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What do Young People Think of the Gardaí?

An Examination of Young People's Attitudes to and Experiences of An Garda Síochána

Niamh Feeney and Sinéad Freeman

Abstract

Interest in the attitudes of young people to the police has increased in recent decades yet the topic has been little studied in Ireland. This paper examines the attitudes of young people towards An Garda Síochána, as well as their experiences with the Gardaí. One hundred and three young people aged 15–19 years were surveyed in four different education centres in the Dublin Metropolitan Region North. The survey was based on the Garda Public Attitudes Survey which is conducted annually with adults. The young people had a much lower satisfaction rate and a higher level of contact than adults with the Gardaí. The contacts were mainly Garda-initiated and negative experiences for the young people. The findings indicate the need to promote non-adversarial contacts between Gardaí and young people in order to foster a better relationship and increase the legitimacy of An Garda Síochána in the eyes of young people.

Keywords

Young people and police; young people's attitudes; An Garda Síochána; policing; police satisfaction

Introduction

In recent decades, an increasing number of researchers and governments have taken an interest in the public's attitudes toward the police. This has been done for many reasons, such as public relation exercises, to influence policy change and to make police forces more effective in working with the public to detect and investigate crime (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008; Frank et al., 2005). Internationally, there has also been a growing interest in the attitudes that young people hold towards the police (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008; Hurst and Frank, 2000).

An Garda Síochána is the unitary national police force responsible for all policing functions in Ireland and since 2002 annual surveys have been conducted with adults on their attitudes toward the police. These surveys have acted as the main source of information on this topic in Ireland yet none have included the opinions of young people under the age of 18. The 2008 publication notes that all respondents were over the age of 18 and states that 'the sampling methodology ... is likely to under-represent

certain hard-to-reach groups' (Garda Research Unit, 2008: v). Connolly (2002) identifies young people as one of the 'police property groups' in Ireland – 'those who spend their time in public spaces, on the street [and] who are most exposed to policing' – yet they have not been afforded a voice in the national surveys. Young people's attitudes to the police are especially important as adolescence is a time when attitudes can be formed or changed and experiences at this time may impact on young people attitudes as adults (Hinds, 2007). Furthermore, as police are often the first and only criminal justice professionals that young people have contact with, the nature of these contacts may influence young people's willingness to engage positively with the criminal justice system as a whole (Hurst and Frank, 2000). The importance of obtaining young people's views has already been acknowledged by the Home Office in Britain who decided, after a number of commissioned reviews, to include young people under the age of 16 years in the British Crime Survey 2009/2010 (Home Office, 2008). The aim of this paper is to address the dearth in knowledge that currently exists in the Irish context by focusing on the attitudes of a number of young people to An Garda Síochána in one Garda District (Dublin Metropolitan Region North). It also aims to provide an insight into their experiences with the nation's police force, a subject that has been little researched to date.

Review of Previous Research

International Research on the Public's Attitudes to Police

Frank et al. (2005) outline two reasons for increased interest in public attitudes to police. Firstly, the increasing focus on community policing has seen a shift in perceptions of the value of community members. They are now seen as a resource to the police, as satisfied consumers will act as the 'eyes and ears' of the police. Bridenball and Jesilow (2008) agree that public satisfaction is needed to help the police enforce the law. Secondly, citizens are becoming viewed as consumers who are in a position to evaluate the effectiveness of police policies and procedures.

Research has shown that public attitudes are generally in line with the level of support for law and order, with positive assessments of the police linked to a strong sense of involvement and inclusion in the political system or general approval of government (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008). The perceived level of police legitimacy is also important, as people are more likely to comply and engage with authority if they believe it is legitimate (Hinds, 2007).

In general, it has been found that the public have favourable attitudes towards the police (Hurst and Frank, 2000; Frank et al., 2005). Contact with the police and the manner in which these exchanges are handled have consistently been found to influence attitudes (Hurst, 2007; Frank et al., 2005). In particular, the type of contact and the quality of the contact have been identified as important factors. Contact with the police can be police- or citizen-initiated. Police-initiated contacts include being stopped and questioned and routine vehicle checks. Citizen-initiated contacts include reporting a crime and getting documents signed. The former have been found to be a determinant of negative attitudes and the latter of positive attitudes (Rosenbaum et al., 2005; Hinds, 2007).

Studies have shown that the quality of contacts people have with police officers may be more influential in their perceptions of the force than the type of contact (Brandl et al., 1994; Frank et al., 2005). Brandl et al. (1994) compared adults' specific attitudes about police performance to more general attitudes toward them during their direct contacts with the police. The perception of whether the direct contact was positive or negative was identified as the main determinant of the adults' attitudes towards the police (Brandl et al., 1994). Furthermore, in the study by Frank et al. (2005), respondents who discussed negative attributes of officers were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the police.

Irish Research on the Public's Attitudes to the Police

The views of approximately 10,000 individuals in Ireland towards An Garda Síochána have been recorded annually since 2002 in the Garda Public Attitudes Survey. Results in respect of key indicators, such as satisfaction with overall service, satisfaction with contact with the Gardaí, Garda approachability and overall performance at local level, have been relatively consistent over the surveys despite changes in survey companies and methodology. For example, satisfaction with the overall service has fluctuated less than ten per cent over the years with a low of 79 per cent in 2006 (Garda Research Unit, 2006) and a high of 87 per cent in 2002 (Garda Research Unit, 2002). The most recent survey was carried out in 2008. The results showed that 81 per cent of respondents were satisfied with the overall service of the Gardaí. However, the level in different Garda divisions varied widely from 71 per cent to 89 per cent. Forty percent of respondents said they had contact with the Gardaí during the previous year. Garda manner in relation to these contacts was measured under a number of headings: better than expected, as expected, or worse than expected. The average ratings were: 'better than expected' 18 per cent, 'as expected' 70 per cent and 'worse than expected' 12 per cent. The satisfaction with overall contacts with the Gardaí was 79 per cent, slightly lower than the overall rating of the service at 81 per cent. Nevertheless, 72 per cent of respondents felt that the Garda service needed to be improved. In relation to whether a member of the Gardaí had behaved in an unacceptable manner towards them, one out of every thirteen respondents reported that they had. The figure for Dublin Metropolitan Region North (DMR-North) was higher with over one in ten reporting that Gardaí had behaved in an unacceptable manner towards them. The most frequent reason given was that they were 'disrespectful or impolite' (Garda Research Unit, 2008). Similar behavior by the Gardaí was noted in research conducted by the Institute of Criminology (2003), where it was observed that confrontational techniques and strong language were often directed towards young people involved in public order offences in one of the two areas studied in Dublin.

Young People's Attitudes towards the Police

Young people have a high level of contact with police in comparison to adults (Hinds, 2007; Sanders and Young, 2007). As there are few indoor spaces willing to accommodate groups of young people they tend to occupy public areas thus making them more visible to police patrols (Loader, 1996). Research has shown that young people are subject to a high number of police-initiated contacts; mainly 'move on', 'stop and search' and 'stop and question' (Home Office, 1996; Sanders and Young, 2007). Young males seem to be the

main target for these stops. The National Crime Council (2003) note that the mere sight of Gardaí in one area studied was enough to make young people move on.

Research commissioned by the National Youth Council of Ireland and the Equality Authority highlighted how focus groups exploring the stereotyping of young people have identified the Gardaí as having a poor opinion of, and little respect for, young people (Devlin, 2006). The British Crime Survey (BCS) 1995, which included findings on the experiences and attitudes of an extra sample of young people aged 12–15, identified that it may be difficult for police to avoid high levels of contact with young people due to public requests for intervention with them (Home Office, 1996). Young people tend to see occupying public areas as socialising whereas police view it as loitering (National Crime Council, 2003).

Although police-initiated contacts with young people are high, the opposite is true for citizen-initiated contact. This is despite the fact that there is a high level of victimisation among young people (Home Office, 1996, 2009; Hinds, 2007; Roe and Ashe, 2008). There are suggestions that this may be because young people view some types of victimisation, such as being assaulted by bullies, as normal and therefore do not report such offences (Home Office, 1996). However the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of young people may also impact on the likelihood of young people reporting crimes. Hinds (2007) found that young people are more likely to view the police as legitimate if they believe that police use procedural justice in their contact with young people and do a good job. Young people who had prior negative contact with the police were more likely to view them as less legitimate. This highlights the importance of the quality of the contact between young people and the police and the use of fair practices in influencing young people's attitudes toward the police.

International research has shown that young people generally have less positive attitudes towards the police than adults (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008; Hurst and Frank, 2000). Like adults, how police treat them impacts on young people's views. In the British Crime Survey 1995, the majority of 12 to 15 year olds felt that they were treated fairly by police. However, 27 per cent felt that they were treated unfairly and this was generally linked to searches, to which, as mentioned, young people are more likely to be subjected by the police (Home Office, 1996). Hinds' (2007) research revealed that many contacts between the police and young people are adversarial and this leads to the formation of negative attitudes toward the police. Young victims also rate the police less favourably (Home Office, 1996; Hurst and Frank, 2000). These situations can lead to young people feeling both over-controlled and under-protected and further serve to highlight the importance of obtaining information on young people's attitudes toward, and experiences of, the police.

Methodology

An exploratory and cross-sectional research design was employed in this study. It was decided to collect the data by means of a written survey which is a method regularly used to communicate with the public on social issues (Bachman and Schutt, 2008) and is seen as an important tool in the gathering of public attitudes toward the police (Frank et al, 2005). With the permission of the Garda Research Unit, the survey was designed based on the Garda Public Attitudes Survey 2008 to allow the results of the study to be

systematically compared to that of the national survey. A number of adjustments were made to the Garda Public Attitudes Survey 2008 for the purpose of this research. This included the rewording of some questions to make them more relevant and accessible to young people. A number of open-ended questions were also included to obtain participants' opinions on subjects in greater detail and allow the young people to describe their experiences and suggestions for improvement in their own words. The survey was piloted with a sample of young people for ease of reading, understanding, time needed to complete the survey and to ascertain if other issues needed to be addressed by the study before being finalised. The piloting process raised issues around the clarity and wording of some questions which were all addressed prior to the main study.

