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Youth Violence – Terminology, Statistics and Perceptions

2.1   To establish the scope of the inquiry, Chapter 2 considers definitions of the terms 'violence', 'bullying' and 'young Australian' as used in the terms of reference. In presenting an overview of the statistics on youth violence in Australia, the Chapter also outlines the difficulties associated with obtaining accurate and comprehensive data. The Chapter considers the impact of violence on young Australians, and concludes with an examination of young peoples' and community perceptions of violence and considers how this relates to feelings of personal safety.

Terminology and Definitions

2.2   When examining the impact of violence on young Australians, it is essential to have an agreed understanding of what precisely violence is, and who is included in the demographic 'young Australians'. As neither 'violence' nor 'young Australians' is defined in the inquiry's terms of reference, consideration of possible definitional variations is essential to establish the scope of the inquiry. Consideration of other terms used either in the terms of reference or in evidence to the inquiry (e.g. bullying, anti-social behaviour etc) is also warranted.

Defining Violence

2.3   There is generally no agreed or accepted definition of what constitutes violence. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), violence is defined as follows:

> ... any incident involving the occurrence, attempt or threat of either physical or sexual assault. Physical assault involves the use of physical force with the intent to harm or frighten. An attempt or threat to inflict physical harm is included only if a person believes it is likely to be carried out. Sexual assault includes acts of a sexual nature carried out against a person's will through the use of physical force, intimidation or coercion, or any attempts to do this.[1]

2.4   In its 2002 *World Report on Violence and Health,* the World Health Organisation (WHO) defined violence as:

> The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation.[2]

2.5   WHO identified the following three categories of violence:

- self-directed violence (e.g. self abuse and suicide);

- collective violence (e.g. social and political violence including war and terrorism); and

- interpersonal violence (e.g. family and intimate partner violence, community violence involving an acquaintance or stranger).[3]

2.6   The definition of violence is also contextual. In his submission, The Hon Dr Bob Such MP points out that the word 'violence' potentially encompasses a number of quite distinct behaviours 'from bullying to slapping to rape or even death - in a variety of contexts'.[4] For this reason The Hon Dr Such MP suggests that:

> More precise definitions of these variations would offer meaningful distinctions, essential for policy formulation and strategies to prioritise and address the problem.[5]

2.7   The scope for differential understandings of what violence is, was also raised by representatives of the Youth Minister's Roundtable of Young

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1   Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2006), *Personal Safety Survey 2005, Australia,* Cat No 4906.0, p 5.

2   World Health Organization (WHO) (2002), *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva.

3   WHO (2002), *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva.

4   The Hon Dr Bob Such MP, Submission No 15, p 1.

5   The Hon Dr Bob Such MP, Submission No 15, p 1.

Territorians who had surveyed nearly 500 young people living in the Northern Territory. As explained to the Committee, survey respondents reported various understandings:

> Many believe that violence is all encompassing of verbal, emotional and physical actions while others felt that violence is a physical action that is intended to cause harm and that violence and abuse are separate but not mutually exclusive issues. However, even with the division of ideas, the group agreed that the intent to cause harm is the underlying definition of 'violence'.[6]

2.8   Also, although not included in the inquiry's terms of reference, the term 'anti-social behaviour' was encountered frequently in evidence. As with violence, there is no precise or agreed definition of anti-social behaviour, but the term is understood to cover a range of aggressive, intimidating and destructive behaviours. These behaviours range from non-criminal activities such as swearing, noisy behaviour and binge drinking to criminal behaviours such as the use and/or sale of illicit drugs, property damage and theft.[7]

Links between Bullying and Violence

2.9   Bullying in recent years has been subject to intense interest from the media with some high profile cases where bullying has had severe consequences (including suicide), for the victims.[8] According to the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), the National Centre Against Bullying defines bullying as:

> ... the repeated and intentional use of negative words or actions by a person or group of people with more power against a person with less power which causes distress and risks wellbeing.[9]

2.10   Many have linked exposure to bullying and perpetration of bullying to the development of subsequent violent behaviour in the longer-term.[10] While

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6   Ms Hannah Woerle, Transcript of Evidence, 17 March 2010, p 1.

7   Williams J, Toumbourou J, Williamson E, Hemphill S & Patton G (2009), *Violent and antisocial behaviours among young adolescents in Australian communities: An analysis of risk and protective factors,* Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), p 19.

8   See for example: *Bullies Drove My Girl to her Death*, Herald Sun, 22 July 2009; *Time to Stop the Torment,* Herald Sun, 11 February 2010; *In Harm's Way*, The Age, 10 March 2010.

9   ARACY, Submission No 55, p 24.

10 See for example: National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc (NCSMC), Submission No 2, p 2; Nepean Domestic Violence Network, Submission No 18, p 3; Youth Advisory Council NSW, Submission No 25, p 2; ARACY, Submission No 55, p 24; Tasmanian Government, Submission No 56, p 3; Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 4.

it is clear that bullying behaviour and violent behaviour can, and do overlap, there was a lack of consensus in evidence as to whether bullying is always necessarily a form of violence. As explained by a representative of the Youth Minister's Roundtable of Young Territorians:

> The youth roundtable also believe that bullying and violence are not the same issue. Violence is often an outcome and is certainly an arm of bullying. If bullying can be caught in its earlier stages then many instances of violence could be prevented. It is important that bullying and violence are treated as separate issues with their own solutions, but both issues are as important as each other and both can have a devastating effect on young people.[11]

2.11   Bullying is recognised as a complex issue which can manifest in different ways (i.e. verbal and/or physical), involve different perpetrator and victim relationships (e.g. peer to peer, adult to young person, young person to adult) and occur in a variety of locations (e.g. school, workplace, home).[12] Submissions suggest that the prevalence of bullying behaviour is high, with approximately one in four Australian children experiencing bullying every few weeks or more often.[13] The emergence of new forms of bullying associated with changes in communications technology also featured widely in submissions.[14]

Defining Young Australians

2.12   Another consideration for the inquiry was to define the target population of 'young Australians'. While most submissions did not specify an age range for young Australians, many responded to the terms of reference with a focus on the young people between the ages of 12-25 years.[15] Focusing its considerations on young people aged 12-25 years, the Australian Government submission notes:

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11   Ms Hannah Woerle, Transcript of Evidence, 17 March 2010, p 1.

