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Youth Scan

October 2007

From the National Youth Council
"Developing a Vibrant, Highly-Connected, and
Self-Sustaining Youth Sector, and Nurturing World-Ready Youth"

Bringing you snippets of youth trends and issues compiled from
diverse sources such as news reports, journals and press releases,
Youth Scan aims to help you stay in touch with the constantly evolving youth scene.

In this month's issue of Youth Scan, we highlight articles and studies published in the September 2007 issue of the Youth Studies Australia journal:

1. Underpaid and Exploited: Pay-related Employment concerns experienced by young workers

Paula McDonald, Sandra Backstrom and Aaron Allegretto

2. Young People and Citizenship: An Everyday Perspective

Anita Harris, Johanna Wyn and Salem Younes

3. The Politics of Education: Why stand-alone youth work degrees matter

Judith Bessant

In line with the National Youth Council (NYC)'s efforts in promoting and encouraging youth research, this month we highlight three Youth Research Fund (YRF) supported studies shared at the recent NYC organized Youth Research Lunchtime Seminar:

Help seeking practice and intentions among post secondary students in Singapore

Mathew Mathews, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

Stress, Coping and Protective Factors in 'O' Level Students

Fei Yue Community Services and Students Care Service

Emotional well-being and coping strategies amongst secondary school students

Students Care Service

A copy of Youth Studies Australia and reports are available at the National Youth Council. Interested readers can contact the Research and Planning Section of NYC at [6839 9172](tel:68399172) or email Sarah_ISMAIL@pa.gov.sg for more information.

1. Underpaid and Exploited: Pay-related Employment concerns experienced by young workers

Paula McDonald, Sandra Backstrom and Aaron Allegretto

Macro-level data paint a detailed picture of the vulnerability of young people in employment, such as their concentration in casualised jobs, low average-weekly earnings and reduced access to collective representation, yet little is known about the internal conflicts that arise in individual workplaces that employ youth. This research study seeks to address this gap in the literature by exploring nearly 700 cases of inquiries reported to the Young Workers Advisory Service (YWAS) in Queensland over a three year period. The inquiries, which relate to issues of conflict about pay/remuneration that occur between employees and employers, allow a detailed and nuanced analysis of situations where young workers are vulnerable.

In exploring the patterns of pay/remuneration experienced by young workers, 688 complaints were coded into the following categories: underpayment; overpayment; and cash-in-hand payments without pay slips. The number of total issues within the pay category was 792. More than half of the issues examined (58%) related to unpaid wages or benefits. Of which, nearly 40% of these cases received only partial payment, 11% were not payment entitlements and 10% were not paid at all. 21% of all cases reported underpayment; 4% of pay issues overall were related to being overpaid, whereby young people had difficulties in negotiating a pay-back plan; and approximately 7% of pay issues reported cash-in-hand payments without pay slips. 18% of young people involved were dismissed from their positions, either directly or indirectly as a result of conflict over pay issues.

The author makes recommendations in assisting young people to avoid pitfalls regarding pay and employment issues; the importance of information sharing on new workplace relations laws; and the role schools, governments and parents can play in shaping employment citizenship.

2. Young People and Citizenship: An Everyday Perspective

Anita Harris, Johanna Wyn and Salem Younes

This article addresses the changing nature of civic and political engagement for young people in Australia. It draws on recent research that explores youth engagement from the perspective of changing life patterns which see the current generation making adult choices in a highly individualized context. This approach is highly relevant for the study of youth engagement because it opens up the possibility of recognizing new civic and political practices. If young people are no longer experiencing continuous, structured identities and predictable life trajectories, what does this mean for their participation in civic and political life?

Studies have suggested that young people have become increasingly disengaged from formal politics as well as community activity, and know and care little about formal political processes. However, research on new identities reveals another trend in young people's participatory

practices: young people may be connecting with civic life in new ways that are directly related to their more fragmented and individualized biographies.

This research project set out to investigate attitudes of young people in Victoria aged 15-17 (N = 970) towards practices of civic and political engagement in light of their new life patterns and also raises questions about the extent to which strategies (by adults) that aim to increase youth civic engagement and participation need to engage differently with young people.

Although young people were unlikely to be members of unions (7%), political parties (3%) or political organizations (4%), a sizeable number join formal associations. They are members of sporting clubs (51%), online groups (29%), youth/student groups (23%) and religious groups (18%). In addition, traditional sites of youth association are not meaningful to these youths. They prefer informal activities not structured by organizations/adults and the most important groups to them socially and emotionally are the informal associations of friends and family.