The research was conducted with young people attending educational institutions in the Dublin Metropolitan Region North (DMR-North). The DMR-North region was selected as it encompassed a range of educational institutions which would increase the likelihood of accessing a broad demographic of young people. This specific region also complied with the logistical constraints associated with the resources and time-frame of the study. A number of schools were approached in the region. These included fee-paying schools, voluntary secondary schools, community schools, designated disadvantaged schools and Youthreach projects (for early school leavers). A designated disadvantaged school, a community school, a voluntary secondary school, and a Youthreach centre agreed to participate in the study and thus provided the sample. The survey was group-administered in each of these settings. The sampling units in the post-primary schools were students in Transition Year (between the junior and senior cycles) while all students in the Youthreach project were invited to take part. The British Society of Criminology (2009) Ethics Code was adhered to, specifically with regard to the principles of informed consent, parental consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality. Data was collected to capture young people's attitudes to the Gardaí at a specific point in time: March and April 2009. In total, 103 young people completed the survey. The age of the respondents ranged from 15 to 19 years old with a majority (59 per cent) aged 16 years old. Fifty nine of the participants were male and forty two were female (two participants did not indicate their gender on their questionnaires).

The majority of the survey questions were pre-coded. The quantitative data was processed and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program (version 15). Thematic analysis was conducted on the qualitative data. The findings were interpreted and conclusions drawn based on the data collected and that of previous studies. A limited amount of data triangulation was possible due to the ability to compare qualitative answers in the survey to quantitative questions.

Findings

Findings emerged in relation to the young people's general views of the Gardaí (including levels of satisfaction), their experiences of contact with the Gardaí and their suggestions for improvement. It is important to note that the survey was of a self-report nature and it was not possible given the constraints of this study to verify the data given in relation to, for example, victimisation reports. However, studies examining self-report data have generally found it to be a valid and reliable source for

most research purposes (Thornberry and Krohn, 2000). Furthermore, given the sample size included in the study (103 participants) it is important to highlight that these findings do not allow for national generalisation. The fact that the survey was conducted in one specific Garda Division (DMR-North) however, may allow recommendations to be made which may improve young people's attitudes to the Gardaí and Garda practices in this area.

Young People's General Views of An Garda Síochána

Sixty two per cent of the young people were satisfied with the service that An Garda Síochána provided to the community, with just one per cent stating that they were very satisfied. Almost one in ten reported that they were very dissatisfied with the Garda service (see Figure 1).

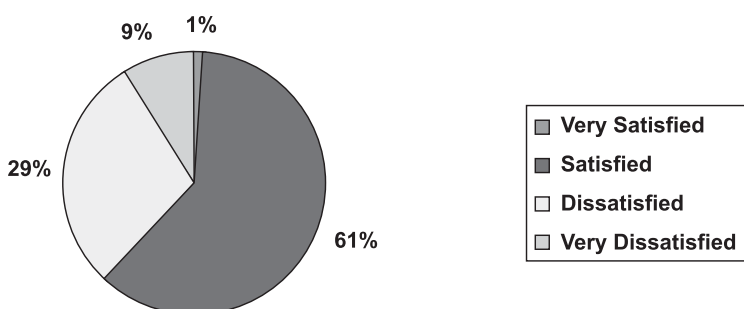


Figure 1: *Young people's overall satisfaction levels with the service provided by An Garda Síochána to the community*

(Missing values have been excluded. Percentages rounded to nearest whole).

In relation to their overall contact with the Gardaí, 59 per cent of the young people were satisfied with the nature of their contact, with six per cent stating that they were very dissatisfied.

Forty three per cent of the young people reported that the Gardaí were approachable at their local station, while 31 per cent said they were unapproachable. The most common reasons cited for approachability were that the young people could 'communicate with them' and that the Gardaí were 'members of the community'. In relation to inapproachability, the most frequent response was that the Gardaí were 'unfriendly/rude', followed by the statements that 'they are just not interested' and 'they think they are superior/formal manner'.

The young people were given a number of statements about the Gardaí in Ireland and asked whether they agreed or disagreed and the level to which they did so. Seventy per cent disagreed that 'when people are dissatisfied with what the Gardaí do, it is easy to have the matter corrected'. The strongest disagreement (83 per cent) was with the statement 'young people are treated better by the Gardaí than adults'. Somewhat worryingly, only 38 per cent of the young people believed that if their rights were violated, they could rely on the Gardaí to help them.

Levels of Contact

Eighty five per cent of the young people reported that they had contact with the Gardai in the past year. More young people reported Garda-initiated contact (77 per cent) than citizen-initiated contact (51 per cent). The main reason given for citizen-initiated contact was the signing of passport forms (41 per cent). The main reasons given for Garda-initiated contact were ‘stopped and questioned’ (61.8 per cent), ‘moved on’ (48.5 per cent) and ‘stopped and searched’ (40.6 per cent).

The level of crime victimisation reported in the past two years was almost 19 per cent. The most common crime that the young people were victim of was assault. Despite this, only a minority (37 per cent) of victims initiated contact with the Gardai by reporting the crime. Where crimes were not reported, the two most common reasons given by the young people were that they ‘believed Gardai could not have done anything’ (31 per cent), followed by ‘no involvement wanted with the Gardai’ (26 per cent).

Unacceptable Behaviour by Garda Members

Almost two-thirds of the young people (60.8 per cent) reported that a Garda had behaved in a way towards them that they considered unacceptable. The types of unacceptable behaviours cited most frequently were that the Garda had been disrespectful or impolite and that the young people had been stopped or searched without reason. Over a quarter of young people (26.5 per cent) reported that the unacceptable behaviour related to a Garda swearing at them (see Table 1).

Nature of Behaviour	%
Was disrespectful or impolite	43.1
Did not follow proper procedures	11.8
Stopped or searched without reason	43.1
Harassed	13.7
Made wrongful accusation	29.4
Behaved in a violent way	15.7
Discriminated due to age, gender, race or ethnicity	12.7
Swore	26.5
Took an item of your property	15.7

Table 1: *Main types of unacceptable Garda behaviour reported by the young people*

A large majority (88 per cent) of the young people did not report the unacceptable behaviour. The remainder reported it to the Garda station or sergeant. No young person reported it to the Garda Ombudsman. The main reason given for non-reporting was that the young people ‘did not trust that the complaint would be looked into properly’, followed by that they ‘did not think it was serious enough’. This is consistent with the previous finding that young people did not feel it was easy to have the matter corrected if they were dissatisfied with a Garda’s conduct towards them.

Descriptions of Contact Experiences

The young people were asked to describe in their own words a positive or negative experience that they had with the Gardaí in the past year. Most of the positive experiences described related to a positive manner. These included, for example, that 'my local community guard was very strict but polite and level headed'.

Examples of other positive experiences included occasions where the Gardaí spoke to young people in a polite or friendly way or did something helpful such as giving a young person an umbrella when it was raining. Other experiences that were described as positive were when the young person knew that what they were doing was wrong or illegal and the Garda involved was not aggressive or rude:

A few of my friends and I were out one night. We were drinking and had alcohol on us. The Garda approached and politely asked us to leave the drink on the ground and move somewhere else. They were polite and respected us.

(Male, 16 years)

The most commonly reported contact category was negative-violence followed by a perceived unmerited stop, search or accusation. The levels of violence reported varied. Some young people described pushing and shoving while others described serious assaults:

I was push[ed] against a wall and jabbed repeatedly in the chest very hard with a pen by a plain clothes female Garda after saying that the Garda were acting inappropriately.

(Male, 16 years)

I was arrested [named area] I wasn't told what station I was being brought to. [I was] humiliated in front of my friends by being dragged to the ground in the lashing rain and was processed in [named station] and was left in a holding cell. A Garda entered the cell and asked me if I was ok. I was sitting on the bed and said 'yeah'. When I did, he kicked me in the head and said 'yeah you're not now ye cheeky little bollox'.

(Male, 17 years)

Many descriptions of perceived wrongful stops, searches or accusations were brief, for example, 'a Garda car pulled over and searched us for no reason'. Others described what could represent dishonest behaviour from the Gardaí involved:

I had my bag searched for drink. I thought she had taken everything out, then she asked 'do you have anything else in here you shouldn't?' I said 'no, you just took all the drink I had' then she looked and she had left one can in my bag and then she told me I was a liar ... It wasn't my fault as I thought she had taken everything out.

(Female, 17 years)

Other common themes that arose from the descriptions of contacts were that many of the young people felt discriminated against due to their youth, appearance or the area they were from. In addition they stated that Gardaí often asked them where they lived and if they were in an area that they were not from they were told to go home:

I was stopped and checked for alcohol when I was walking home. I had none so the Gardaí just drove off. I felt discriminated against because I was young.

(Male, 16 years)

[The Gardaí] told me to move away and I didn't do anything to disturb the peace, took details for no reason just because I was in an area that I didn't live in.

(Female, 16 years)

In relation to their overall contacts with the Gardaí, 60 per cent of the participants reported that they were negative. Young people who reported negative experiences were more likely to be dissatisfied overall with the Gardaí (67 per cent), with only 22 per cent of those who described positive contacts reporting that they were dissatisfied with the overall service.

Young People's Suggested Improvements

Almost three quarters (73 per cent) of the young people felt that the overall service provided by the Gardaí needed to be improved. In response to a list of suggested improvements, the most common item selected was for Gardaí to be friendlier (77 per cent), followed by more Garda foot patrols (45 per cent) and more contact with the community (38 per cent).

Eighty five per cent of the participants stated that the relationship between the Gardaí and young people needed to be improved. The young people's suggestions for improvement were many and varied. A small number of participants felt that young people should have more respect for the Gardaí and that this would improve the relationship. However, the majority focused on changes that the Gardaí could make to their practices and attitudes. The most referred to improvements (30 per cent) related to the Gardaí ceasing to discriminate against young people by, for example not making unmerited accusations or moving young people on for no reason:

The Gardaí discriminate against young people and always assume we have done something wrong. Gardaí have accused a lot of young people in my area of things they haven't done. Due to all this, most opinions in the area of the Gardaí are negative.

This needs to be sorted.

(Female, 16 years)

Twenty eight per cent of young people felt that the Gardaí could improve their attitude and manner and listen to them more. Twenty seven per cent of young people thought that the Gardaí should treat young people fairly and with more respect while seventeen per cent suggested that the Gardaí be less aggressive and violent. Other suggestions for improvement included for the Gardaí to focus more on serious crimes and to be more lenient on minor crimes. A number of young people also called for the Gardaí to be more involved with the community and with young people and for them to get to know them better to foster a positive relationship between both groups.