12   See for example: Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), Submission No 39, p 4; ARACY, Submission No 55, p 24; Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic), Submission No 60, pp 13-15.

13   See for example: NCSMC, Submission No 2, p 8; Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 15; YACVic, Submission No 60, p 13.

14   See for example: NCSMC, Submission No 2, p 8; Nepean Domestic Violence Network, Submission No 18, p 3; Cairns Community Legal Centre Inc, Submission No 23, pp 4-5; ACON, Submission No 30, pp 10-11; Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 7; Ms Rosemary O'Grady, Submission No 77, pp 7-8; Dr Adam Tomison, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 4.

15   Australian Government – Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) et al, Submission No 62, p 5.

> When defining 'young people', there are a number of definitions and age ranges for youth that are generally accepted.[16]

2.13   However, one submission which did address the issue of the target population directly argued strongly for the inclusions of children under 12 years of age, suggesting:

> ... [an] extension of the definitional boundaries applying to young people and youth issues to encompass the developmental needs of younger adolescents (i.e. aged 10 plus) ...[17]

Committee Comment

2.14   The terms of reference presented to the Committee did not define violence or specifically prescribe boundaries for the target population of 'young Australians'. While not explicit in the terms of reference, the Committee took interpersonal violence, rather than self-directed or collective violence, as the intended focus of the inquiry. Also, when using the term 'youth violence' the Committee supports a broad definition of violence which not only encompasses actual physical violence and assault, but also the threat of harm. With regard to the term 'anti-social behaviour' as used in evidence to the inquiry, the Committee understands that this refers to a range behaviours, which depending on the context of usage may or may not include violence.

2.15   The overlap and linkages between violence and bullying are also acknowledged. In keeping with the broad definition of violence, the Committee recognises that bullying can also be a form of violence which is sometimes a precursor to physical violence or assault.

2.16   Although again not explicit in the terms of reference, the repeated use of the phrases 'among young Australians' and 'by Young Australians' have been taken by the Committee to imply that the primary focus of the inquiry is peer to peer violence; that is violence involving young people both as the perpetrators and as the victims. Importantly, the term 'youth violence' used throughout the report is intended to encompass violence committed against young people as well as violence perpetrated by young people.

2.17   The Committee recognises the devastating impacts of domestic violence and child abuse on young people and notes that these occurrences may lead to increased risks of perpetrating violence on others and/or

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16   Australian Government - DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, p 5.
17   ARACY, Submission No 55, p 14.

continuing victimisation. The Committee believes that a detailed examination of these issues is beyond the scope of this inquiry. However, the Committee also notes that detailed consideration has already been given to both of these issues resulting in the 2009 report *Time for Action: The National Council's Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009-2021.*[18] Furthermore, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and in consultation with state and territory governments, the Australian Government has already initiated a series of priority actions in response to recommendations made in the *Time for Action* report.[19]

2.18   With regard to the inquiry's target population, the Committee is aware that, by any definition, young people are not a homogenous group. Clearly young people experience a number of very discrete developmental and transitional phases as they move from childhood to adolescence and from adolescence to young adulthood.[20] Therefore, in recognising the diversity of young Australians as a target population, the Committee has decided not to unnecessarily confine its considerations to a narrow or prescribed age group.

Data and Statistics on Violence in Australia

2.19   Data and statistics on violence and perceptions of violence in Australia are available from a number of different sources.[21] Data sources include:

- administrative data sets such as jurisdictional police data on recorded crime and data on hospital admissions;

- surveys and data from federal and state/territory government departments and agencies including the ABS (e.g. *Crime and Safety Survey*, *National Health Survey*, *Personal Safety Survey, General Social Survey)*; the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) (e.g. *National*

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18 Australian Government - Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) website, viewed on 15 February 2010 at http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np_time_for_action/Pages/default.aspx.

19 Australian Government - FaHCSIA website, viewed on 15 February 2010 at http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/pubs/violence/np_time_for_action/immediate_government_actions/Pages/default.aspx.

20 See for example: The Smith Family, Submission No 14, p 6; ARACY, Submission No 55, pp 13-14.

21 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Submission No 42, p 6.

Homicide Monitoring Program); the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (e.g. *National Drug Strategy Household Survey* and *Morbidity and Mortality databases*); and the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research; and

- research and surveys on levels of violence, crime and perceptions of personal safety conducted by academic institutions and community based organisations, such as Mission Australia's annual *National Survey of Young Australians* which provides information about the values and issues of concern to young Australians.[22]

Difficulties with Measuring Violence

2.20   Measuring actual levels of youth violence in Australia is difficult. For example, a major limitation of using data sets such a police crime statistics or hospital admissions is that only a small proportion of incidences are actually reported to the police, and fortunately, not all violence results in injury requiring hospitalisation. As explained in the submission from the Australian Government:

> It must initially be acknowledged that there is an inherent difficulty when relying on statistics to paint the whole picture concerning violence. Most of the statistics and reports ... only take into account reported cases of violence. While the rates of reported violence should not be dismissed, it is important to recognise that many cases of violence go unreported and will not be represented in statistics.[23]

2.21   Dr Kelly Richards from the AIC also explained that certain types of crime, including violent crime, are much less likely to be reported to the police than others, observing:

> The vast majority of things like domestic violence and sexual assaults are never reported to police and are never recorded by police. Other crimes—primarily homicides and motor vehicle thefts—are almost always picked up by the police. With homicides it is obviously because there is a dead body, and with motor vehicle theft it is because of insurance purposes. That proportion

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22   Mission Australia website, *National Survey of Young Australians: Key and Emerging Issues,* viewed on 9 June 2010 at http://www.missionaustralia.com.au/document-downloads/doc_download/207-youth-survey-2009.

