predominantly Pacific community. A few participants expressed great pride in belonging to South Auckland, and even reported instances where they would have to defend themselves against people who would make negative comments about their community.

### ***Employment and Occupation***

Only a third of our participants reported that they were currently in full time employment. Several of these participants reported that they were also involved in some form of paid employment when they were younger and still in secondary school. Only one participant who is currently attending school reported that she was involved in part time employment for a few hours per week.

Most employed participants indicated that financial hardship was a major factor influencing them to enter the workforce into full time employment. A few participants reported that after they completed secondary school, they entered some form of tertiary education but abandoned their studies to look for a job so that they could help their parents who were struggling financially. The majority of participants indicated that they worked in a range of occupations including customer services, warehouse store men, secretarial services, factory work and one participant who indicated that she was a barrister.

Most participants reported positive experiences within their employment environment, expressing positive, supportive relationships with their work colleagues, satisfaction in the work, and for most participants the ability to help their parents out financially.

### ***Economics***

Most participants grew up in low socio-economic families, experiencing financial struggle throughout their lives. Therefore, in general, money or the lack of money was an important issue for most participants.

Several participants reported the financial struggles they had growing up and the negative effects and consequences it had on them. For example, when speaking about their childhoods, many participants spoke about things that they did not have or could not have because of their financial situation. This would include necessities such as lunch, clothes and school stationery. Their financial situation also impacted on other activities such as sport, where their parents could not afford to pay for their sports equipment.

As was discussed in the Fa'asamoa Summary, most participants attributed their financial hardship to the practice of giving money to fa'alavelaves. As a result of this, a few participants reported that they went out and found employment so that they could make some money for themselves or to help out their parents. While most participants reported that they were more than happy to help their parents out, a few participants reported resentment at having to contribute towards family fa'alavelaves and bills.

### ***Church***

All participants reported that they had attended at least one church service at some point in their lives with many reporting that they still attended church regularly. For the most part, attending church every Sunday with their family was compulsory, and was seen as being part of a young Pacific Island child's life. However, participants reported that attendance became optional as they became older.

Several participants reported that they attended Samoan churches. Of these participants, very few commented on any positive spiritual feeding they received from those within their church environment. Rather, participants felt that, Samoan churches were cultural institutions within which fa'asamoa was strictly maintained and reinforced by the minister and parishioners – Samoan churches were all about money, fa'alavelaves and financial hardship. Most frequently discussed was the cultural practice of giving huge amounts of money to the church for fa'alavelaves such as fundraising events, weddings, funerals or weekly donations, which would pay for the operational costs of the church, such as electricity, mortgage repayments. Also included were the minister's wages, household and car maintenance bills. Many participants felt that this practice stemmed from a widely held belief that generosity and giving was the 'righteous' thing to do.

A few participants reported that they attended Palagi churches and that the main reason for this was to escape the financial obligations of Samoan churches. These participants spoke positively of the spiritual feeding they received and the positive relationships they had with members of their church

family, especially those who belonged to their church 'youth group'. These participants spoke positively of the fellowship, support and guidance they received from their peers and leaders.

## **EDUCATION**

### ***The value of schooling***

All participants reported the importance of a good education and the expectations placed on them by their parents and extended aiga to achieve well at school. For the most part, participants felt that achieving well at school and going onto university would give them more of an opportunity to get a good job to support themselves and their family. Education was seen as the key to a secure future. The placing of a high value on education and a 'better life' is a recurrent theme with parents. This leads to the large amount of parental control over areas of participant's lives where parents feel that such activities or influences will be a barrier to the participants attaining those objectives. Linked to these expectations are the reasons why their parents migrated from Samoa 'to have a better life' and they expected the participants to be more successful economically than they are.

The value of education and its perceived link to economic success was a major factor in determining which secondary school they attended, path, expectations to achieve highly in exams, expectations to attain university qualifications and the expectations to go into a certain career path.

### ***Primary School***

Most participants spoke positively of their primary school years. Very few participants viewed primary school as an institute for learning – school was a place to have fun spending time with friends and not worrying about schoolwork or their future.

The data clearly indicates that having friends and getting on with their peers was an important factor in determining whether participants had enjoyable primary school experiences. Participants who reported having positive relationships with their peer groups reported more enjoyable experiences than those participants who did not. A few participants reported negative experiences because they had no friends or were alienated and bullied by their peers.

### ***Secondary School***

For the most part, participants reported negative experiences of secondary school, due primarily to increased pressure from people around them, increased bullying, personality clashes with teachers and peers, difficulty with the schoolwork and increased negative peer pressure.

The high expectations and pressure placed on participants to achieve academic success plagued participants throughout their secondary school experience. Many reported the anger and frustration they felt at the huge amount of parental control which restricted them from going out with friends, participating in 'normal' activities such as watching television and being forced to study hard and fulfill their church and home commitments.

Despite the huge amounts of pressure and frustration participants felt regarding the expectations placed on them by their parents, participants never confronted their parents or challenged them because they understood that to do so would be disrespectful. Furthermore, participants expressed a need to gain their parents approval by achieving the success they wanted and also a need to ensure that their parents would 'look good' in front of their extended aiga and the wider Samoan community.