Discussion

Young People's Satisfaction with An Garda Síochána

The young people surveyed were 18 per cent less satisfied than their adult counterparts in DMR-North. This is consistent with international research, which has shown that young people generally have less positive attitudes towards the police than adults (Bridenball and Jesilow, 2008; Hurst and Frank, 2000). In light of this, an effort to increase community activity between Gardaí and young people may be beneficial.

This could take the form of an increased effort of local Gardaí getting to know the young people in their area through friendly conversation while on patrol. This may allow a relationship to develop which could benefit both the Gardaí and the young people when it is necessary for the Gardaí to intervene in the young people's lives and thereby increase satisfaction levels.

Garda Manner

The findings revealed a common dissatisfaction with Garda manner including the view that Gardaí were unapproachable because they were unfriendly or rude. In addition, Garda manner and attitude was a focus of many of the suggestions made for improvement. These findings support Devlin's (2006) report which found that young people think Gardaí have a poor opinion of them and little respect for them.

In relation to approachability, in DMR-North almost three times as many young people (31 per cent) as adults (12 per cent) found the Gardaí unapproachable. This is perturbing as international research (Home Office, 1996) has shown that young people are less likely to report victimisation to police in general. Therefore if they also consider the local police unapproachable it may further decrease the likelihood of reporting victimisation. This could lead to resources not being distributed as necessary and a feeling of helplessness among young people. This was reflected in the findings in that only 37 per cent of victims reported the crime. The underreporting of victimisation is also likely to be higher than shown here as it has been suggested that young people can see some types of victimisation as normal and therefore may not report them (Home Office, 1996).

Young People's Contact with the Gardaí

Twice as many young people had contact with the Gardaí compared to adults. In line with previous international research (Home Office, 1996; Sanders and Young, 2007), the young people also reported a high incidence of Garda-initiated contact. The majority of the young people felt that the Gardaí treated them worse than adults. More than three fifths of the young people stated that a member of the Gardaí had behaved in an unacceptable way towards them. This compares to only one in thirteen adults in the country and one in ten in DMR-North. Cross-tabulation showed that over 90 per cent of those who described positive experiences were satisfied with the Gardaí. This suggests that satisfaction levels were linked to the quality of the contact, as was the case in studies by Frank et al. (2005) and Hinds (2007).

Similar to previous research (Home Office, 1996; Sanders and Young, 2007), this study found that young people were subject to a high number of Garda-initiated contacts of the type 'move on', 'stop and search' and 'stop and question'. This impacted on their feelings of being discriminated against and was the subject of many of their descriptions of their contact with the Gardaí and their suggestions for improvement. In contrast, the majority of young people had little citizen-initiated contact with the Gardaí and for those that did it was mainly for the signing of passport forms.

An evaluation of the reasons for the reported high level of stops and 'move ons' by the Gardaí should be completed to discover whether they are justified or if young people really are being discriminated against. In addition, Gardaí should explain to young people why, for example, they are asking them to move on or stopping them. If

Gardaí are required to give a reason as to why they are doing this it may reduce the number of times they enforce these practices unnecessarily. Also, if young people are provided with a justifiable reason they may be less likely to perceive that they are being discriminated against.

Violence and Aggression

Gardaí are required to adhere to the principles of necessity and proportionality at all times (An Garda Síochána, 2009a), yet the most reported contacts that young people had with Gardaí were those that involved violence or aggression on behalf of the Gardaí. This is cause for concern as Gardaí are conferred with the duty to uphold the law and although an element of force is often necessary for the job, a high level of aggression towards young people cannot be accepted. Therefore, an in-depth investigative study should be completed to discover the extent of, and circumstances that may give rise to, this behaviour. In addition, records should be kept nationally of all contact that Gardaí have with young people under the age of 18 for their protection, as is necessary practice for most institutions and services that engage with young people.

Legitimacy

Hinds (2007) found that young people with prior negative contact with the police viewed them as less legitimate than those who did not. While not directly asked in the survey about the legitimacy of the Gardaí, the high level of reported negative contacts, unacceptable behaviour and complaints about Garda manner suggest that the Gardaí may not have been viewed as legitimate by the majority of young people in the study. This is a cause for concern given that as discussed previously; low legitimacy may cause a number of problems including lack of cooperation with police and underreporting of victimisation. Therefore, there needs to be a drive to inform young people of the accountability and complaints procedures such as the Garda Ombudsman. This could include a schools campaign, visits to youth groups, or advertising and providing information on social networking sites.

Young People's Suggestions for Improvement

The young people's suggestions for improvement were generally related to the areas of unacceptable behaviour and the negative experiences they reported. When asked how An Garda Síochána could generally improve, the majority of young people felt that the Gardaí could act in a friendlier manner. In contrast, the priority for adults in the Garda Public Attitudes Survey was for greater manpower and more Garda foot patrols. The different findings may be explained by the fact that young people have more Garda-initiated contact so a friendlier attitude would be important whereas adults have more citizen-initiated contacts and more concerns about loss of property and safety.

The young people also expressed the view that they were discriminated against and that they were being unfairly moved on or stopped and searched on a regular basis. They did not understand why they were subject to such practices by the Gardaí. However, some of the young people felt that these practices could be reduced if the Gardaí focused on higher profile crimes.

The young people voiced the opinion that they were not listened to or understood by the Gardaí. Suggestions for improvement in relation to these issues and in Garda manner were common among the young people. Some felt that increased awareness and contact between young people and the Gardaí in non-confrontational settings such as community groups, schools and through community policing initiatives would improve the relationship. If young people had a better view of the Gardaí from a younger age, through involvement in these initiatives, legitimacy and thus compliance may be improved. It may also help the Gardaí to get to know the local young people and improve their managing of them when necessary, which may be positive for both groups.

The suggestions put forward by the young people may not be incompatible with those of the Gardaí as there have been some measures introduced in recent times that may influence change in the nature of the relationships between the Gardaí and young people. Gardaí have become involved in Garda Youth Diversion Projects which seek to divert young people from anti-social and/or criminal behaviour. According to the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform (2007), these projects also enhance Garda/community relations. Community policing initiatives, where Gardaí and members of the community and local agencies work together to prevent crime and anti-social behaviour and to improve the overall quality of life also have this aim (An Garda Síochána, 2009b). Although the objectives are generally to enhance the public's relationship with the Gardaí, a by-product of improving relationships may be the development of a better view of certain groups among the Gardaí. One of the strategic imperatives in the Policing Plan for 2008 was 'to renew and invigorate the culture of the Garda Síochána' through an 'assessment of the culture of the organisation and appropriate interventions' (An Garda Síochána, 2008: 18). This suggests that an improvement in Garda culture is already a matter that is being tackled. While this is a welcome step, the Plan does not outline how this is to be achieved or indicate what elements of the culture need to be changed. Thus, it is currently unclear whether it includes Garda manner and actions towards young people.

Conclusion

The research has shown that the young people involved in this study have similar feelings towards and experiences of the police as have been found internationally in larger scale studies. They have a lower level of satisfaction than adults and have a high level of contact with the Gardaí, particularly Garda-initiated contact with 'move ons' and 'stop and searches' featuring predominantly. The young people's experiences of these contacts were generally negative and they were found to lack confidence in the desire or ability of Gardaí to protect their rights. This lack of confidence in or connectedness to the Gardaí may be why so few of the young people were willing to report crimes committed on them and may also make necessary contact with them more difficult and adversarial.

While it is stated in An Garda Síochána's (2009a) Declaration of Professional Values and Ethical Standards that Gardaí have the duty to uphold and protect the human rights of all, regardless of their age, it is important to note that under the terms of the Equal Status Acts 2000–2008 protection against discrimination on the grounds of age

is not extended to those aged under 18. This, along with other aspects of being young (the majority of the young people in the study cannot vote; they generally do not initiate contact with the Gardaí or report unacceptable behaviour towards them) puts them in a vulnerable position and may allow Gardaí abuse the powers that they have been given in a way that they are unlikely to do with adults.

In relation to some discretionary activity, it appears that the young people in the study have been treated in a harsher manner than adults. The general attitude conveyed by the young people towards the Gardaí was negative but attitudes can and do change (Aronson et al., 2007). For relationships to improve it is necessary for changes to be made. Even though these young people may at present have an unfavourable opinion of the Gardaí this could still be changed if they were to have positive experiences with them.

The Gardaí have been subject to much criticism in recent years, some of which has been founded and dealt with by way of the courts and tribunals (Garda Review, 2010; Morris Tribunal, 2010). It is possible that the time has now come to listen to young people as one of the main consumer groups of the Garda service. The information gathered in this study could provide a platform for further research to be completed nationally so that other young people are also given the opportunity to voice their opinions and have their experiences gathered in relation to An Garda Síochána. This would allow generalisations to be drawn at national level and recommendations to be made for changes, if necessary, in Garda practices and policies nationwide.

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Addressing the Needs of Young People

A Broader View of Sexual Health

Caroline Forde

Abstract

This paper presents the findings of an exploratory study investigating the ways in which we can better address the sexual health needs of young people (14–21). Six focus groups and four in-depth interviews were conducted with young people and a wide range of professionals who work with them in the Northwest. It was evident that sexual health continues to be a difficult area for both young people and parents, with a perceived lack of awareness and understanding associated with sexual violence in particular. Personal development programmes were deemed essential, with the value of including the topic of sexual violence in this broader view of sexual health highlighted. Complementary to interagency collaboration, which would ensure that valuable referrals are made, a number of participative and creative approaches involving young people and parents were identified. Implications are discussed in the context of broadening the concept of sexual health and partnership approaches.

Keywords

Young people; sexual health; sexual violence

Introduction

To date, progress has been made in Ireland in relation to improving young people's access to health services and in the provision of information and advice regarding their sexual health, yet further work is required in this area. As part of their strategic plan, the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan (SRCC) designated young people, aged between 14 and 21, as a specific population requiring focused attention. This resulted from a lack of referrals within this age group to the centre. The SRCC thus sought to create a partnership with relevant youth and community organisations, health services and young people in the Sligo and Leitrim area. This was with a view to developing in-depth, detailed understandings of how we can better address the sexual health needs of young people. By means of predominantly focus group research, this paper aims to examine the knowledge shared and identify means of enhancing this knowledge, and although the study reflects a local context, it is likely to have broader relevance at a national and, indeed, international level.