23   Australian Government – DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, p 8.

of all crimes that are actually recorded varies substantially across the crime types.[24]

2.22   In relation specifically to assault, data from the ABS *Crime and Safety Survey* indicates that only a minority of young people (20%) aged 15 to 24 years will report their assault to the police. Various reasons were given with the most common being that they considered it too trivial or unimportant to report, followed by the assault being considered a private matter or one that they would take care of themselves.[25]

2.23   Consistent with this data, evidence to the inquiry also suggests that young victims of violence may be less likely to report incidents to the authorities, including to police. As explained by a young participant of the Committee's Youth Forum held in Melbourne:

> ... there is a definite under reporting due to lack of confidence, fear and no faith in the system as such. That includes police, schools, youth services and sports clubs. The first point of contact is very important.[26]

2.24   A number of reasons why under reporting of violence may be more prevalent among young people were given by Victim Support Australasia including:

- Young people may be silenced by a culture of not 'dobbing' or 'dogging'.
- Young people may have little faith in the likelihood of action being taken.
- Many young people will be willing to take action themselves (including retribution).
- The significant risk of this, is that through taking matters into their own hands young people heighten the risk of their own re-victimisation.
- Many young people have experience of the justice system and don't like what they've seen.[27]

2.25   With regard to levels of unreported crime, Dr Richards observed:

> We would call [unreported crime] the 'dark figure of crime'. We know it is out there, but it is not getting recorded. And we know it is out there because crime statistics, police statistics, vary

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24   Dr Kelly Richards, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 5.

25   ABS (2006), *Crime and Safety, Australia 2005*, Cat No 4909.0.

26   Jakob, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 3.

27   Victim Support Australasia Inc (VSA), Submission No 1, p 2.

> dramatically from what we find out about crime when we run a survey.[28]

2.26   Although acknowledging that police crime statistics probably provide the best currently available estimate of the levels and nature of juvenile offending, the AIC also noted difficulties in comparing police data from different jurisdictions, noting:

> Police data provide an insight into the proportion of crime for which juveniles are the alleged offenders. This proportion varies substantially by jurisdiction ... because of state/territory differences in legislation, police practice and data collection methods. It is therefore not possible to create an accurate national picture of juvenile offending ...[29]

2.27   An additional limitation associated with these datasets is that data is often available only in aggregated form, making it impossible to unpack, potentially hiding trends relating to specific types of crimes, populations or areas.[30] With regard to youth crime specifically, and as a subset of criminal activity more broadly, the AIC advised that it has only recently begun to collect this data, stating:

> We have only recently begun to monitor youth crime at the AIC. We have monitored juveniles in detention for a long time—for almost 30 years—but that is only the hard end, if you like, of juvenile offending. The broader picture of young people coming into contact with police and then what happens to them is something that we have only just begun to monitor.[31]

2.28   Furthermore, administrative datasets can also be influenced by a range of factors which although they might appear as trends in criminal activity or violence, may not actually reflect real changes. For example, while changes in crime statistics might reflect actual changes in rates of crime, they might also reflect changes in police responses to criminal activity[32] or changes in levels of reporting.[33] Given apparently significant levels of unreported crime and challenges associated with unpacking aggregated data, there are clearly risks associated with putting too great a reliance on administrative datasets.

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28   Dr Kelly Richards, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 5.
29   Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Submission No 57, p 3.
30   Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 19.
31   Dr Kelly Richards, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, pp 6-7.
32   Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, p 14.
33   Dr Adam Tomison, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 5.

2.29   While some national surveys of crime and personal safety, such as those conducted by the ABS may provide a more comprehensive picture of what is occurring, they also have their limitations. For example, and as noted by the ABS in relation specifically to its 2006 *National Personal Safety Survey*:

> Measuring violence in the community through household surveys is a complex task. It tests people's memories by asking about events that occurred in the past, which may have been traumatic and which may have involved people closely related to them. The accuracy of the statistics can be affected if respondents feel threatened by the act of providing information or if they are concerned that the information might be used against the perpetrator.[34]

2.30   While there are a number of national surveys which collect data on crime, personal safety and victimisation, none of these examine youth violence specifically. As with the administrative datasets, data from these national surveys is generally available only in aggregate form, making it difficult to unpack and identify issues that are specific to particular populations or look for emerging trends. Also, while some surveys are conducted on a regular basis enabling comparisons to be made over a period of time, this is often not the case for research projects, including those which may have a narrower focus on youth violence.

2.31   Although online surveys such as Mission Australia's *National Survey of Young Australians* which has been conducted annually since 2001, and indeed the online survey which was conducted as part of this inquiry, are useful for engaging with young people and obtaining descriptive information, their dependence on respondent self-selection rather than rigorous cross-sectional population sampling methods means that data is not statistically robust. As a result these findings cannot be extrapolated to the general youth population.

Committee Comment

2.32   While recognising the difficulties associated with measuring violence, the Committee appreciates that comprehensive and reliable data on youth violence is crucial to determining levels of violence, identifying emerging trends and to understanding the impacts of violence on young Australians. As summarised by the AIHW:

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34   ABS (2006), *National Personal Safety Survey, Australia 2005*, Cat No 4906.0, p 4.

> The ability and success of reporting on the health and wellbeing of young people is dependent on the availability of robust, reliable, national and jurisdictional data, which tracks progress over time.[35]

2.33 In addition to assessing the level and characteristics of youth violence, the Committee also understands that robust data collection would also help evaluate the efficacy of anti-violence interventions. While recognising the value and expediency of using administrative datasets, the Committee understands their limitations and the risks associated with relying too heavily on these datasets.