Participants coped with the pressure in a number of ways including confiding and talking their problems out with siblings, cousins or peers and escaping from their problems through the use of alcohol or drugs.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### ***Parents***

All participants expressed that they placed a high value on family. Furthermore, parents were seen as central to the family. The importance of family was stressed with most participants agreeing that family was of utmost importance, and would take precedence over other commitments. Elements of the family deemed important by all participants included obligation and duty to parents, respect, customs, strict discipline and love.

An overwhelming sense of obligation and duty towards parents was clearly the main element expressed by all participants. It is clear that this sense of obligation was largely due to participants' perceptions of what it means to be respectful as was discussed in the Fa'asamoa summary. All participants acknowledged that it is this 'respect' for their parents which controls the relationship between child and parent. This respect allowed parents to assume control over participants and the control extends to all the different areas of the lives of participants including who their peers will be, their spiritual values, their cultural values, their money, their leisure time and the value of schooling. Participants accepted that this parental control and the obligation to obey and respect their parents were 'normal' for Samoan children.

### ***Siblings***

Most participants reported strained relationships with their siblings when they were younger with physical and verbal fights being a common occurrence. Many attributed this to their young age and not 'knowing any better'. However, all participants reported that as they 'matured', their relationships with their siblings improved greatly and many discussed the close bond that they now had with them. For the most part, participants considered their siblings as their greatest source of support, comfort, protection and help especially from older siblings. A few participants who had younger siblings commented on their general annoyance with younger siblings who they regarded as 'immature', but still reported close bonds with them.

### ***Extended Aiga***

Very few participants reported that they see their extended aiga on a regular basis. For the most part, participants reported only seeing their extended aiga on special occasions such as family weddings, funerals, birthdays or reunions. Although participants acknowledged the lack of contact they had with their extended aiga, most participants reported that they had positive relationships with them and would look forward to occasions in which they would see each other again. Many spoke of close relationships they had with their cousins whom they would spend time having fun with. Participants also reported positive support networks within their extended aiga especially during difficult times such as the death of a loved one. These participants reported that their cousins were a great comfort to them during this time.

A few participants reported that they had been brought up by their grandparents whom they regarded as their parents. These participants all reported positive, supportive relationships with their grandparents and many participants reported being a lot closer to their grandparents than they were to their parents. Other participants also reported close relationships with their grandparents whom they could always rely on to help them out when needed. Indeed, many considered their grandparents, particularly their grandmothers as their protector whom they could run to when they were in trouble with their parents.

Very few participants reported negative relationships with their extended aiga. Negative reports focused primarily on family, fa'alavelaves academic and financial competitiveness.

### ***Peers***

Having friends and getting on with their peers was very important for participants, particularly when they were going through school. The data clearly indicates that this was an important factor in determining whether or not participants enjoyed positive school experiences. Several participants reported that they enjoyed school because they were accepted by their peers. A few participants

reported being alienated or bullied by their peers and for the most part, school was a negative experience for them. Friendships were formed on the basis of commonalities such as similar class backgrounds, sports interests, music interests and academic abilities.

Friends were seen as the major source of support and comfort for participants when they felt overwhelmed by pressure at school or home, and were often the only people that participants would approach for help dealing with these pressures. For the most part, participants acknowledged that although friends were often unable to provide them with solutions to their problems, being able to talk to them and 'let out' their frustrations was a helpful release of tension.

Several participants reported that they hung out with the 'wrong crowd' at school and were easily pressured by their peers negative influences including wagging school, consuming drugs and alcohol and committing crime. However, as participants have matured, they have tended to stay away from groups they thought would have negative influences on them.

## **ISSUES**

### ***Identity***

Feelings of alienation and rejection by their Palagi and other ethnicity peers during early school years because they were a minority ethnic group was frequently mentioned by participants. As a result of this, many participants were ashamed of their heritage and would not identify themselves as Samoans for fear of being ridiculed and teased. However, most participants reported that when they reached high school, the number of Samoans attending school increased and thus, all participants underwent a renewed sense of pride in their Samoan identity as they drew 'strength in numbers' through forming friendships with their Samoan peers.

The majority of participants fell into three distinct groupings in relation to how they identified themselves and the problems they had with belonging or 'fitting in' with their Samoan heritage. Clear distinctions were made between New Zealand born Samoans, Samoan born Samoans, and those participants of mixed Samoan ethnicity. However, all categories of participants felt that identifying with their Samoan ethnicity was important in being 'Samoan'. Knowledge of the language, knowledge and adherence to the fa'asamoa were identified as key components of ethnic identity that affected the way participants perceived themselves.

Many New Zealand born Samoans and participants of mixed Samoan ethnicity identified similar problems in relation to the pressure and alienation they experienced from their peers, and the ways in which they dealt with them. Several New Zealand born Samoans felt pressure from their Samoan born peers and elders to prove how 'Samoan' they were by understanding and adhering to the fa'asamoa. Similarly, participants of mixed Samoan ethnicity felt this pressure, but unlike the New Zealand born participants, no distinction was drawn between Samoan born and New Zealand born Samoans. Rather, this group of participants reported they experienced alienation from their 'full' Samoan peers regardless of their country of birth. As a result, these two groups of participants thought that it was important to become very involved in their customary cultural practices, and fluent in the Samoan language. By doing so, participants felt a sense of identity and belonging to their Samoan heritage, and peer groups.