Background

As young people are generally less vulnerable to disease than children or the elderly, their health was not a priority internationally for many years (WHO, 1993). However, the 1989 World Health Assembly recognised that young people are highly vulnerable to the changes that have occurred in the social and sexual mores in many societies in recent times, thus increasing their risk of unwanted pregnancy, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and the misuse of alcohol and drugs (WHO, 1993). However, it was also acknowledged that young people are both willing and able to take greater responsibility for their health in cooperation with the relevant actors in society, once provided with the opportunity (WHO, 1993). An interagency and interdisciplinary approach was thus highlighted as essential to successful health promotion.

Progress has been made internationally over the past ten years in addressing these issues, with the introduction of education programmes designed to equip young people with the life skills they need in order to make informed decisions and the establishment of youth-friendly health services (UN, 2005; Ní Riain & Mulvehill, 2008; Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). However, problems persist worldwide in this area, as a combination of factors, including the lower age of initiation of sexual activity, a tendency towards unprotected sex and the misuse of alcohol and drugs, continue to result in unwanted pregnancies and STIs (Wellings et al., 2001; Denyer et al., 2002; Lazdane & Lazarus, 2004; Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2004; UN, 2005). Accordingly, there has been a renewed focus on the urgent need for youth-friendly services and improved access to sexual and reproductive health information, both in the school and out-of-school settings (Lazdane & Lazarus, 2004; UN 2005).

Ireland – Sexual Health in Context

Irish sexual culture, particularly among young people, mirrors the increasingly liberal social climate recognised by the 1989 World Health Assembly, with international trends towards earlier sexual activity over recent decades also reflected in the (relatively few) Irish studies conducted to date (e.g. Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Layte et al., 2006; O'Keefe et al., 2006; Mayock et al., 2007). As this research highlighted the fact that those who engage in sexual activity at a younger age were less likely to use contraception, it is clear that we need to investigate ways in which to better promote informed decision making among young people. Sexual violence poses an added concern, with non-disclosure, or indeed delayed disclosure, providing a significant challenge to an appropriate response (McGee et al., 2002; RCNI, 2009). In line with the trend in international practice, the focus of health service planning and delivery in Ireland was on adult and child services until 2001, when a shift in focus led to the delivery of adolescent (12–18) and youth (15–24) health services. A number of these have been included in a review of promising practice by the HSE (Ní Riain & Mulvehill, 2008).

While there is increasingly greater openness in Irish society regarding sex and sexuality (Inglis, 1998; O'Connell, 2001), the sexual health behaviour of young people remains poorly understood, and is rarely the subject of public discussion (Mayock & Byrne, 2004). In order to gain an insight into the behaviour and attitudes of young people and thereby develop better responses aimed at addressing their sexual health

needs, more discussion is necessary. The importance of open communication concerning sex in the home has also been highlighted (Burtney, 2000; Wellings et al., 2001; Schubotz et al., 2002), yet it is evident that parents require support in order to fulfil their role as primary sex educators effectively (Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Fullerton & Lee, 2005). The main sources of knowledge concerning sex for young people in Ireland are their own social network, friends and youth media (Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004).

Addressing Young People's Sexual Health Needs

Previous research and discussions regarding young people's sexual health issues have concentrated on the negative, problematic and 'high risk' aspects of adolescence (Denyer et al., 2002; France, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004). 'More recently there has been a shift in focus to the various skills and strategies used by adolescents to protect and promote their health and to enable them to overcome the risk factors' (Denyer et al., 2002: 18). Accordingly, international research has encouraged the development of skills-based sex education programmes designed to develop competence, self-esteem and confidence, allowing the twin objectives of delaying the age of sexual debut and reducing the level of adverse outcomes to be realised, whatever the age of debut (Layte et al., 2006).

Official recognition of the need for Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in Ireland arose from the radically changed context of sexuality (Mayock & Byrne, 2004). Introduced as part of the curriculum in primary and post-primary schools in 1997, RSE became mandatory in 2003. However, it has been noted that this programme has yet to be fully implemented, with many teenagers reporting that teachers failed to discuss the broader social, moral and emotional issues or the practice of safer sex; these research participants displaying a continued lack of knowledge concerning contraception, relationships and STIs (Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Layte et al., 2006; Mayock et al., 2007). Given that the opportunity to discuss sex and sexual health issues in an open and positive environment encourages young people to develop the confidence and competencies in order to progress into the realm of sexual relationships without feeling apprehension, fear or shame (Aggleton et al., 1998), this is of particular concern.

The Teenage Health Initiative (THI), operated by Foróige in partnership with local Health Boards and delivered in the main in an out-of-school setting, was devised as a personal development and sex education programme aimed at delaying the onset of sexual activity among teenagers (Kearns et al., 2008). As youth organisations often provide education and training on public health issues in a participatory atmosphere, it has been recognised that it is often easier for young people to raise and discuss sensitive issues in these forums (WHO, 1993). While THI enables teenagers to become more comfortable discussing sexual and personal issues, a number of gaps have been identified, including the lack of a specific programme for parents and the exclusion of topics such as rape and personal safety (Kearns et al., 2008).

In addition to educational programmes, Crisis Pregnancy Agency campaigns such as 'b4udecide' and 'Think Contraception', leaflets and posters produced by Health Promotion Units and websites such as SpunOut.ie promote healthy decision making

among young people in relation to their sexual health needs. However, it is evident that more work is needed in this area in addition to improving access to health services, including those that address sexual violence. Research shows that involving young people in the development of the services that affect them offers valuable benefits to both the services and the young people who want to be consulted, listened to and treated with respect (Kirby, 2001; Denyer et al., 2002; Keenaghan & Roche, 2007; Ní Riain & Mulvehill, 2008).

It is the aim of this paper to investigate the ways in which the SRCC, in partnership with youth and community organisations and health services, can reach out more proactively to young people in Sligo and Leitrim in relation to making sexual health needs easier for them to negotiate. While reflecting a local context, the findings should have a broader relevance at a national and, indeed, international level. The main focus is on the importance of broadening the concept of sexual health and recognising the contribution of partnership approaches to successful health promotion.

Methodology

An exploratory study was conducted, seeking new insights and generating ideas in order to gain an enhanced understanding of the topic under investigation (Robson, 2002; McGivern, 2003). As community-based action research, it involved the active participation of service providers and the young people whose sexual health needs they wish to better address, resulting in practical outcomes related to these participants' work and lives respectively (Winter et al., 1989; Stringer, 2007). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it facilitates an understanding of the meaning the participants attach to the topic and is rich in context (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). The research sought to build on the findings to date of quantitative and qualitative studies conducted nationally and internationally.

Participants

Six focus groups, three with young people and three with professionals, and four semi-structured, in-depth interviews with professionals, two of which were 'paired depths', were conducted in 2009. Twenty one participants were professionals who work with young people aged between 14 and 21; and 19 were young people within this age group. The inclusion of young people in the study had the added value of introducing the authentic voice of personal experience. The mutual support generated within focus groups encourages open conversation concerning embarrassing subjects and feelings that are common to a group but which may be considered to deviate from mainstream culture or attitudes (Kitzinger, 1995). This is particularly important when researching stigmatised or taboo subjects such as sexual health and sexual violence.

'The focus group is characterised by homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions' (Krueger & Casey, 2000: 71). In order to ensure diversity within the sample, the rationale for selecting participants involved a number of key stratifying variables (Bryman, 2004), namely gender, professional role, geographic location and age. To give a holistic picture, a variety of professional roles were represented, namely youth workers, sexual violence and addiction counsellors, coordinators of youth and community organisations and nurses,

including individuals who work in an STI clinic. The participants of the study were accessed via the SRCC, a database of youth and community organisations held by them, health services known to them and additional youth organisations identified.

Procedure

Each focus group comprised six participants, with the exception of one group of seven young people and one mini-group discussion involving three professionals. A balance was sought between the need for enough individuals to ensure a lively discussion and the problems associated with over-large groups. The discussions with young people involved groups that were pre-established within the organisations they attended, one all-male between the ages of 19 and 21, one all-female between the ages of 16 and 17 and one a mixture of both males and females between the ages of 15 and 17. A concern has been expressed that such cohesive groups may provide a narrow range of views (Krueger & Casey, 2000), but it is the view of the current author that the young participants in this study appeared confident in expressing their own opinions.

Separate topic guides were devised for the professionals and the young people, the data generated from the research with the professionals informing the questions for the latter. As questions of a general nature were involved, the schedules were used as a guide and, where appropriate, the researcher deviated from the order of these in response to issues raised by individual respondents (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). A combination of open-ended, probing, follow-up and clarifying questions was used in order to elicit depth, detail, vividness, nuance and richness (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main areas addressed in the topic guide explored the understandings and behaviour of young people in relation to their sexual health, how professionals who work with young people can promote informed decision making among young people in relation to their sexual relationships, how parents can be supported to respond to the sexual health needs of their children and how young people can contribute to addressing their own information needs in this area. Emergent themes from the initial discussions were thus explored and followed up in subsequent focus groups and interviews, which were recorded and transcribed for analysis, and which lasted approximately sixty minutes on average.

Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed and informed consent obtained from all participants and the parent(s) of those under the age of 18. The topic of young people's sexual health is sensitive and often controversial. However, the actual experiences of the young people were not sought in this research as the focus was on their ideas of how we can better serve young people in this area. The researcher was, nonetheless, mindful at all times of the wellbeing of participants and was guided by the national Children First Guidelines (Department of Health & Children, 1999). Ethical approval was received from the Research Ethics Committee (REC) at Sligo General Hospital.

In order to analyse the data, twenty main coding categories were devised, the first codes developed from the aims of the project, in conjunction with the expectation of certain responses. Additional codes emerged directly from the data, namely the topics and issues raised by the interviewees. Once satisfied these codes accurately reflected the data, the transcripts were coded accordingly. Themes, patterns and contradictions were next sought within the data, ensuring that the richness of the information was not

lost (Khosropour & Walsh, 2001). A summary of elaborated themes was produced from each code and relationships between these themes were then explored. The material from the focus groups and interviews was thus combined in order to ‘...stitch together descriptions of events into a coherent narrative’ (Rubin & Rubin, 2005: 201). In relation to the group discussions, the analysis focused on extensiveness rather than frequency, namely the number of participants who referred to a particular theme (Krueger & Casey, 2000), and incorporated a ‘between’ and ‘within’ each focus group approach.