2.34 Rather than attempting to expand and modify administrative datasets, the Committee believes there is a strong case for improved data collection to be achieved through the introduction of a regular, cross-sectional survey designed specifically to measure the prevalence, nature and severity of violence involving young people and to monitor trends over time.[36] As proposed by Professor Paul Mazerolle of Griffith University:

> If every two or three years Australia had a national youth survey that was a snapshot and cross-sectional and you could compare it over time, that would be useful. You could look at changing prevalence rates, different levels of victimisation and attitudinal shifts. There is a lot of analysis underneath that with that kind of information and I think that is probably the best way to go and it would start telling us something meaningful about how big the problem is, how it is changing and where we need to target our prevention resources to really try to turn these kids around.[37]

2.35 Given the complexities of measuring violence, the Committee agrees that a cross-sectional community-based survey to measure the prevalence, nature and severity of youth violence and to monitor trends over times is necessary. The Committee believes that such a survey would most appropriately be conducted either by the ABS or the AIC.

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35 AIHW, Submission No 42, p 6.

36 See for example: ARACY, Submission No 55, pp 34-35; Associate Professor Sheryl Hemphill, Transcript of Evidence, 15 February 2010, p 49.

37 Professor Paul Mazerolle, Transcript of Evidence, 30 March 2010, pp 18-19.

Recommendation 1

2.36   **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, either
         through the Australian Bureau of Statistics or the Australian Institute of
         Criminology, implement a regular (biennial or triennial) cross-sectional
         community-based survey to:**

- **measure the prevalence, nature and severity of youth violence;
  and**

- **monitor trends over time.**

What is Known about Violence Involving Young People

2.37   Despite the challenges associated with measuring youth violence and its
         impact on young people, using available data it is possible to make a
         number of broad observations. However, the following sections are not
         intended to be a comprehensive review of all the data and research
         relating to youth violence in Australia.

Increasing Levels of Violence

2.38   Data from various sources in a number of jurisdictions indicate that
         violence, including violence involving young people, is a significant and
         growing problem for the community.[38] Despite challenges in obtaining an
         accurate national figure for youth offending, according to a representative
         of the AIC:

> ... in general, crime is declining and that has been happening for
> about the last 15 to 20 years, but violence is in fact increasing as a
> subset within that. I think we can comfortably say that violence by
> young people is in fact increasing, perhaps both in frequency and
> in severity.[39]

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38   See for example: Mr Kelvin Thomson MP, Submission No 10, p 2; Tasmanian Government,
     Submission No 56, p 2.
39   Dr Adam Tomison, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, pp 3-4.

Young People are at Increased Risk

2.39   While some datasets indicate increased levels of violence perpetrated by young people, others show that young people are also most at risk of being the victims of violence.[40] The following table (Table 2.1) is drawn from the ABS *Crime and Safety Survey 2005* and presents data on victims of assault. According to the survey, young people are the most likely to be the victim of assault with nearly 9% of young people aged 15–24 years being the victim of assault in the previous 12 months. The data shows that the prevalence of victimisation decreases the older a person is, with less than 1% of persons aged over 65 years being victims of assault. The average victimisation prevalence rate in the general population is 4.8%.

Table 2.1:   Victims of assault by age and sex

Age group (years)	Victims of assault			Victimisation prevalence rate[a]
	Males	**Females**	**Persons**	
	%	**%**	**%**	**(% of population)**
15–19	16.5	18.3	17.3	9.9
20–24	16.2	12.7	14.6	7.9
25–34	23.7	24.9	24.3	6.6
35–44	19.5	19.5	19.5	5.1
45–54	14.5	16.1	15.2	4.3
55–64	7.4	5.5	6.5	2.3
65 and over	2.2	3.1	2.6	0.8
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**4.8**

(a) Victimisation prevalence rate is the proportion of the relevant population that have been the victim of assault in a 12 month reference period.

Source: ABS (2006), Crime and Safety, Australia 2005, *Cat No 4909.0.*

2.40   Based on this, and other data from the ABS *Crime and Safety Survey 2005*, the AIHW concludes:

> Young people were also two times as likely to be the victim of assault, and three times as likely to be the victim of robbery, as the general population.[41]

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40   See for example: Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 2; AIHW, Submission No 42, p 2; ARACY, Submission No 55, pp 3, 15.

41   AIHW, Submission No 42, p 2. See also: Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 2.

2.41   Importantly, some data also indicates that the cohorts of victims and
        perpetrators of violence are not discrete, with young people who have
        been victimised also at increased risk of offending. As explained by the
        AIC:

>   Peer on peer violence amongst young people is common. Young
>   people are more likely than older Australians to be both the
>   perpetrators and victims of a range of violent offences, including
>   assault, sexual offences and homicide. Our understanding about
>   the peer on peer violence is emerging and the AIC believes this is
>   the key area to understand if impacts of violence on young
>   Australians are to be reduced.[42]

2.42   Data from the *National Hospital Morbidity Database* also provides
        information on the impact of violence on young people as victims. In brief,
        the data shows that:

>   ... in 2005–06, there were 7,652 hospitalisations among young
>   people aged 12-24 years due to assault — a rate of 205 per 100,000
>   young people. Young people account for more than one-third of
>   all hospitalisations for assault. Over the last decade the rate of
>   assault hospitalisations has increased by over a quarter (29%
>   increase for males and a 19% increase for females between 1996–97
>   and 2005–06). The number of deaths from assault is considerably
>   lower, with 27 deaths among young people aged 12–24 years in
>   2005 — a rate of 0.7 deaths per 100,000 young people. However,
>   rates among young adult males were three times as high as among
>   young adult females (18-24 year olds).[43]