Samoan born participants reported a strong sense of cultural identity based on their adherence to their fa'asamoa and having being born and brought up in Samoa in the early stages of their lives. Indeed, many of these participants felt they were more 'Samoan' than their New Zealand born peers because of their unquestioned acceptance of the fa'asamoa values. For the most part, strict adherence to fa'asamoa and being fluent in Samoan were reported as being the major differences between Samoa born and New Zealand born participants.

Participants agreed that balancing fa'asamoa and the culture of mainstream society was a challenge, but a necessity for Samoan young people in New Zealand. All participants spoke of the pressures of juggling the two cultures. For the most part, participants expressed feelings of frustration and

annoyance at ‘double standards’ – having to balance their fa'asamoa values within the family, home and church environment and the mainstream Palagi values at school or in wider society.

### ***Discipline***

Participants generally agreed that discipline, both in the school and at home, was an important issue in their upbringing as a Samoan young person. A number of Samoa born participants commented that the discipline was severe in the schools that they attended in Samoa, where punishments for disobedience could include being ‘whacked’ with a stick, or ‘hard labour’ which included cutting the school lawn during school hours.

Most Samoa born participants believed that there are some differences in the discipline of children in Samoa and New Zealand, often commenting on different strategies employed by their friends’ parents, such as ‘time out’ or being ‘grounded’. However, New Zealand born participants reported that growing up, they often received harsh disciplinary measures from their parents.

Participants generally associate getting ‘hidings’ from their parents with being disciplined, and stated a variety of reasons for getting hidings, which included disrespecting authority, disobedience, wagging school, fighting with their siblings, and fighting with their school peers. Few participants stated that they were given hidings other than for disciplinary measures.

However, despite the hidings and discipline participants expressed that they accepted that getting hidings was part of growing up and believed it was positive for their personal development. A few participants commented that the lack of discipline of their parents towards their younger siblings was negative for their siblings as they have developed ‘wild’ streaks, were disrespectful and undisciplined. For most of the older participants (18-27 years), the situation in terms of receiving hidings improved as they got older.

### ***Alcohol***

Most participants reported having tried alcohol at some point in their lives. For the most part, first times were shared with family members or friends in their early teens (13-16 years). After the initial experimenting with friends and family, very few participants reported that they still drink or that they drink heavily. For the most part, alcohol would be consumed, on social occasions such as family parties, as a means of escaping from pressures, to fulfill their need to have the approval of their peers; and at ‘aftermatch’ functions for their sport.

### ***Drugs***

Most participants reported that they had never tried drugs primarily because of the health related risks and dangers associated with drugs. Though, most participants reported that they could access drugs through peers at school, they have not felt the ‘need’ to ‘go down that road’, preferring to indulge only in alcohol. However, a few of the male participants reported that when they were younger (16-18), they regularly consumed drugs (marijuana) to relax and release the tension and pressures going on in their lives. These participants felt that being ‘high’ was the ultimate stress reliever, and the only option available to them that allowed them to escape. However, these participants reported that they no longer feel the need to take drugs as they have become more involved with their church youth groups and have formed strong, supportive relationships with their peers.

### ***Risks***

Participant’s descriptions of ‘risky’ behaviours included alcohol and drug consumption, smoking, criminal activities such as theft, sneaking out of the house and disobeying parents. Although some of the participants’ behaviours are not risky per se, they are included in this category because of the punishments that were imposed when parents found out about such behaviour. ‘Risky’ behaviour in this category included sneaking out of the house, nightclubbing and having an intimate partner without parents’ permission. All participants understood what the consequences of disobeying their parents would be (for the most part, getting a hiding) but that it was not enough to dissuade them from partaking in ‘risky’ behaviour. For the most part, participants reported that they participated in ‘risky’

behaviour because it was 'fun', they had nothing better to do or they were pressured into doing it by their peers.

Male participants in particular reported partaking in criminal activities when they were still in High school. Criminal activities included car theft, aggravated robberies, vandalizing property (tagging) and shoplifting. These participants reported that they no longer partake in these activities as they were only a result of the 'wrong crowd' they used to associate with.

### ***Sexuality***

Several of the older participants (over 18 years) discussed the differences with their past and current intimate relationships. Many reported on 'experimental' short term relationships when they were younger compared with the longstanding supportive, loving relationships they experienced in later years. Most of the younger participants (under 18 years) reported that they did not have an intimate partner because their parents would not allow it. The main reason for this was the high value and importance that their parents placed on education and their belief that being in an intimate relationship could be a barrier to achieving academic success. This parental attitude was also reported by many of the older participants as being the case when they were growing up. However, most participants accepted that this was part of being 'Samoan', with many agreeing with their parents views.

Four participants identified themselves as homosexual. Participants described their experience growing up as a constant struggle to hide their sexuality from their parents, peers and family, for fear of bringing shame upon themselves, their family and ridicule from wider society. Losing the love and support of their family and extended aiga was paramount in their decision not to disclose their sexuality. At the time of the interview, only two participants had reported that their families knew that they were homosexual. Of these two participants, only one reported having the full support and love of his family. Those participants who reported that they had not yet 'come out' with their parents felt that this was because there was a general understanding within their family that homosexuality was something to be embarrassed about and wrong. Most participants described their siblings as being their main source of comfort when they are ridiculed by others or are feeling overwhelmed by the pressure of trying to hide their sexuality.

### ***Coping strategies***

Participants engaged in a range of coping strategies to deal with the pressures and problems including, withdrawal, avoidance, confiding in siblings, friends or members of the extended aiga, praying, alcohol and drugs.