A number of limitations need to be acknowledged. As a small-scale qualitative study the findings of this research do not lay claim to universal generalisability (Kvale, 1996). The young people recruited for this study were participants in the organisations involved and they cannot be said to be representative of young people in general, even within their own local areas. The results paint a picture of the participants’ perceptions as understood by the researcher. Finally, given the gender breakdown within the professional groups represented, only a small number of males were included in the sample.

Findings

As it is important to establish the understandings and behaviour of young people regarding their sexual health in order to identify the ways in which we can better address their needs; the findings first provide an insight into this area. These findings thus outline the participants’ perspectives in addition to what the experiences of the professionals reveal about the behaviour of young people. Next, suggested ways in which informed decision making among young people can be promoted are presented. Finally, participants’ perspectives are summarised on how parents can be supported, relevant services can be improved, and how young people can contribute to meeting their own sexual health information needs. There was a striking consistency between the perspectives of young people and professionals, young males and females and between the different professional groups.

Sexual Health: Young People’s Understandings and Behaviour

No matter how you try to improve, like to be able to talk to people, it’s still going to be a dodgy subject anyway, no matter how much you try and improve. I know it’s better to improve the situation but it’s still going to be one of those topics that you’re not gonna, it’s not as easy to talk about as anything else.

The ‘awkward’ nature of this quote from a young female aged 17 sets the scene for the manner in which the participants perceived the topic of sexual health as viewed within Irish society today. There was a general agreement among all of the participants that sexual health is where drugs and alcohol were ten years ago; that young people are generally more open about drinking and smoking marijuana than they are about discussing their sexual health needs. A small number of professionals remarked that when young people do approach them there is an urgency about their needs as they wait until the situation is critical. It was also felt that they are often unaware of the services available to them.

It was evident that sexual violence was deemed particularly taboo by several female teenagers, with reference frequently made to a perceived stigma that is attached to the experience of rape. The following exchange which took place in a focus group with young girls highlights the fear engendered by such stigma, particularly regarding acquaintance rape:

P1: *If it was someone you know; there's such a stigma on it like I don't think that there would be a lot of people that you would be able to trust to actually tell them. Just say for instance sake you're going out with someone and then you were with them...and then they raped you and then you go to your parents and say 'ok this happened to me'... what if they didn't know that you're in that kind of relationship...How are you going to explain to them and then they're going to think...*

P2: *You should have told them about it in the first place*

P1: *I didn't know that you were...doing that sort of thing like. Can you trust them that much to say it to them; it's such an awkward topic.*

Given the fact that almost nine out of every ten perpetrators of sexual violence are known to their victims (RCNI, 2009), this is of particular concern. Furthermore, a female youth worker believed that self-blame prevents survivors of sexual violence from accessing a rape crisis centre (RCC), a finding which is consistent with Kelleher & McGilloway's (2009) Irish study which highlighted a number of barriers to accessing RCC support services.

A perceived lack of knowledge and understanding on the part of young people emerged as a common theme across the focus groups and interviews conducted with the professionals, particularly in relation to the most prevalent risks they face. Of greater concern is the fact that several professionals and young people believed that young girls are not identifying sexual violence as an issue and do not understand that they have the right to say no to sexual coercion. As a female youth worker commented:

...through my previous work... girls would come in and say what they got up to over the weekend and as we were sitting there as workers we were hearing that they'd been raped...or that they'd been sexually assaulted and the girls were telling us what a great time they'd had and that they had to have sex with so and so because otherwise this would have happened, but that was all part of the norm...

Societal pressure and family background were highlighted as factors influencing the vulnerability of young girls, with what is deemed acceptable influencing their self-worth. A small number of professionals also suggested that young girls feel worthless unless they are in a sexual relationship and therefore submit to such relationships being conducted on their partners' terms. According to a female youth worker, all of these interconnected issues link back to a lack of self-esteem on the part of the young females.

Promotion of Informed Decision Making

Reflecting the need to build self-esteem, the preferred means of promoting informed decision making among young people in relation to their sexual health were personal

development programmes and group workshops for older young people, followed by one to one discussions where necessary. The following excerpt from a focus group with professionals demonstrates this point well:

- P1: *When I would talk about this topic [sexual health], I would always do it in conjunction with alcohol and drugs and building self-esteem because their sexual health and their use of alcohol and drugs is so closely connected...*
- P2: *Yeah I agree with you because I think it's all about building trust and it's, I don't think it's all about providing services for people to avail of when they are in dire need.*
- P1: *No.*
- P2: *You know whether it's sexual health or rape crisis, I think what we could prevent is a lot better but I think we're back down to empowerment ... It needs to be part of an integrated... first if all bringing young people to a level where they feel that they are in control of themselves and what's going on so they're much more willing and capable...of saying yes or no or making decisions...*

In order to reduce the stigma attached to the topic of sexual health, it was recommended that personal development programmes begin with issues such as self-worth and relationships, affirming the existing format of the Teenage Health Initiative (Kearns et al., 2008). A number of professionals also noted that by including the issue of sexual violence in this broader view of sexual health, discussions would become less intimidating to young people. The expansion of Foróige's THI programme to other youth and community organisations is one suggestion (a female youth worker mentioned in an interview that she is a member of the working group for a best practice manual for THI being developed by the Foróige Best Practice Unit).

As queries and issues regarding sexual coercion will inevitably arise on a day to day basis within youth and community organisations, it was also recommended that youth workers come together in order to deal with their own issues first. Several professionals and young people expressed the view that, given the relationship already established, youth workers would be the ideal individuals to deliver the general aspects of a personal development programme, with a GP or nurse brought in to deliver the specific details relating to contraception and STIs. The importance of young people building a rapport with medical professionals, thereby providing a local link, was emphasised.

...you know because at the end of the day that's where they have to go to get contraception or get any advice if they are worried about anything so it kind of breaks down that wee bit of a barrier; that people are afraid to go into the doctors and ask questions like that.

(Female Youth Worker)

In relation to additional channels of communication, the view was expressed by a male nurse that, whatever means are utilised, it is essential that young people from every strata of society are targeted, including those who are isolated and do not have the same access as others to education, supports and technology. While youth-based websites were viewed as the most appropriate modern means of reaching young

people, other tools were also seen as having a role to play, including attractive and engaging leaflets and wallet cards with useful information and contact details.

Key Actors in Society

There was much discussion surrounding the difficulties experienced by both parents and children concerning their discussion of sexual health, with a number of factors identified as hindering young people from being open with their parents, including an overprotective attitude and a lack of trust. Many young people advised that parents need to realise that sexual health is a serious issue for them but also that it should not be treated as taboo:

If it comes up it's more like a warning to you. It's not like they're trying to help you understand it or discuss it with you, like they're not on the same side as you... it's more like they're talking down to you... 'make sure this doesn't happen to you' and so you can't get an honest opinion.

(Young Female aged 16)

The perceived lack of awareness and understanding on the part of young people regarding sexual coercion and the most prevalent risks they face was also associated by a small number of participants with parents' inability to educate and support their children. The need for parents to have support and guidance via programmes and information evenings was identified by many of the participants. It was also suggested that existing referral pathways within organisations, and the perception of the SRCC name as frightening to both parents and young people, constitute barriers to accessing support.

Reflecting the earlier assertion that the topic of sexual health continues to be taboo within Irish society, many young people believed that there is a far greater focus on the provision of information regarding drugs and alcohol, particularly in the school environment and this only serves to reinforce the stigma attached.

We got way more information on alcohol and drugs in health ed, mother of god more drugs... by making it [sex] so different, it makes you more uncomfortable with it.

(Young Female aged 17)

There was a general consensus across all of the focus groups and interviews that RSE is not being taught properly in schools, if at all, with a small number of professionals criticising the exclusion of contraception and the emotional aspect of relationships. The difficulty of teachers providing sex education to their students was recognised by both young people and professionals, and the need for external facilitators was suggested.

The view was broadly shared that that young people can contribute to addressing their own sexual health information needs through a number of avenues, including peer education and drama. Writing and directing a play on the topic of sexual health could enable young people to develop feelings of control, exploration, self-expression and self-esteem. The following quote from a female youth worker evokes the essence of social inclusion, reflecting the earlier assertion regarding channels of communication reaching young people from every strata of society:

I'm sure given the smallest opening for them to express themselves...a great opportunity for them to act out whatever things that are relevant issues to them ...

It would stick with them if they get the opportunity to do it... Some young people never get a chance and if they do get one little chance it changes their lives forever...So I think anything that we can do to encourage them and make them feel more confident.

In addition, it was felt that older young people would benefit from the inclusion of a module on sexual health as part of a humanities or social science course.

Discussion

It is widely recognised that Irish sexual culture, particularly among the young, mirrors the increasingly liberal international social climate, yet the sexual health behaviour of young people remains poorly understood and is rarely the subject of public discussion (Mayock & Byrne, 2004). It is important to establish the understandings and behaviour of young people regarding their sexual health in order to better identify the ways in which we can promote informed decision making among them.

Sexual Health: Young People's Understandings and Behaviour

According to Inglis (1998) and O'Connell (2001), there is currently a greater openness in Ireland regarding sex and sexuality as the culture of silence has gradually eroded. However, the study's findings suggest that the topic of sexual health remains taboo to a large extent within Irish society and this is reflected in how young people understand their needs in this area, with many professionals regarding young people as quite secretive. Sexual violence was deemed particularly taboo by several female teenagers and it is evident that the prevailing attitudes of blame need to be challenged. There is considerable room for improving young people's knowledge and understanding, particularly in relation to the most prevalent risks they face, a finding which replicates those of a number of previous Irish studies focusing on the sexual health of adolescents (Doocey et al., 2003; Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004).

'Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence' (WHO, 2004: 67). However, there was a strong belief that young women are not identifying sexual violence and do not understand that they have the right to say no to sexual coercion. Notably, the same concern was not expressed in regard to young men, perhaps reflecting the traditional view that the onus is on girls alone to manage the issue of consent.

It is evident that discomfort and lack of knowledge can often be compounded by a lack of self-esteem and therefore there is a need to continue raising young people's awareness and building their skills and abilities in order to reduce the stigma attached to sexual health issues and promote informed decision making. In addition, the findings indicate that where this is complemented by knowledge of the services available, young people will no longer wait until a situation has reached a critical stage before addressing it.

Key Actors in Society

Positive relationships are key to achieving these aims, as self-esteem, confidence and competence building ideally begins at home and is then reinforced in both the school and out-of-school settings. Given that it influences the behaviour and attitudes of

young people (Fullerton & Lee, 2005), the core relationship between parents and their children was highlighted as being of paramount importance, particularly in relation to their sexual health. It was recognised that it can be difficult for parents and children to discuss sex, and yet the findings also suggest a need to rethink adult attitudes in relation to over protectiveness and a lack of trust.