Risk by Gender

2.43   As implied by data from the *National Hospital Morbidity Database*, young
        males and young females have quite different risk profiles. As shown in
        Table 2.2 based on data from the ABS *Crime and Safety Survey 2005,* female
        victims are much more likely to have known their offender than male
        victims. Teenage females are more likely to have been assaulted by a
        friend or other family member, while for 20–24 year old females assault is
        usually committed by their partners, other family members or by friends.
        The older young males get, on the other hand, the more likely they are to

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42   Dr Adam Tomison, Transcript of Evidence, 10 February 2010, p 3.
43   AIHW, Submission No 42, p 2.

be assaulted by a stranger. Males are more likely to be victims of violent assault, and females of sexual abuse or assault.[44]

Table 2.2:   Victims of assault aged 15–24 years, by characteristics of offender

	Males	Females	Persons
	%	%	%
15-19 years			
Whether offenders were known to the victim in most recent incident			
Offender(s) all known	50.4	67.0	58.5
Some offender(s) known	*9.1	*8.1	8.6
Offender(s) not known (a)	40.5	24.9	32.8
How offender(s) known to the victim in most recent incident			
Partner/Ex-partner	–	*8.9	*4.3
Other family member	8.1	18.2	13.1
Friend (including (ex) boyfriend/girlfriend)	12.9	27.5	20.0
Other known person/ work/study colleague	32.9	*18.5	25.8
Not known personally	4.6	**2.6	*3.6
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
20-24 years			
Whether offenders were known to the victim in most recent incident			
Offender(s) all known	36.8	63.8	47.8
Some offender(s) known	*9.0	**1.1	*5.7
Offender(s) not known	54.3	35.1	46.5
How offender(s) known to the victim in most recent incident			
Partner/Ex-partner	–	*16.8	*6.8
Other family member	4.5	*11.7	*7.4
Friend (including (ex) boyfriend/girlfriend)	16.4	*13.7	15.4
Other known person/work/study colleague	19.0	*16.1	17.9
Not known personally	7.3	**2.2	*5.3
Total (b)	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

–   cell has a value of zero

*   estimate has a relative standard error of more than 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

**   estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

(a) Includes 'don't know' responses.

(b) Includes persons who did not give details of most recent incident.

Source: ABS (2006), Crime and Safety, Australia 2005, Cat No 4909.0.

44   VSA, Submission No 1, p 2.

2.44   As shown in Table 2.3, the location of the incident of violence will depend
        on the age and sex of the young person. For females, nearly two-thirds
        were assaulted in their own home, another person's home or within their
        place of work or study. This is true regardless of their age. For males aged
        15–19 years, half were assaulted in their own home, another person's
        home or within the place of work or study, with another 38% being
        assaulted in a place of entertainment, car park, street or open land. The
        reverse is true for males aged 21–24 years.

Table 2.3: Victims of assault aged 15–24 years, by location of incident

	Males	Females	Persons
	%	%	%
Location of most recent incident			
15–19 years			
Home	15.7	33.6	24.6
Another person's home	*11.0	*13.1	12.1
Place of work/study	22.8	17.3	20.1
Place of entertainment, including car park	20.0	*9.2	14.7
Street or other open land	18.8	*11.9	15.4
Other	*11.6	14.8	13.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
20-24 years			
Home	10.3	30.9	18.7
Another person's home	*6.3	*7.7	*6.9
Place of work/study	16.9	25.2	20.2
Place of entertainment, including car park	36.5	*14.3	27.5
Street or other open land	16.7	*9.7	13.9
Other	*13.3	*12.1	12.8
Total(a)	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

*   Estimate has a relative standard error of more than 25% to 50% and should be used with caution.

(a)   Includes persons who did not give details of most recent incident.

Source: ABS (2006), Crime and Safety, Australia 2005, Cat No 4909.0.

2.45   Another national survey conducted by the ABS, the *Personal Safety Survey
        2005*, shows similar findings, however only persons over the age of 18
        years were interviewed. The *Personal Safety Survey 2005* also included a
        question regarding the contribution drugs and alcohol played in the
        violence. As with other indicators, the contribution of drugs and alcohol to
        violent behaviour differed depending on whether the perpetrator of
        violence was male or female. Drugs and alcohol were reported as

contributing to violence in 67% of cases where the perpetrators were male and approximately 50% of cases where the perpetrators were female.[45]

2.46   In addition, while male violent offenders still significantly outnumber female violent offenders (77% versus 23%)[46], some evidence has suggested there is apparent narrowing of the gap between the ratio of male to female offenders, suggesting that 'female delinquency' may be on the rise. As noted by Professor Kerry Carrington of Queensland University of Technology:

> Historically many more boys than girls have been drawn into the juvenile justice system for criminal offences and violent related offences. However this pattern is changing as officially recorded rates of female delinquency have been rising steadily in countries such as Australia, England, Canada and the United States over the past 50 years. They have also generally been rising at a rate faster than that for boys, as have their rates for violent crime. As yet there is little consensus about the reasons for these changing patterns of female delinquency.[47]

2.47   However, emphasising the difficulties associated with measuring violence, particularly the limitations associated with interpreting administrative datasets, Professor Carrington cautioned:

> Whether the statistical evidence of girls becoming increasingly more delinquent and violent reflects changes in the processing of girls by the juvenile justice authorities, or whether it reflects real qualitative changes in female behaviour is a matter of considerable unresolved controversy.[48]

The Impacts and Costs of Violence and Bullying

2.48   According to the WHO's *World Report on Violence and Health*:

> Youth violence deeply harms not only its victims, but also their families, friends and communities. Its effects are seen not only in death, illness and disability, but also in terms of the quality of life. Violence involving young people adds greatly to the costs of health and welfare services, reduces productivity, decreases the

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45   ABS (2006), *Personal Safety Survey 2005, Australia*, Cat No 4906.0, p 29.
46   ABS (2006), *Crime and Safety, Australia 2005,* Cat No 4909.0, p 7.
47   Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, pp 3-4. See also: Tasmanian Government, Submission No 56, p 3.
48   Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 6.