Reactions were gendered with female participants being more likely than male participants to withdraw, with many reporting locking themselves away in their room to 'have a good cry'. This was seen as a positive short term release of tension. Female participants were also more likely to confide in friends, siblings and cousins for support and comfort. Male participants were more likely to consume alcohol and drugs as means of escaping from their problems. Although most participants reported that this was only a short term solution as their problems were only 'pushed aside' for a little while, they could not think of any better way to deal with them.

### ***Death***

Only a few of the participants mentioned death during the course of the interviews. With the exception of one female participant, death was only mentioned and discussed if it was one of the participant's parents. The topic was usually brought up after the participant was asked to describe a negative experience or down time in their lives. For all participants, the loss of their parent was described as being the saddest times of their lives. A few participants also described initial feelings of anger and guilt, often blaming themselves over the deaths. However, through the support and comfort of their family and extended aiga, these participants were able to work through their grief and accept that they were not to blame.

Participants reported that the main way in which they handled the loss was through fellowship with their family and the knowledge that finally their loved one had found peace and rest. Many talked

about the support of their extended aiga especially their cousins, and their church family who would often spend time comforting them. For most participants, just being able to talk about their feelings and remembering the good things that they had with their parent have been great sources of comfort. Many participants also reported that they grew spiritually from the experience, reporting that it was through their belief and faith in God that they were able to handle their sadness.

### ***Recreation***

Several participants, particularly male participants reported that they were involved in regular sporting activities. Only two female participants reported that they played sport on a regular basis with the majority being restricted to participating in sport only in school P.E class. Sports discussed included rugby union, rugby league, netball, basketball, soccer and tennis. Most participants reported that the primary motivation for participating in sports was because it was 'fun'. Indeed, for many of the male participants, school was considered 'fun' and 'enjoyable' only because of the sports they were involved in, either competitively for school or lunchtime rugby matches with their friends. Male participants in particular admitted that playing sport was often the only reason they would go to school. Positive reports of being in school sports teams included winning sports competitions and matches often described by many as being some of the 'happiest' time of their lives, socializing, and being 'popular'. Similarly, a few male participants described winning sports tournaments as being some of the 'happiest times' of their lives.

## **PAKEHA DATA**

A total of thirty interviews were conducted with young people of Pakeha ethnicity living in the Counties, Manukau region of New Zealand, mainly in Manurewa, Papatoetoe and Papakura but also Hunua, Waiuku and Pukekohe. Participants were equal numbers of males and females, aged between 12 and 24 years. Most participants were born and brought up Counties/Manukau and all but one were born in New Zealand.

At the time of the interview, twenty-one participants were still attending school, being at different stages of intermediate and secondary school, and one was attending a tertiary institution. Eight participants reported that they were in full time employment; none were married or had children.

## **ENVIRONMENTS**

### ***Culture***

Most of our participants were somewhat limited in their response to this issue, expressing confusion as to their own cultural identity. A number asserted that they had no culture or adopted broad labels such as New Zealander, white or naming of country of origin of parents or forebears. For those who did attempt to elaborate, there was acknowledgement that Christian religion was part of it and that accent or dialect of English was relevant. Others noted that the seemingly happy and unproblematic relations of primary school days became much more fraught and difficult at secondary school. Some participants stated that their culture was boring and implied that it could best be identified by default in relation to other socially marked cultures.

Some participants argued that there were no significant or essential differences between themselves and 'cultured' friends and in particular that there were no grounds for racism and prejudice. A number of participants asserted a knowledge of and interest in Maori and Pacific cultures, identifying friendships, relationships, and knowledge of languages as crucial contact points at which racial/ethnic prejudices and barriers dissolve into understanding and mutual respect. Those who had active contacts with Maori and Pacific people experienced criticism from peers and families, acknowledged positive and negative aspects to such cultures and were aware that they still carried manageable areas of prejudice despite the contact. A further comment implied that relations at the personal level were at least in part dependent upon political contexts such as land claims to the Waitangi Tribunal that could become a cause of controversy and dispute in intercultural friendships.

### ***Community***

Counties/Manukau, having both rural and urban environments and communities evoked different responses and experiences for participants. Urban participants reported mixed impressions naming specific locations as dangerous often in relation to ethnic tensions but insisting that people and places were always a mixture of good and bad. Some stated that the streets were not safe particularly at night and reported feelings of insecurity (actual break-ins) in their homes. Several participants reported avoiding use of public spaces and amenities for fear of bullying. A small proportion expressed the desire to leave the area for more attractive locations. Others reported no problems and good relations with neighbours and community people, and argued that the district provided for all their needs in terms of work, leisure time, socialising and access to quality outdoor environments for recreations.

Rural dwellers in Counties/Manukau presented a different impression of the lived environment. The emphasis was on the isolation from friends, social and sporting activities, services and amenities and the balance of these difficulties against the safety and tranquility of country living. These features tend to create insularity within social groups and a strong reliance on parents to provide transport. Aside from farming the rural environment was seen to provide limited employment opportunities leaving young people exposed to having to commute long distances or leave the district for jobs. Country roads were seen as a source of danger in their own right because of the speed of travel and acted as a further limitation on the movement of young people who were not drivers themselves.