Furthermore, informants felt that some parents are also unaware of the most prevalent risks facing young people and are therefore not in a position to provide education and support. As sexual coercion constitutes one of these dangers, it is clear that this lack of awareness needs to be challenged before we can address what is happening with young people. In keeping with the findings of Fullerton and Lee (2005), the study suggests that parents require programmes of information, support and guidance which would contribute to a better understanding and trust of their children in addition to developing the tools they need to open up discussion.

In terms of the school and out-of-school settings, a number of recommendations have been proposed. The provision of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) was generally viewed in a negative light, with the difficulty of teachers providing sex education to their students recognised. It was suggested that an outside facilitator would be better placed to deliver RSE. Criticism was expressed in relation to the exclusion of contraception and the emotional aspect of relationships, a finding that is in agreement with those reported in previous Irish studies (Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Layte et al., 2006).

As the commissioning body, a number of valuable insights into the perceived difficulties associated with young people accessing the services of the SRCC were provided. It was found that existing referral pathways within organisations, and the perception of the SRCC name as frightening to both parents and young people, constitute barriers which clearly need to be addressed. Working on solutions to these issues would ensure that the message that the SRCC is a viable option if sexual violence does occur would be promoted.

Promotion of Informed Decision Making

Supporting the recognition of the need for information to be reinforced by self-esteem, personal development programmes were deemed essential, with several participants highlighting the value of including the topic of sexual violence in this broader view of sexual health. These findings are consistent with the recommendations of both national and international research in relation to skills-based education (Denyer et al., 2002; Department of Health, 2003; Mayock & Byrne, 2004; Teenage Pregnancy Unit, 2004; Layte et al., 2006) and an evaluation of THI conducted by Kearns et al (2008). As with THI, by beginning a personal development programme with the issues of self-worth and relationships, a natural progression into the area of sexual health could be achieved. While youth workers could deliver the general aspects of THI via group work, a medical professional might be brought in to give talks on contraception and STIs. In addition, and as already mentioned, separate information, support and guidance is required for parents.

Youth media has been recognised as one of the main sources of sexual knowledge for young people in Ireland (Hyde & Howlett, 2004; Mayock & Byrne, 2004). In keeping with this finding, websites such as SpunOut.ie were highlighted as an effective

means of reaching young people, while leaflets and wallet cards containing useful contact details are also helpful. This research also illustrated a range of ways in which young people can contribute to meeting their own sexual health information needs, including peer education, module development and drama. There was general agreement among respondents that once carefully planned and monitored, such opportunities would prove successful.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that much can be gained from consulting with young people and those who work with them. It is also clear that much more can be achieved by creating a partnership through which their proposals can be addressed. This paper has shown that there is a need to broaden both the concept of sexual health and the collaborative partnerships that have been recognised as essential to successful health promotion (the Appendix to this article includes recommendations from the original research report for the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre and other partners). A broader view of sexual health would continue to promote the recognition of the personal development aspect and also include the topic of sexual violence which has hitherto received insufficient attention.

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Appendix: *Recommendations from Research Report*

SRCC and Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI)

- There is an opportunity for these organisations to work with Foróige in relation to designing a module on sexual violence for inclusion in the THI official best practice manual. Once included, RCC counsellors would ideally be brought in to give talks on this aspect of the programme.
- SRCC should manage workshops for youth workers in order to come together to address their issues in relation to sexual coercion.
- SRCC to do more work on the issue of viable referral pathways for young people with the relevant statutory and youth work agencies in relation to sexual violence, taking cognisance of the 1999 Children First Guidelines.
- SRCC to consider establishing a designated part of their service for young people which would go by a different name and advertise this service more widely in youth-friendly locations.
- SRCC to identify a designated young persons' counsellor who would act as a liaison between youth and community organisations and health services and the SRCC.
- SRCC and RCNI to discuss how to include sexual violence on the school curriculum within the delivery of RSE.

Youth and Community Organisations

- Training in the delivery of THI to be offered to all youth workers, with delivery at local level possible in partnership with Foróige and funding to be agreed between all interested parties.

Department of Education

- The Department of Education to be made aware of the findings of the study, with particular attention brought to the expressed views regarding the use of external facilitators to deliver RSE or a personal development programme which would be complementary to RSE.

Partnership

- Build upon the partnership created via this project in order to realise the feasible ideas generated and continue to work together, utilising such channels of communication as youth media and drama.

Biographical Note

Since graduating from the M.Sc. in Applied Social Research at Trinity College Dublin with a distinction in 2008, Caroline Forde has been working as a research and policy intern for the Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Counselling Centre, Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan (SRCC) and the Rape Crisis Network of Ireland (RCNI). She has recently submitted a PhD proposal on the topic of sexual violence to the Global Women's Studies Department in NUI Galway.

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Drug and Alcohol-Related Knowledge, Attitudes And Behaviour

A Study of Early School Leavers in the West of Ireland

Sue Redmond and Eva Devaney

Abstract

Substance use can lead to a variety of negative impacts on society and individuals. Early school leaving places a person at increased risk of substance use and potential dependence. This research aims to explore the drug and alcohol related attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of early school leavers (aged 15–20) in the West of Ireland. The findings suggest that use of all substances, except solvents, is high by comparison with school-going counterparts. Alcohol use is widespread and accepted, with knowledge of the harms from alcohol coming from lived experience. Parental influence emerges as important in shaping a young person's attitudes towards alcohol. A lack of understanding of the link between drugs – mainly cocaine – and addiction was evident. Dissatisfaction with current drugs education was apparent and knowledge level varied considerably within the group studied.

Keywords

Early school leavers; drugs; alcohol; attitudes; behaviours

Introduction

In its founding constitution the World Health Organisation (WHO 1946) declared that 'health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease and infirmity'. Initiatives in Ireland such as the Health Promotion Strategy (2000), National Alcohol Policy (Health Promotion Unit, 1996) and National Drugs Strategy (Department of Tourism, Sport and Recreation, 2001) all prioritise drugs prevention and education and aim to delay the onset of alcohol consumption or to promote the non-use of drugs. Substance use behaviour can be understood with reference to a range of theories including social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1977a), social learning theory (Bandura, 1977b; Hoffman et al., 2006), the health belief model (Rosenstock, 1966; Becker, 1974), theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1967; Morgan and Grube, 1994), and the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen and Madden, 1986). There are varied reasons why a person uses drugs or alcohol. The initial choice to take is mostly voluntary. The selection of drugs available in Ireland have properties which can stimulate, sedate, cause hallucinations or reduce pain, therefore at any one time a person can obtain a substance to alter the way they feel or behave as desired. Early school leaving is seen as a risk factor for substance use. Education is a basic determinant of

health (Whitehead 1990; Lalor et al., 2007). Education is fundamental to reducing the health inequalities worldwide; it also provides people with the knowledge and ability to make informed decisions about their health. A lack of educational attainment and potentially fewer opportunities to progress within the workforce and society can place young people at greater risk of substance use and addiction. The European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD, 2007) found that 47 per cent of Irish 15–17 year olds had been drunk in the past twelve months compared with an EU average of 39 per cent. The ESPAD (2007) also found that 20 per cent of 15–17 year olds have used cannabis, similar to the EU average of 19 per cent and down on the 2003 figure of 39 per cent (ESPAD, 2003). Inhalant misuse was also higher for young Irish people at 15 per cent compared to the European average of 9 per cent. Other illicit substances, such as LSD, speed, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin were used by 10 per cent of young Irish people compared to a European average of 7 per cent.

Taken together these figures suggest that Irish young people are more likely than their European counterparts to engage in high-risk behaviour such as drug taking. Most previous drug and alcohol research in Ireland has been undertaken with school-going populations, with little specific attention to the most at risk young people, early school leavers. This study therefore set out to explore the attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of early school leavers with regard to drugs and alcohol as well as their views of drug and alcohol education.

Methodology

The research approach is a mixed-method one. It was considered that the research questions posed would be best answered through triangulation, which Cohen et al. (2000:112) describe as ‘the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour’. Questionnaires, focus groups and ‘photo-voice’ were the tools used for data collection. The research was conducted in nine Youthreach early school leaver centres in counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. Participant, parent and centre consent was sought and granted. Simple random sampling was used in selecting respondents for the questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for the focus groups and ‘photovoice’ exercise (see below): centre coordinators were asked to select participants whom they knew from experience would be willing and interested and would have something to say.

Of the 106 completed questionnaires 47 were male (44.3 per cent) and 59 were female (55.7 per cent). The respondents were aged from 15–20 years with a mean age of 16 years. The total number of students in the combined centres was 290. The total number of young people who attended the centres on the day the questionnaire was administered was 252, but questionnaires were only distributed to half of these for practical reasons. A total of 121 questionnaires was completed yielding a response rate of 96 per cent. Of the 121 questionnaires, 106 were completed correctly, six were discarded due to ticking ‘Revelin’ the dummy drug and nine due to questionnaires being incomplete or destroyed. This yielded an actual response rate of 84 per cent for valid questionnaires. There were three focus groups as follows:

- Focus group 1 (n=7): four females and three males aged 16–19 years (mean age 17 years).

- Focus group 2 (n=8): four females and four males aged 15–17 years (mean age 16 years).
- Focus group 3 (n=7); seven males aged 15–18 years (mean age 16 years).

Five males (15–16 years) participated in the photovoice exercise. Photovoice is a ‘process by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community through a specific photographic technique’ (Wang and Burris, 1997: 369). Participants were invited to create visual images or sculptures expressing their experiences or perceptions of drugs and alcohol, photograph them and then talk about them in the group. Examples of the young people’s photovoice artefacts are given below.

Findings

Table 1 outlines that lifetime reported use of any illegal drug was 51 per cent and lifetime use of any illegal substance, excluding cannabis, was 30 per cent.

	Yes N	%	No N	%	Total N	%
Lifetime use of an illegal drug	54	51	52	49	106	100
Lifetime use of an illegal drug excluding cannabis	32	30	74	70	106	100

Table 1: Lifetime use of illegal drugs

Table 2 outlines the frequency of use of each substance. Tobacco is smoked daily by 66 per cent of respondents. Six out of seven respondents (85.9 per cent) have drunk alcohol, while 70.8 per cent do at least monthly and more than half at least weekly. Cannabis has been used by 44.3 per cent of respondents and 24.5 per cent report at least monthly use. Just over one in ten (12 per cent) have used solvents. Ecstasy has been used by 22.4 per cent of respondents, speed by 17.9 per cent and cocaine by 21.7 per cent. Just under one in twenty (4.7 per cent) report having tried heroin.