value of property, disrupts a range of essential services and
generally undermines the fabric of society.[49]

2.49   In considering how experiences of violence can impact on young people
        specifically, a range of physical, emotional and social effects have been
        identified. These include loss of self esteem, increased risks of anxiety and
        depression, increased behavioural issues including higher levels of
        aggression, increased risks of alcohol and substance abuse in later life, lack
        of socialisation, poor engagement with education, as well as other signs of
        physical and psychological trauma.[50] The following comment was made
        by a respondent to the inquiry's online youth violence survey:

> *Some of my friends have been in tears, afraid to come to school anymore*
> *just because of bullying and violence, something needs to be done soon.*
> **Female, under 18 years, regional city**

2.50   Added to these very real physical, psychological and social costs, there is
        also an economic cost associated with youth violence. While the
        Australian Government notes in its submission that there is currently no
        definitive estimate of the overall financial burden of violence in Australia,
        it concludes that it is likely to be significant. Supporting this conclusion
        the submission includes the following data:

> ... while not focused solely on young people, a report
> commissioned by the Australian Government and undertaken by
> Access Economics estimates the total annual cost of domestic
> violence alone in 2002–03 was estimated to be $8.1 billion.
>
> Again, focused on the general population, the report *The Costs of*
> *Tobacco, Alcohol and Illicit Drug Abuse to Australian Society* in
> 2004-05 estimated that the cost of violence to Australian society
> attributable to alcohol was $187 million, attributable to illicit drugs
> was $196 million, and attributable to both was $203.2 million.[51]

Committee Comment

2.51   Based on the available data the Committee recognises that escalating
        levels of youth violence impacts first and foremost on young people
        themselves, as they are the group most likely to be the victims of such

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49   WHO (2002), *World Report on Violence and Health*, Geneva, p 25.

50   See for example: VSA, Submission No 1, p 3; Community Connections (Vic) Ltd, Submission
      No 12, pp 2-3; VicHealth, Submission No 26, p 3; ACON, Submission No 30, p 11; UnitingCare
      Children, Young People and Families (UCCYPF), Submission No 45, p 10; Professor Kerry
      Carrington, Submission No 47, p 8.

51   Australian Government – DEEWR et al, Submission No 62, p 13.

violence. Although young people have different risks depending on their age and gender, the physical, psychological and social impacts of experiencing violence are significant. Furthermore, youth violence also has far reaching consequences impacting on families, communities and on society as a whole. In view of the significant and far reaching impacts of youth violence on young people and on society more broadly the Committee appreciates that addressing this issue is a priority.

Perceptions of Violence Involving Young People

2.52   The extent to which people feel safe in society is important in terms of their health and wellbeing. Therefore, in addition to data which measures actual levels of violence involving young people, understanding perceptions of violence and the impact of these perceptions on young people and on the community is also of critical importance.

2.53   Some evidence to the inquiry has indicated that perceptions of safety do not always align well with the actual risk.[52] While an underestimation of risk is not desirable as this may lead to a false sense of security, equally an over estimation of risk can result a disproportionate level of fear.

Young Peoples' Perceptions of Violence

2.54   As noted earlier in the Chapter, since 2001 Mission Australia has conducted an online annual survey of young people aged between 11 and 24 years of age. The purpose of the survey is to 'identify the things that are important to young people'. Data from almost 48,000 respondents to Mission Australia's *National Survey of Young Australians 2009* indicates that personal safety is a major concern for around one in five young respondents across all age groups and both genders. Bullying/emotional abuse was also identified as a major issue by a similar proportion of respondents.[53]

2.55   The Australian Government's 2009 *State of Australia's Young People: a report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people* also found that approximately one in four young people feel unsafe walking home alone

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52   See for example: Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, pp 2-3; Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 2.

53   Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 7.

at night in their local area.[54] A national survey of crime victimisation and perceptions of crime conducted by the AIC found:

> ... among 7,000 respondents aged 16 years and over, 29 percent of young people (aged 16 to 24 years) report feeling 'a bit unsafe' or 'very unsafe' walking alone in their local area after dark ... This was higher than for the age groups 25 to 34 years (23%) and 35 to 59 (25%) ...[55]

2.56   Mission Australia also referred in its submission to the outcomes of research conducted by the Australian Childhood Foundation which shows that concerns about personal safety are also prevalent among school aged children (10-14 years), noting:

> ... two in five children surveyed felt unsafe in public spaces including shopping centres, cinemas, sporting grounds and walking to school. This sense of vulnerability was more prevalent among girls' responses to the survey, than boys' responses.[56]

2.57   Several other surveys have identified differences in levels of concern expressed by young males and females in relation to personal safety. Despite data which show that young men are more likely than young women to be victims of violence, based on findings of the ABS *General Social Survey* the AIHW reported that the women generally feel less safe than men stating:

> Young people's perception of their safety in the community shows low levels of perception of safety among females. ... For young people 18-24 years males were more likely to feel safe at home after dark than females of the same age (95% and 69% respectively). This difference is more pronounced when comparing how safe young people feel when walking alone in their local area at night, with 76% males and only 27% of females feeling safe or very safe.[57]

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54 *State of Australia's Young People*: *A Report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, October 2009, p 115.

55 AIC, Submission No 57, p 6.

56 Mission Australia, Submission No 59, p 8.

57 AIHW, Submission No 42, p 3. See also: Women's Health Victoria, Submission No 17, p 3; YACVic, Submission No 60, pp 5-6.