The author highlights that citizenship for young people today as something more than conventional participation in political activity, but less than wholesale shift to new autonomous participatory practices. Politics needs to be defined in a less restrictive way to capture the politics of young people. Findings also have implication for engaging young people who are disadvantaged and disconnected from family or/and friends.

3. The Politics of Education: Why stand-alone youth work degrees matter

Judith Bessant

While the demand in Australia for youth workers is growing, the education of youth workers in universities is being 'rationalised' because these institutions have been fiscally squeezed by successive federal governments. What are the consequences for youth workers, young people and society as a whole if the move towards 'generic' human service degrees is allowed to continue? Given that there is no national professional youth work association in Australia, what can those who teach youth studies or work in the field do to promote and develop specialized youth work education?

For decades Australian youth workers have debated the value of establishing a professional body with some responsibility for defining minimum education and training standards of practice, accrediting university and TAFE youth work programs, and developing a code of ethical practice. Australian youth workers still have no national professional association to represent their interests, nor is there an agreed set of professional education standards. However, there is a strong youth sector and a national network of peak bodies which run annual, state-based conferences.

This paper considers the merits of retaining a vocationally specific and clearly identified youth work program versus generic qualifications; and the implications of the rationalization of university program/curriculum. The author also provides arguments for the retention of youth studies programs in Australian universities as youth work education plays a major role in supporting the youth sector.

Help seeking practice and intentions among post secondary students in Singapore

Mathew Mathews, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore

This report examines beliefs that students in Singaporean post secondary institutions have with regards to seeking help for their mental and emotional problems. Data presented examines both actual and intended help seeking behavior as well as student's beliefs in the relative efficacy of different interventions for psychological problems. This report also presents students' responses to various attitudinal variables which are commonly considered to be barriers to seeking help from professional sources.

Through the use of multiple regressions, various possible predictors of help seeking from professional sources and the perception of the efficacy of counselors to helping with psychological problems are examined. The descriptive data shows the low levels of intentions to seek help from mental health professionals and notes stigma, cultural beliefs of how problems should be handled as important variables.

Regression models highlight demographic variables, endorsement for various kinds of etiology models for the causation of mental problems, prior exposure to psychology and attitudinal variables related to coping with problems as significant predictors of perceptions of the efficacy of counselor consultation for psychological problems. Etiology and attitudinal variables were predictors of intentions to seek help from mental health professionals for psychological problems. Some important considerations for more effective service delivery in mental health provision are also discussed.

Stress, Coping and Protective Factors in 'O' Level Students

Fei Yue Community Services and Students Care Service

The aim of this study was to establish an understanding of the needs of students undertaking the 'O' level in terms of their sources of stress, signs of stress, coping styles and protective factors that mitigate stress. In total 1606 students from the twelve north-eastern neighborhood secondary schools that participated in Project O road shows participated in the survey, with another 16 respondents in 2 focus groups. A total of 46 emails and 258 SMS Buddy Support were also used for qualitative analysis.

Results revealed that the highest cause of anxiety came from the students' academic performance, followed by stressors from within the family. The lowest source of stress came from boy-girl relationships. Whilst under stress, respondents would display emotional signs, followed by, in descending order, physical, behavioral, negative and suicidal signs. With regards to methods of coping, respondents utilized active coping strategies most often by focusing on the problem, followed by seeking instrumental social support, disengagement, venting emotions and seeking emotional support. Lastly with regards to resilience factors, the strongest came from bonding to the school followed by individual characteristics, peers and, the family members.

Findings suggested the importance of recognizing the presence of stress in its multiple forms, and for family life education to holistically target the essentials of effective communication at teachers, parents and teenagers.

Emotional well-being and coping strategies among secondary school students

Students Care Service

Early adolescence marks the end of childhood and the start of young adulthood. This transitory period is seen as the most turbulent and volatile phase of an individual's adolescence life, more so than the late adolescence stage. Besides grappling with biological changes, they also face changes socially, emotionally, and intellectually.

The aim of this study was to achieve an understanding of the problems which Secondary One and Two students faced and how they cope with these problems. 387 students (ages 12-15) from two secondary schools that were participating in Students Care Service's STEP UP program were surveyed. Results revealed that the highest cause of anxiety came from academic related sources, followed by physiological sources of stress. The lowest source of stress came from interpersonal relationships.

The students were also asked about important domains in their life. Family came out tops while the second most important domain would be their examination results. Teachers were the least important domain in their life. With regards to methods of coping, respondents utilised productive coping methods most often by thinking of different ways to solve a problem, working at solving the problem to the best of their capabilities, focusing on the cause of problem and taking direct action to solve the problem.

The findings pointed to the need to understand the presence of students' stress in a more holistic manner and that the coping strategies employed by the students also depended on the context as well as their available pool of resources.

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