### ***Economics***

A considerable proportion of our participants come from middle to upper income families which have rarely experienced major financial stress. Under about fifteen years of age the common scenario is of a

moderate (\$5/week) amount of pocket money from parents given without expectation of reciprocity. Participants report spending their pocket money on minor consumer items (takeaways, music, videos) or sometimes requirements such as bus fares, while their parents fund them into all regular or major requirements (clothes, sports gear, uniforms etc). Some parents require household chores in return for pocket money and others offer the opportunity to earn more through household work. Some participants reported working at external jobs (paper rounds, baby sitting) and budgeting their earnings to fund large purchases (bicycle), or saving for unspecified goals. Older participants report a growing aspiration toward financial independence, wanting to meet their own needs for spending on clothes, fast food alcohol etc, and budgeting toward major items such as cars, while still welcoming parental contributions on some items. Many had part time jobs and some were in full time employment. Some working participants experienced stress over financial pressures as they juggled costs of training, returning home to live as a short term budgetary measure. A small proportion of participants experienced having little money in the family during childhood especially in the case of sole parent families.

### ***Employment and Occupation***

Over two thirds of our participants (including more than half of those at school) reported being in part time employment ranging from two to fourteen hours per week. Aside from the pleasure of having money (and thus some financial autonomy) the stories also express a satisfaction in the work as such and a valuing of the work environment as a supplement to the background of school and home. The range of work was wide and included paper round, farmhand, fast food operator, shop or petrol station attendant, waitressing, amusement park attendant, selling diverse items (clothes, roses), fruit/vegetable picking, kennel attendant and calf-raising. The participants who chose not to work did so for a variety of reasons including the need to study, maintaining family contacts and the need for rest. All participants who had left school were in fulltime work in a range of trade and professional/ training occupations including fast foods management, computer technician, butchery, computer software development, camera hand and joiner.

## **EDUCATION**

### ***Early memories***

The earliest memories of our participants were overwhelmingly of happy security centred on family, friends and early childhood education. Most recall stable family settings or managed mobility around parental jobs, in which friendships and family relations were nurturing and stimulating. There were a diverse array of experiences of play, friendships, food, toys, celebrations and occasional accidents. Nearly all participants reported having attended at least one (and sometimes multiple) early childhood education centres such as kindergarten, playcentre or daycare. Most participants found these experiences enjoyable and invigorating although there were some accounts of the anguish of learning to be left and the feeling of being juggled between the schedules of working parents.

### ***Primary school***

Participants reported mostly happy memories of primary school, with a strong emphasis on the importance of friendships, kind supportive teachers, experimentation with possibilities in diverse areas of interest (academic work sport, drama, responsibility, mediation), the pleasure of unstructured sport/games in breaktimes and a generally low stress “carefree” period. To a much lesser extent there were negative comments on the difficulty of school transition, problems with bullying, reading difficulties and unpleasant teachers. Primary school seemed to blend seamlessly with community, peer and family orientations – parents tended to be more involved, friends lived close by, the home/school axis was the world – in ways that were not repeated at subsequent levels of schooling. Gender differentiation in terms of activities, friendships and parenting assumed increasing salience in memories of this life stage.

### ***Secondary school***

Most of our participants were either at or had graduated from secondary school and it was clearly a highly salient part of their life experience. Key insights were the valuing of the peer group as the main

context of their secondary schooling. Whether the overall educational experience was good or bad the issue of how they related to the peer group was vital. Those who remember a happy and fruitful time are those who report strong supportive friendships and a broader stimulating social circle. Participants who had a hard time at secondary school or even parts of it report feelings of isolation and alienation from their peers either from differences in orientation to issues such as drug use or religious affiliation or from the geographical effects of living in rural settings. Levels of social skill and problems with shyness with their school mates were sources of unhappiness or discontent for a number of participants. Growing awareness of gender as an organising feature of the school setting in terms of peer friendships, cross-gender relationships, preferred activities, academic orientation and forms of socialising was evident in the talk of many participants. In terms of the academic programmes there was a considerable appreciation of multi-teacher systems, of the positions of responsibility such as prefectures and of extracurricular activities such as sport and camps. Most participants reported good to excellent academic achievement and experienced strong self-motivation and the approval of peers and parents for success. Some expressed discontent with the range of options and extensions available and with the failure of some teachers to recognise and teach to student strengths. There was a profound dislike of the internally assessed Sixth Form Certificate and for petty and “pointless” school rules and disciplines.

### ***Achievement***

Participants oriented strongly to achievement and success and could cite important personal examples of such events. It is seen as important as a vehicle for external recognition that feeds into self-perceptions and self-esteem. It is a site at which peer and parental/family endorsement operates in positive and affirming ways. Achievements in a range of academic, cultural, sporting and personal arenas were widely seen as a product of personal qualities and abilities although some credit was also apportioned to families and peers, and to other powers (god). Although as a group participants were clearly no strangers to success, they expressed surprise and pleasure at their particular achievements. Several participants mentioned a circularity which saw them most interested and enjoying of things they were good at so that success and effort became self-sustaining.

Academic achievements were linked to futuristic schemas in terms of satisfying jobs, stable income and lifestyle options. Male participants spoke of competition, of winning and beating others for desired awards or outcomes. Female participants talked of more collaborative approaches to both work and play, citing negative consequences of heated competition.