2.58   In fact, according to the 2009 *State of Australia's Young People* report, being female was the single largest demographic factor associated with feeling unsafe.[58]

2.59   Although clearly concerned about risks to their personal safety, it is interesting to note that young people are less likely than older people to see themselves as victims, even though data indicates that young people at the greatest risk. As noted by Ms Linda Chiodo et al:

> Despite their vulnerability to violence, young people are most likely to report feeling safe, while older people report the highest level of fear, irrespective of their lower rates of victimisation, in comparison to individuals aged between 15-24 years. Therefore, perceptions of safety are not always reflective of actual risk.[59]

2.60   One consequence of this raised by the Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), is that it may present additional challenges in effectively communicating personal safety messages to young people.[60] On the other hand, the Commissioner also notes that an overestimation of risk may lead to a disproportionate level of fear among young people making engagement with community more challenging, stating:

> While responding to this issue with due seriousness it is also important to remember that the overwhelming majority of children and young people are not involved in violence either as victims or perpetrators. Overstating the risks can potentially lead to an increased risk for children and young people if they disengage from the community through fear of becoming victims or are further marginalised by the adult community through fear of them perpetrating violence.[61]

2.61   For individuals, the level of perceived risk to personal safety has been strongly linked to a young person's own exposure to, and experience of, violence. As noted by the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children (NCSMC):

> Young Australians' perceptions of violence and community safety begin from their experiences of home and family. Where home

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58   *State of Australia's Young People: A Report on the social, economic, health and family lives of young people*, Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, October 2009, p 116.

59   Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 3. See also: Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 2.

60   Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, p 2.

61   Commissioner for Children and Young People (WA), Submission No 33, pp 2-3. See also: Mission Australia, Submission No 59, pp 6, 8-9; YACVic, Submission No 60, p 5.

and family have been characterised by physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, young people are much less likely to feel safe either at home or in their communities.[62]

2.62   Similarly, the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian noted that homeless young people are also more likely to have a heightened perception of risk. The Commission reported that in consultations with homeless youth, the young people themselves had suggested:

> ... that this was based on aspects of their local community and specific previous encounters of violence that created an expectation that they might be confronted with violence on a daily basis.[63]

2.63   Based on her own extensive experiences of working with young people, Ms Nina Funnell suggested that young people's perceptions of risk have also been influenced by 'popular myths' about violence. Elaborating further, Ms Funnell identified the following misconceptions about violence:

- That young people are perpetrators but not victims of violence;
- That physical and sexual violence is most often committed by strangers;
- That victims of violence are often responsible for having provoked the violence;
- That alcohol is to blame for causing violence; and
- That verbal assault (including bullying, taunting, cyber bullying etc) is not as damaging as physical assault.[64]

2.64   Addressing each of these misconceptions and considering their implications, Ms Funnell observed that:

- only a very small proportion of young people are perpetrators, while young people are most at risk of being victims, but are also least likely to report violence or seek support;

- the risk of 'stranger danger' is overemphasised and atypical in relation to sexual violence, making it more difficult for young people to legitimise their own experiences of violence where family member or

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62   NCSMC, Submission No 2, p 7.

63   Queensland Commission for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, Submission No 66, p 4.

64   Ms Nina Funnell, Submission No 4, pp 2-5.

friend has been the perpetrator and often in the absence of a high degree of physical violence;

- blaming the victim or alcohol thereby inappropriately deflecting responsibility and culpability away from the perpetrators; and

- underestimating the impact of verbal violence, thereby failing to fully acknowledge the serious and long lasting impacts on self worth and esteem.[65]

2.65   Ms Funnell concluded that in combination these misconceptions have acted to divert attention away from the real dangers, and consequently resources from tackling the underlying causes and real problems associated with youth violence.[66]

Committee Comment

2.66   The Committee recognises that young people are clearly concerned about their personal safety. However, despite being at the greatest risk of victimisation, people under the age of 25 years are still less concerned about risks to their personal safety than older Australians. While the Committee is aware that it is important to avoid creating a disproportionate level of fear, it is also vital that young people have a clear understanding of the actual risks to their personal safety so that they can make informed choices about their participation in activities and also make considered decisions about their own behaviour.

2.67   During the course of the inquiry, the Committee has received evidence which includes suggestions for a range of interventions to counter inaccurate or misleading perceptions about violence involving young people and levels of risk. Suggestions have included awareness raising through social marketing campaigns and support for education programs that assist young people to recognise all forms of violence, their involvement in violence either as a perpetrator or victim, and the potential impact of involvement on themselves and on other people.

2.68   Importantly, evidence also suggests that to be effective interventions must teach potential perpetrators alternative behaviours to resolve conflict, as well as provide young people with strategies to minimise their risks of victimisation. These strategies are examined in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5 of the report.

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65   Ms Nina Funnell, Submission No 4, pp 2-5.
66   Ms Nina Funnell, Submission No 4, p 4.

Community Perceptions of Young People

2.69   In addition to considering young peoples' perceptions of violence and
        risks to their personal safety, it is also important to consider community
        perceptions more broadly, as this shapes the environment in which young
        people seek to engage. As noted above, although the actual risk of
        victimisation declines with age, older people are more concerned than
        younger people about their personal safety. As reported in the submission
        from Voices Against Violence, a group of almost 3,500 members set up to
        promote, develop, implement and influence initiatives to lead change
        towards eliminating acts of unprovoked violence:

> 'Voices' contends that the community has a genuine perception of
> fear and that the level of violence within the community has
> reached a point whereby the feeling of community safety has been
> taken away.[67]

2.70   The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY)
        provided information on the outcomes of research into community
        attitudes towards young people which reveals that:

> Today's young people were considered to be more technically
> savvy, worldlier, independent, have more money and
> opportunities as well as being more aware of their rights than ever
> before. Young people were perceived to be empowered.
>
> However, when asked to characterise young people, focus group
> participants typically expressed powerfully negative views. Young
> people were described as having a lack of respect, both for others
> and for themselves (e.g. risk taking behaviour), lacking in
> commitment, direction and hope, being too materialistic, being
> selfish and image/brand obsessed.[68]

2.71   On the basis of these findings ARACY concludes:

> ... that hostile community attitudes towards young people do not
> provide a supportive base from which to foster young people's
> emotional and social development and wellbeing. A hostile
> attitudinal environment is not only unlikely to reduce youth
> violence, but more than likely exacerbate it.[69]

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67   Voices Against Violence, Submission No 67, p 3.
68   ARACY, Submission No 55, p 17.
69   ARACY, Submission No 55, p 17.