	Tobacco	Alcohol	Cannabis	Ecstasy	Speed	Solvents	Cocaine	Crack cocaine	Heroin
Reported Use	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Never	17.9	14.2	55.7	77.4	82.1	87.7	78.3	96.2	95.3
Once/Twice	11.3	15.1	19.8	7.5	12.3	11.3	14.2	1.9	4.7
Monthly	2.8	19.8	11.3	12.3	4.7	0	6.6	1.9	0
Every Week	1.9	36.8	3.8	2.8	.9	.9	.9	0	0
3+ times/wk	–	12.3	7.5	–	–	–	–	–	–
Every Day	66.0	1.9	1.9	–	–	–	–	–	–
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2: Frequency of use by substance

Attitudes and Perceptions

The general view of cigarette smoking was that people have a right to; that it is an individual's choice. Smokers were seen to be only doing harm to themselves. For the most part participants perceived alcohol as a positive substance that would enhance their confidence and increase enjoyment. Some risks were highlighted and participants were aware of the impact of heavy drinking on decision making, poor judgement and potential for violence and aggression.

Parental Influence

Just over half the respondents, 53.8 per cent, thought that they would not get into trouble with their parents if they drank alcohol (Figure 1). However, parental influence was seen as crucial to behaviour with respect to alcohol. Most participants felt that if parents allowed their teenagers to drink alcohol with them it would instil a more responsible approach to alcohol.

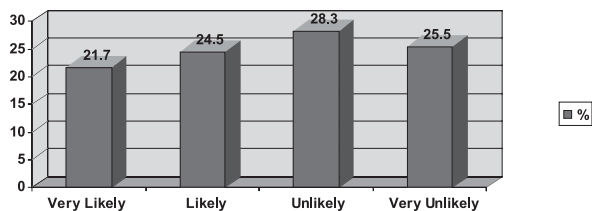


Figure 1: *How likely is it if you drink alcohol in the next month you would get into trouble with your parents?*

Table 3 demonstrates that those who drink regularly (i.e. monthly or more often) are less likely to feel that they will get into trouble with their parents for drinking. The differences were statistically significant at $p<0.05$ level (Chi square=25.260, $df=2$, $p=0.000$).

		Frequency of drinking alcohol			Total
		Never N	Once/Twice N	Regular N	Never N
Trouble with Parents?	Likely	15	10	24	49
	Unlikely	0	6	51	57
Total		15	16	75	106

Table 3: *Frequency of alcohol use by 'likelihood of getting into trouble with parents'*

Attitudes towards Alcohol

The great majority of respondents, 84.9 per cent, believed that drinking alcohol would translate into having more fun (Figure 2).

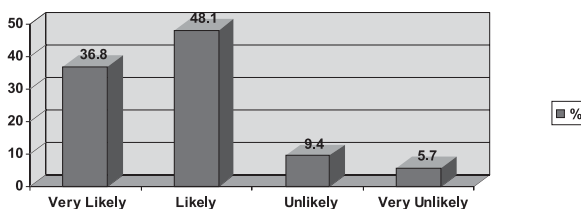


Figure 2: *How likely is it if you drink alcohol in the next month you would have more fun?*

In terms of using alcohol as a coping strategy, 47.2 per cent of respondents believed that alcohol could help them to forget their troubles (Figure 3).

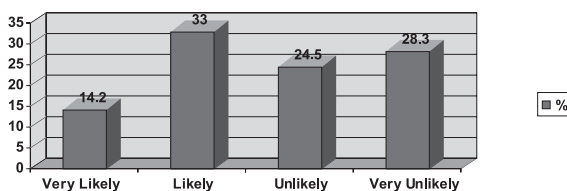


Figure 3: *How likely is it if you drink alcohol in the next month you would forget your troubles?*

The older participants were aware that drinking at fifteen years old was harmful, despite having done so themselves. They felt they had insight into risks it posed to behaviour and decision-making by young people. The younger participants felt strongly that the drinking age should be lowered so that they could drink in pubs in a safe environment and not 'bushing' i.e. drinking in fields or parks. When asked whether they believed that Irish people had a problem with controlling their drinking, most felt that it was no more a problem in this country than in any other and that it really was only a small percentage of the population who generally 'gave the rest a bad name'. Others thought that there was 'very little to do' in Ireland as well as 'bad weather' which inhibited their creativity and left drinking as the only thing to do. In the main participants felt that alcohol facilitated 'great fun' and did not cause huge problems. However there was an awareness of how drinking to excess could lead to an increased risk of violence and sexual risk taking.

Some participants felt that alcohol increased their likelihood of trying other things, and noted that it was common among some of their typically non-drug using peers to use illicit drugs when under the influence of alcohol and then regret it. Participants felt that there was very little for young people to do in their local area and that this could impact on drug or alcohol use.

Gender Specific Risks

A variety of dangers that girls were at risk of when under the influence of alcohol were highlighted. These included not looking after themselves or each other by walking home alone or leaving friends behind if they did not get into a venue. They also believe they can be vulnerable when they are drunk and may be taken advantage of. They may not 'have respect for themselves' when they do get drunk and then do things that they had not intended to or will regret, such as unprotected sex leading to STI's, unplanned pregnancies or taking drugs. When participants explored the negative consequences of alcohol for boys, universally it was identified that violence and aggression were key risks. Also the male participants believed that they would probably go to greater lengths to attain drugs than their female counterparts and as such were at greater risk of harming themselves and others.

Attitudes towards Drugs

The focus groups revealed a 'normalised' attitude towards substance use. All focus group participants believed that cannabis should be legalised. Most felt that cannabis use was widespread and relatively harmless. In general participants were of the opinion that alcohol was more harmful than cannabis. The majority of participants felt strongly that all drugs could not be legalised. One participant felt that less harm would come to individuals if all drugs were legal and regulated. However, the majority of participants did feel that experimenting with drugs was acceptable. Some participants could not understand how substance use lead on to addiction, particularly cocaine. Participants did recognise that if their peers were using substances they were more likely to try them, however they did not generally feel that it was peer pressure that made people try drugs.

Marijuana and illicit substances were not thought to increase a person's popularity, with the great majority (83.9 per cent) thinking that such use was 'unlikely' or 'very unlikely' to enhance acceptance with peers (Figure 4). However Table 4 indicates that those who use cannabis regularly (i.e. at least monthly) were more likely to think that they could have fun by using drugs. The differences were statistically significant at $p < 0.05$ level (Chi square=16.065, $df=2$, $p=0.000$).

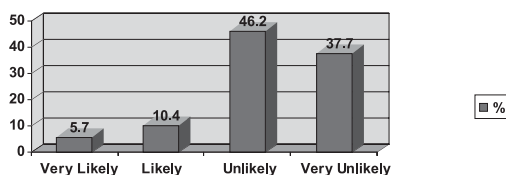


Figure 4: *How likely is it that if you took marijuana or other illegal substances in the next month you would be more popular?*

		Have fun while using drugs?		Total
		Likely N	Unlikely N	N
Frequency of cannabis use	Never	25	34	59
	Once/Twice	17	4	21
	Regular	21	5	26
Total		63	43	106

Table 3: *Frequency of cannabis use by 'likelihood of having fun' when using drugs*

Education

The majority of participants believe that most young people do not know enough about alcohol before they start drinking and they felt that they generally learned about alcohol by drinking it themselves. They also felt that a person may learn about alcohol from their parents, particularly if they are allowed to drink with them, but in the main their understanding and knowledge come from first hand experience. Most participants felt that they did not receive enough education around drugs; predominantly they felt they discovered for themselves the effects, influences and often the risks associated with taking drugs.

Drinking and Driving

Attitudes towards drink-driving were predominantly negative, with participants initially saying they would not get into a car with someone who had a few drinks on them. However they felt that if it was late and they had a few drinks themselves they would be more inclined to get in a car with someone who had been drinking. The perception was that the person driving would have to be fairly drunk for them to consider not taking a lift. Overall participants seemed to prefer the idea of getting into a car with someone who would be 'stoned' though some participants thought that the driver might be unable to react if too stoned.

Photovoice

'Photovoice' (Wand and Burris, 1997) is a visual way of enabling participants to express their attitudes towards substance use in their community. It was used as a descriptive tool to add strength and validity to the focus group and questionnaire findings. Five young men were invited to create sculptures or visual representations expressing their experiences and perceptions of alcohol and drugs, and then to photograph and discuss these. Just two examples will be given here.

James's image and commentary makes the link between drugs and the impact on relationships with others, and also with mental health. He wanted to illustrate how drugs can at the start be enticing and yet when people become dependent they lose interest in other things such as their appearance, their health and their relationships.



‘This guy is out of his head. Drugs have made him lose his mind. Drugs affect your brain and this can mean that you act and think differently than normal. This can affect your family and friends’ (James).

Karl wanted to indicate how prevalent cannabis use is in his community, coupled with an expectation to smoke to be ‘cool’ and to fit in with others.



‘This model also shows how normal cannabis smoking is within our community’ (Karl).

Discussion

The data reveal that when compared with the findings for young people in general a higher percentage of the early school leavers in this study use both legal and illegal substances, putting them at greater risks of health, social, emotional and economic problems. According to this research, 66 per cent of early school leavers use tobacco daily, compared with 23 per cent of 15–17 year old school goers who report smoking over 40 times in the ESPAD 2007 study. Six out of every seven early school leavers (85.9 per cent) have drunk alcohol and more than half (51 per cent) do so at least weekly. For school goers, 78 per cent report having drunk alcohol and 21 per cent report having drunk 20 or more times over the past 12 months (ESPAD, 2007).

In terms of cannabis use, 44.3 per cent of these early school leavers report having tried it and 24.5 per cent report at least monthly use. The ESPAD survey (2007) revealed 20 per cent report life-time use of cannabis, and 9 per cent have used in the previous 30 days. The findings of the current study reveal that a higher proportion of early school leavers have tried cannabis and report regular use. This may be in part explained by the fact that the centres involved in the study engage young people who may be more likely to engage in risk taking behaviour, be more 'like-minded' or exert greater influence over each other's curiosity and experimentation, as well as having more money available to them from incentives to attend the programme. Lifetime use of any illicit drug was 51 per cent of the population which was lower than the finding by Mayock and Byrne (2004) that 61 per cent of early school leavers reported lifetime use of an illegal drug. This differential may be due to higher incidences of drug use in Dublin where their study was conducted.