While some participants reported being happy when they could show they were not “useless” in a particular sphere, many also offered failure as one of their deeper fears. For a number specific instances were recalled as strongly aversive and leading to corrective actions. Others cited the possibility of having the labelled “incompetent” attached to them, especially in work settings, as their worst nightmare.

### ***Future goals***

Participants were firmly focussed on career goals with even younger people talking about their hopes and choices. Older participants were mostly aiming for tertiary educational qualifications in their fields of interest or professional trades training and qualifications. Some participants were intending to start businesses or enter politics. Aside from career goals there were numerous expressions of the need to establish independence from parental family by going flatting, travelling, or earning their own income.

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### ***Parents***

Twenty-five of our thirty participants grew up and live in two parent households. Overall they report stable, supportive family situations in which their needs and desires are catered for through processes of negotiation within well-understood boundaries with significant consequences for breaches. An even mix of mothers’ and fathers’ roles was reported by most participants in terms of which parent was most valued as a source of advice and support. In terms of continuity of nurture, fathers were noted as more often absent or unavailable to engage with children in quality time through work and other external

commitments. Conflict within this environment occurs episodically, but is contained and managed in ways that older participants clearly signal are idiosyncratic but effective and meaningful contributions to their identity and well-being. Most participants report negotiations (often amicable) over parties, alcohol, curfews, intimate relationships, education and career choices. Both parents make equivalent contributions to such arrangements in most instances although some participants report a dominant parent supported by the partner. Conflicts arose for some participants over lack of clear boundaries to behaviour while others found very restrictive practices lead to concealment of their activities in “double” lives and subsequent recriminations at discovery.

### ***Extended family***

Relationships with extended family, especially grandparents were of considerable importance to participants, all of whom had at least some contact with their broader family circle. For younger participants especially frequent visits to grandparents who lived nearby seemed to be almost routine. They reported sharing interests (fishing, sports) and confidences with their elders and enjoying being treated to occasional gifts or shopping trips. Many also had friendships of varying degrees with cousins, either as local community members or via telephone, email contacts and more distant visiting. Special occasions such as Christmas and birthdays drew families together and certain shared locations (family bach) served as a focus. Some participants commented on the difficulties of keeping in touch amid the busy-ness of their lives and others noted the divergence of families as conflicts arose or interests shifted. Gossip and mutual antagonisms were given as reasons why some families seemed more disparate than related.

### ***Peers***

Participants were very clear that their friends and peers had been major influences on their well-being at multiple levels through a diverse array of issues. While ‘youth culture’ was not explicitly noted there is a backdrop of standards, expectations, norms, interests, behaviours and language that was common to what we were told. Localising a little there are populations of young people (school, community) that are reference groups to issues such as achievement, happiness, connectedness, identity and aspirations. Within and beyond such populations there are named groups (skatiers, surfies, boy-racers) identifiable and disciplinary over their own boundaries and mostly criticised for a certain narrowness as a result. Then there are friends who cluster and flow around the individual, creating and resolving petty (and momentous) tensions, pleasures, dangers and opportunities. Special friends (same sex and inter sex) reflect the intense daily interactions of confidante, support, debating partner, ally, conspirator. Some of the older participants talk about lovers or sexual partners who usually represent a further or perhaps different degree of intimacy. These diverse personal and impersonal relationships constitute a crucial part of the world of our participants where the mores and norms, defiance and variations of culture are being reformed among the peer group. Particular sites, especially school and community to a lesser extent take on extra significance in the arena of peer relations because these are the places where the individuals, groups and subgroups gather and interact. New or intermittent settings such as school or youth camps which threw new groups of people together were valued for the opportunities and new combinations that emerged. The importance of location was to some extent balanced by the use of electronic communications of various kinds, especially cellphone and text messaging but also by specific visiting, particularly for informants living in rural settings. Participants reported a sharp awareness of the roles, niches, cliques and power dynamics that pervade these sites and had strategies for managing tensions and maintaining their sense of self and identity in these contexts. Pressures could be acceded to or resisted and participants report instances of doing things (stealing, smoking, drinking, playing truant) against their better judgement because the group was encouraging. Equally the value of that support was noted in positive activities such as academic work, sporting and other achievements and in dealing with problems when they arose.

### ***Siblings***

Participants reported mixed experience in their relationships with their siblings. Reports of good relations were common with valued attributes including protectiveness, easy communication, role modelling, pseudo-parenting and general caring and attentiveness, especially from older brothers and sisters. Interestingly the reports of poor relations were mainly about younger siblings and ran the gamut of irritation, argument, physical and verbal fighting, and issues over power and control. A few

participants talked about feeling distant from their siblings and not caring or taking an interest in what they did.

## **ISSUES**

### ***Health***

Overall our participants are very healthy with only a few reporting chronic problems. The major issue among the latter was asthma which affected three and aside from that there were reports of one undiagnosed cardiac problem, and one case of cerebral palsy (overcome). Participants afflicted by these conditions talked mainly about their strategies for coping with and effectively overcoming their problem. Aside from these issues there were a few instances of infectious diseases (tonsillitis, glandular fever, and abscess) and the major remaining issue was sports injury. In all of their talk, although participants mentioned the inconvenience, irritation, and sometimes fear attached to their condition, the emphasis was on recovery and restoration of abilities or interests that were seen as temporarily suspended by the problem.