2.72 In a joint submission, Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services observed that:

> Young people are often perceived as troublemakers, associated with criminal or deviant behaviour, and viewed with fear or suspicion by other community members. Young people hanging out in groups are often thought to be intimidating, dangerous, disruptive and likely to cause fear by their mere presence. Somewhat ironically when you speak to young people who have been the victims of crime, abuse & racial or socio-economic discrimination they are reluctant to be in public spaces on their own, feeling safer amongst groups of friends.[70]

2.73 An issue frequently raised in relation to community perceptions of young people, violence and personal safety, was the role of the media in shaping these perceptions.[71] Much of this evidence suggests that young people are often portrayed by the media as being anti-social and the perpetrators of violence, while downplaying the reality they are also the group at greatest risk victimisation.[72] YACVic illustrated negative reporting about young people by providing the following examples of recent headlines taken from the Victorian Press:

- *Kids riddled with booze and drugs: Pre-teens hooked on heroin*, Herald Sun, 23/10/09;

- *Police vow to be tough as schoolies run amok: Teen yobs face jail*, Herald Sun, 26/11/09;

- *Gangs, alcohol fuel another weekend of violence: Fear on our streets,* Herald Sun, 25/02/08;

- *Blood flows as the madness goes on: Youths battle in streets*, Herald Sun, 15/04/09; and

- *Crackdown on youth gangs brings peace to streets*, Herald Sun, 15/04/08.[73]

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70 Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, p 1.

71 See for example: Nepean Domestic Violence Network, Submission No 18, p 1; Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, pp 1-2; Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY), Submission No 44, pp 5, 8; Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 2; YACVic, Submission No 60, p 8; Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 3.

72 See for example: Ms Nina Funnell, Submission No 4, p 4; Youthlaw & Frontyard Youth Services, Submission No 35, pp 1-2; CMY, Submission No 44, pp 5, 8; YACVic, Submission No 60, p 8; Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 3.

73 YACVic, Submission No 60, p 8.

2.74   The following comments on reporting of youth violence in the media were made by respondents to the inquiry's online youth violence survey:

> *The media has made too much of an issue of youth violence.* **Female, under 18 years, rural/remote**
>
> *Also in the news they choose to report mostly fights, attacks on the elderly, vandalism, it is no wonder we are fearful about going out ... I'd really like to know the statistics for youth violence today.* **Female, under 18 years, regional city**

2.75   Hume City Council observed the influence of negative reporting by the media on community perceptions of young people, noting:

> Local and State media reporting of recent violent events in Hume involving young people, has exacerbated poor community perceptions. Often a small incident is compounded by the magnitude of attention received, leading to young people feeling more unsafe and victimised in their community. Negative stereotyping of young people devalues their place and contribution to the community.[74]

2.76   A representative from the Youth Minister's Roundtable of Young Territorians also observed:

> Good news stories involving young people are underrepresented or not reported and negative stories are often sensationalised. The youth roundtable also felt that the media neglects the underlying causes of violence in its reporting and that such coverage provides notoriety for violent youth, who welcome the situation.[75]

2.77   The influence of the media in strengthening negative perceptions of youth was reported as being particularly problematic for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or refugee backgrounds. As noted in the submission from the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY):

> Young people from refugee or migrant backgrounds are also affected by the prejudices and speculations reported in the media around ethnic 'gang' violence and drug related issues. The difference between 'youth group formations' and gangs is a sensitive one and it is important to avoid media stereotypes in this area. Where there is ethnic-based group criminal activity, media

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74   Hume City Council, Submission No 43, p 2.

75   Ms Hannah Woerle, Transcript of Evidence, 17 March 2010, p 2.

> reporting needs to be sensitive to the potential impact on the public's perception of groups of refugee and migrant youth.[76]

2.78 As well as promoting negative perceptions of young people, a number of submissions outlined other potential consequences of negative media stereotyping. For example, Professor Kerry Carrington suggested that:

> Undue media attention, social over-reaction and over-policing, can place pressure on group members to live up to a particular public image by behaving in ways that correspond with the labels - usually in the form of 'dangerous' or 'tough' gang behaviour.[77]

2.79 Similarly, ARACY reported on research which suggests that media reporting may in some cases increase anti-social behaviour, with some groups 'enjoying' the associated notoriety.[78] Mr Thomas McGuire of the Australian Hotels Association suggested that high profile reporting of specific types of violence (e.g. glassing) in the media could also result in copycat behaviour and an escalation in that type of violence.[79]

Committee Comment

2.80 Despite the fact that only a minority of young people engage in violent behaviour, and that when it comes to victimisation young people are in fact the most vulnerable group in our society, the Committee understands community perceptions of young people appear to be negative or even hostile. The Committee believes that addressing negative community perceptions of young people is essential if young people are to be supported in their development and encouraged to participate and contribute fully and positively to society.

2.81 Suggestions for countering negative community perceptions of young people include implementing social marketing campaigns to effect cultural and attitudinal changes towards young people and promoting responsible reporting in relation to young people and violence in the media. Both of these strategies are examined in more detail in Chapter 5 of the report.

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76 CMY, Submission No 44, p 5. See also: Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, pp 2-3; Ms Linda Chiodo et al, Submission No 78, p 3.

77 Professor Kerry Carrington, Submission No 47, p 2.

78 ARACY, Submission No 55, p 18.

79 Mr Thomas McGuire, Transcript of Evidence, 3 February 2010, pp 7-8.