### ***Alcohol***

Participants widely regarded alcohol as a positive and desirable element in their social lives, enhancing self-confidence, signifying maturity, facilitating socialising, and relieving stress. While all of our participants under fourteen reported non-consumption, most over sixteen reported experimentation, bingeing, and at the older end of the age range, moderating their alcohol intake. All participants over sixteen years of age indicated that they had easy access to alcohol, either directly, or through their parents, peers or other co-operative purchasers. Many participants reported multiple experiences of harm arising from their use of alcohol, in areas such as work, schooling, relationships, family tensions, sexuality and violence. A number of participants articulated strong anti-drink drive positions and suggested the emergence of peer group norms around this issue. At the older end of the age range (early 20s) there was frequent mention of the moderation of earlier binge-oriented drinking into more stable (often high), manageable patterns of consumption.

### ***Drugs***

By a considerable majority our participants had little exposure to, knowledge of or interest in illicit drugs, with those under 14 all stating that they did not use them at all. Experimentation seemed to be common among users by age 15-16, but a high proportion of these participants had subsequently reduced their intake or abandoned illicit drugs (often in favour of alcohol and tobacco). Among this group there was also a perception that drugs are for “losers” or stupid people and are mostly the province of other groups by culture or sub-culture. The resistant participants were well aware of the use of illicit drugs at parties and clubs but were fearful of the cultures of supply, serious side effects and negative impacts on social and sporting life. Established users of illicit drugs were worried about the quality and side effects of what they bought and reported using the internet to obtain information to protect their health and safety in using. They also had confidence that the long term impacts would be minor because their choices (which included ecstasy, amphetamine, cocaine, ketamine, marijuana and LSD) were non-addictive, expensive and things that people grow out of. Aside from the culture of peer networks which were seen to encourage and enforce drug taking a key motivation for using these substances was that they represent a valid and harmless recreation.

### ***Risks***

Participants talk about risk in several different but related ways which demonstrate a broad knowledge of the interaction of behaviour and consequences across a wide range of issues including drugs (licit and illicit), sexuality, driving, theft/dishonesty, and future opportunities. A key distinction was made between the inherent risks of certain behaviours (eg narcotic use) and the risk of getting caught and having to face the legal consequences. In some instances legal sanction of behaviours were replaced by peer or broader social mores (eg unprotected sex). A further division was offered between relatively superficial, attention seeking actions such as shoplifting and defiant conscious rebellion against social standards. Another form of risk was the potential loss of peer group approval. Activities that could result in embarrassment (eg drinking to excess) or loss of respect (unfaithfulness to sexual partner)

were treated as real liabilities. Some usages were given a future orientation and current behaviours weighed up for example against the risk of addiction or educational failure. Finally there was an acknowledgement that in certain legitimate settings (eg extreme sports) considerable risk was a vital part of the attraction of the activity.

### ***Sexuality***

Participants over sixteen talked in some detail about their heterosexual sexual experiences. Female accounts demonstrate a cautious curiosity rather pressured by perceived male sex drives. Experiences ranged from wholehearted engagement in sexual relationships within a longstanding relationship to accounts of short term relationships and casual sex. Issues ranged from contraception and worries about parental reactions to their relationships, to peer pressure and concerns about STDs. A few participants talked about experiencing sexual harassment, sexual coercion, or pressure to have sex. Male participants talked about sex far less reporting only on issues such as talking to their parents and an intersection between religious belief and sex.

### ***Body perception***

There was a broad understanding that divergence from the shifting and elusive norms of peer group expectation would result in stressful scrutiny, judgement and criticism from peers. Concerns over body image were profoundly gendered with female participants discussing self- and peer-policed weight control practices, the mirage-like quality of the ideal body, fluctuations in body related self-confidence, and the stress of abusive labelling. Resistance to the normative pressures included defiant self-presentation, general critique of 'cool', explicit rejection of media images, and conscious 'protest dressing'. Very few boys commented on this issue but those that did noted that their body form was relevant to attracting girls, significant peer social occasions, and to social significance of participation in sport.

### ***Bullying***

Many participants reported experiences of being bullied, having friends who are victims, or being perpetrators themselves. Being on the receiving end was widely regarded as upsetting and unfair, and lead to persistent sequelae of fear, self-doubt, loss of confidence and anger. Bullying reportedly arose in a number of contexts including ethnic and gender tensions, body image and relationships. Experiences relate to both primary and secondary school and resulted in a number of strategies including strategic alliances, avoidance, changing behaviour patterns and involving adults in efforts to reduce the problem.

### ***Coping strategies***

Participants talked freely about reactions to diverse stressors, with denial, avoidance and repression, producing a range of escape, distraction and rationalisation strategies. Some participants had proactive approaches to difficulties and challenges including engagement with parental or peer confidantes, involvement in extension activities, emotional release, and direct confrontation. Reactions were gendered with boys citing fewer possibilities and less confidence in strategies involving help from others, while girls found support valuable and were more likely to seek creative solutions.

### ***Death***

A considerable number of our participants had experienced death at firsthand and talked about their engagement in and reactions to the events. Most frequently they had lost grandparents or siblings, but also peer group members through natural causes, accidents and suicide. A small number talked about death of family pets. Circumstances predictably determined levels and tenor of reactions which included grief, sadness, anger and puzzlement. Mostly there seemed to be a fairly matter-of-fact approach to death with an acceptance that the attendant emotions were a natural part of a natural process, and an ability to consider and discuss mortality especially in the peers group. Several participants talked about the death of people that they were close to for whom they were involved in the final stages of life, and of attending to the grief of family members and friends more deeply affected than themselves.

## ***Spirituality***

Participants fell into three broad equal-sized groupings in relation to spirituality which they almost universally interpreted in terms of Christian institutions. There were believers, agnostics and atheists and within each group there appeared to be both personal and social definitions in operation.

The most common individual stance was uncertainty as participants summed up their understanding of church-based Christianity and queried the meaningfulness of such practices to their own lives. There were reports of using church as an escape from chores or homework and to its eating into the time available for preferred leisure activities. Many participants had grown up in religious families where church attendance and related activities were coercive and a source of overt and covert tension. A number of participants reported having parted from churches but continuing to believe in god as a kind of individual arrangement about which they were uncertain of the meaning and significance. Others lived double lives hiding their family and/or personal beliefs in various ways (and often running into trouble in the process).

Of those who described themselves as Christian, the most common practices were episodic church attendance, participation in church youth groups, and an orientation to the church as a viable social environment. Some saw divine intervention in various successes they had enjoyed or regarded god and the teachings as a source of strength and support at times of stress and trouble

## ***Recreation***

Most participants were involved in regular sporting activities in a wide range of codes competitive and non-competitive. In addition a significant proportion were involved in regular and valued exercise regimes. Positive attributions to sports activities were especially around fitness, stress release, socialising and structuring of time. Individual pursuits such as extreme sports were named as personal motivating and identity producing activities. In general there was a strong linkage running through the data to the effect that sports required fitness which made a positive contribution to health and wellbeing. On the downside, participants reported serious injuries, feelings of exclusion for those deemed less able and negative impacts on peer relations where sport was constructed as 'uncool'. There was evidence of a distinct reduction in involvement during the mid to late teenage years followed by a resurgence in the early twenties. Aside for the impacts on 'cool' referred to above, reasons for these movements included disinterest in the competitive aspects, greater interest in socialising, work and family commitments, exhaustion, loss of fitness, and change of interests. For those participants who had uninterrupted sporting involvement, the role of an encouraging teacher or parent was reported as vital. There was also mention of supportive environments in which the pleasure and interest of talking about sports acted as an additional spur to continued engagement.

Travel overseas was a common experience with most participants having been away at least twice and a number stating that they were regular travellers. Mostly the trips were for family holidays or visits to relatives but also included were AFS exchanges and independent travel by older participants which were valued as a means of forging their own identities. The main insight that was reported among younger participants was that societies in the diverse locations were either more or less like home.

Beyond work, school and family activities, a number of participants reported that they participated in a range of extracurricular activities including Youthline and peer mediation; Duke of Edinburgh training and Spirit of Adventure sailings; local body youth advisory council, school council and prefect duties; girl guides and calf clubs; volunteer fire service and flying lessons.

Out of school recreational activities were enjoyed by a high proportion of our participants as an enjoyable and challenging addition to routine activities. Structured activities reported seem to focus on the learning and performance of various forms of dance and musical instruments. Jazz ballet and ballroom are the commonly reported forms of dance while music focussed on instruments and material from the classical and jazz repertoires. Martial arts training and competition and youth groups (Girl Guides, church) were examples of other more structured activities. Free time was split between indoor and outdoor pursuits; the latter including surfing, hut building, and 'hanging out' at the beach; the indoor activities which were the most widely reported included computer/internet games and activities,

play station, reading, model making, and listening to music. Older participants reported making use of local bars and clubs for drinking dancing, playing pool and other pastimes.

## COMMENTARY

The data contained in this report is obviously of a summary nature. Our intent is to provide an accessible overview of the project from which more detailed and analytic commentaries will follow.

Another important aim, and the reason why each ethnic module has been reported on separately, is to acknowledge the diversity of youth experience that we were presented with by participants. Gathering these voices together in a single document is our attempt to have them speak to each other while preserving their unique perspectives.

For these reasons although the four domains within which themes are grouped are uniform across modules, there is some variation in the headings under which themes are reported. This feature primarily reflects differences in what young people told us but may also to a lesser degree, reflect differences in approach within the three research teams.

One of the characteristics of the materials reported here is their ordinariness, a certain level of familiarity and perhaps comfort that emanates from them. While eschewing any claims to representativeness we suspect that this arises from both the process for the selection of participants, which oriented toward young people who were at least managing and not in any overt strife in their lives, and the style of data collection, which focussed on everyday experience while also welcoming accounts of the highs and lows of life.

Our sampling processes while purposive did not specifically seek participants across socio-economic strata or geographic location within Counties/Manukau. Thus on the latter point it is clear that the bulk of participants are drawn from central and southern districts of the region. In general terms qualitative research seeks diversity within its data bases but this is always constrained by the relatively small numbers that can meaningfully be drawn into such research. In this case we have chosen to emphasise age, gender and ethnicity at the expense of other variables but it is clear that there is nevertheless a range of experiences of other environmental factors.

We hope that the monograph will be a resource to communities and to policy and applied staff in local authorities and other organisations particularly those in Counties/Manukau where these data were gathered. Our work is ongoing in the more detailed description of insights from this and related databases, and in the process of developing viable theoretical schemata that relate to the Youth Development Strategy (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001) and applied programmes that will enhance the population level wellbeing of young people in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

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