Lifetime use of illicit drugs other than cannabis, such as LSD, ecstasy, cocaine and heroin, was 30 per cent for the early school leavers in the current study compared with 10.9 per cent of school goers (ESPAD, 2007). Early school leavers' reported use was 7.5 per cent for both magic mushrooms and LSD, 21.7 per cent for cocaine, 22.4 per cent for ecstasy, 17.9 per cent for speed, 4.7 per cent for heroin, 3.8 per cent for crack cocaine. The equivalent findings in the study by Mayock and Byrne (2004) were 29.3 per cent for ecstasy, 17 per cent for magic mushrooms, 4.9 per cent for LSD, 9.8 per cent for amphetamine and/or cocaine. This comparison suggests the variability of drug use within the early school leaving population in different parts of Ireland and also highlights the increased prevalence of cocaine use among the respondents in the more recent study.

The early school leavers in this study are three times more likely to use illicit drugs (other than cannabis) than their school going peers. Reported solvent use was 12 per cent for early school leavers compared with 15 per cent of school goers (ESPAD 2007). Mayock and Byrne (2004) reported solvent use at 7.3 per cent. Kelleher et al. (2003) found that 21.3 per cent of school going adolescents in the mid-west of Ireland had used inhalants. The lower number for early school leavers could be due to the fluctuating nature of solvent use. It may also be due to early school leavers having more money than their school going peers due to attendance incentives in their programme, possibly enabling them to afford more expensive drugs.

The respondents demonstrated 'normalised' attitudes towards drugs and alcohol. Cannabis use was perceived to be common within society, and participants demonstrated low levels of concerns about its relationship to depression, paranoia, anxiety and schizophrenia. Other drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine were perceived to be more harmful, but also commonplace. The use of cocaine was predominantly opportunistic with little understanding of how people got addicted to it. Heroin was considered the 'down and out' drug and perceived in a more negative light as knowledge of the degeneration, chaos and damage to family life associated with it was better known. Sixsmith and Nic Gabhainn (2008) suggest that the prevalence of drug use is often overestimated by both adolescents and adults, and is therefore perceived as 'normal' behaviour which in turn can promote use by suggesting it is acceptable. The current findings bear out such a 'normalised' attitude towards drug use among early school leavers and concomitantly a high frequency of use. The benefits of not using or moderate use were only apparent when use was out of control. It would

appear that thrill-seeking behaviour and the association of drugs with enjoyment outweigh any perceived harm. Such an approach to drugs seems in keeping with the health belief model (Rosenstock 1966; Becker 1974), according to which *'it won't happen to me'* or *'most people who take it are fine with it, so it should be fine'*.

Young people in this study believed that if parents were to supervise their initial encounters with alcohol they would have a more responsible approach to drinking. This would give them the knowledge and skills to understand how alcohol affects their behaviour, in a safe environment. They believed it could also strengthen their abilities to make safer choices when they drank alcohol with their peers. Peele (2007) outlines how it is important for parents to instil 'real-life motivators' to keep young people addiction free and to promote independence, critical thinking, responsibility, and the ability to enjoy life. He shows that adolescents who do not drink at home with their parents are three times more likely to binge drink, and that parents are the most important influence on young people who become addicted. The young people in this study did not feel that they were pressurised to try drugs. They considered if a person was curious about something they were more likely to try it, particularly if their friends have access to it. They also maintained that if your experience was a positive one, you were more likely to try it again. In general their responses in this regard are in keeping with the social cognitive theory of Bandura (1977a) according to which behaviour is affected by both personal factors and environmental influences, such as home life or peers.

These results support the findings of *Youth as a Resource* (National Consultative Committee on Health Promotion, 1999) which highlight early school leaving as a risk factor for substance use. The findings suggest that substantially more early school leavers will engage in substance use and go on to use with greater frequency than their school going counterparts. Early school leaver centres can have a positive impact on a young person's development and education and enhance their employment prospects, particularly if the mainstream education system does not meet their needs. Young people's attitudes are significantly shaped by their peers. Having a high proportion of drug accepting peers carries the danger that those young people who have not yet used substances may see the benefit in changing their attitudes to accommodate their new surroundings, as suggested by social learning theory (Bandura 1977b).

There was a perception among respondents that young females who drink excessively are more vulnerable to being taken advantage of. Risks include unprotected sex leading to unplanned pregnancies, and greater danger of sexual assault. Kelleher et al.(2003) found that rates of alcohol use were higher for females than males. The Jakarta declaration (WHO, 1997) stressed the empowerment of women as one of the 'prerequisites for health' in the twenty first century. Promoting gender equality and empowering females enables them to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to make healthier life choices, something central to health promotion. This could help reduce unplanned pregnancies, abuse, addiction and poverty that some women experience as a result of alcohol or drug use.

The focus groups in this study also identified that violence and aggression was an issue for males when under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Empowering women without empowering men will not solve the problem of drug and alcohol related violence. Health promotion interventions for young men are therefore also very important. Empowering young men to recognise when alcohol or drugs may be

impacting negatively on their lives could enhance their ability to make healthier choices, readily access services and have more positive relationships.

The participants felt they were ill equipped with knowledge about alcohol before they started drinking, with many reporting drinking as young as 12–13 years old. Drugs education was deemed inadequate by 40 per cent of respondents, and it was often thought that teachers did not feel comfortable delivering it. Morgan (1998) found that many people see themselves as invulnerable to the risks associated with drug use. Morgan also found that many programmes do not in fact ‘fail’ because they have never actually been implemented and he suggests that programmes needed to focus on *attitudes* to substances, as knowledge gains are the easiest outcome to achieve but behaviour change is the most difficult. Drug education can not ‘inoculate’ children against drug use, but it does form part of the range of measures society needs to take to encourage personal development and reduce the harm caused by drugs.

When asked what they believed was effective in drugs education, participants were initially most likely to mention an ex-addict relaying their story; but their interest was perhaps as much in hearing the addict’s story as having their own substance-use behaviour changed. Upon further discussion respondents expressed the opinion that ‘scare tactics’ do not work, and balanced information and decision making were most important. In connection with this, Tobler et al. (1997) found that programmes that rely on ‘scare tactics’ have not reduced the incidence of harmful drug use. They also found that the ex-addict can gain a heroic status in telling their story and inadvertently glamorise risky behaviour. Montazeri (1998) found that fear-arousing messages may actually encourage resistance among audiences along with denial that the message applies to them, and may even contribute to positive attitudes to the very behaviour that they are intended to counter. The very ethics of this form of education would be questionable as ‘scare tactics’ go against the principles of health promotion such as empowerment and personal development.

To a certain extent the early school leavers in this study already know that drugs and alcohol can have negative impacts on their behaviour, health and lives. However it would appear that despite this knowledge continued and escalating substance use is evident. This links with the health belief model (Rosenstock 1966; Becker 1974) which suggests that behaviour is dependent upon the perception that it will or will not lead to harm. With increased normalisation of substance use within society, and the media’s ability to sensationalise celebrity drug use (Drugscope, 2005), the negative aspects of drugs may seem far removed from the direct experience of young people or their friends, even if the dangers are discussed in class or an ex-addict is brought in to talk to them. This highlights the need for innovative and creative ways of engaging young people in drugs and alcohol education, incorporating critical thinking and decision making skills.

Conclusion

The research reported in this paper explored the drug and alcohol related attitudes, knowledge and behaviours of early school leavers in the West of Ireland. It found that the prevalence of substance use was substantially higher when compared with school attendees, and also found a high level of ‘normalisation’ of attitudes to drugs and alcohol. This highlights the importance of cooperative multi-faceted approaches to

reducing the risks posed to early school leavers. These include enhanced education measures aimed at combating the risks related to substance use and integrative programmes to engage parents, teachers and young people. Responses should also take account of the young people's own view that greater availability of activities and opportunities where they can be themselves and socialise with friends would provide positive alternatives to drinking and drug use. This study confirms the findings of other research (e.g. Humphreys et al., 2003) that boredom and insufficient services and facilities, particularly in rural and isolated areas, can lead to experimentation with drugs at an early age. The Appendix to this paper presents further recommendations for consideration in the practice context.

Note

This article is based on a dissertation completed for a Masters in Health Promotion and Education at the University of Limerick, completed by Sue Redmond and supervised by Eva Devaney.

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Appendix: *Practice Recommendations*

- Effective law enforcement of current licensed premises to promote non-drunkenness.
- Smaller SPHE group sizes, a maximum of 15 young people so all opinions can be engaged with in a safe environment, in line with group work best practice.
- Further provision for skills based parenting programmes.
- Innovative harm reduction strategies to keep young people safe.
- Enhanced community policing measures to building better relationships between Gardaí and school and youth projects, and an emphasis on understanding the law and how it protects people.
- Alternative activities are a strong motivator for engaging in healthier lifestyles. An emphasis must be placed on the importance of thrill-seeking activities for families, schools and communities to focus on a 'natural' high as an alternative to drugs.
- Having services and facilities available to young people and communities when they need them such as youth services on Friday and Saturday evenings, and on-call social work after 5pm.
- As adults have a choice of socialising venues to meet their tastes so too should young people, to ensure all diversities are equally catered for.
- Greater emphasis needs to be placed on developing drugs and alcohol education programmes within schools, which are fully implemented, competently delivered and stringently evaluated, in line with best practice.
- Earlier interventions at national school level, including evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of the 'Walk Talk' programme.
- In-school mentoring programmes between older students and younger students.
- Transition programmes to facilitate the change from primary school to secondary school.
- Further availability of counsellors in schools who are trained to deal with the problems facing young people.
- Yearly secondary school student needs analysis and accompanying the findings with requisite training for all teachers to be mindful of issues specific to the young people in their school.
- Play therapists for primary schools which allow children express their experiences and feelings through a natural, self-guided, self-healing process.
- Nationwide provision of home-work clubs to assist people from an early age with learning difficulties, including parental literacy assistance.

Biographical Note

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Research Digest

Children and Young People's Experiences of Health Information and Quality Authority Inspections

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Consultation conducted on behalf of the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA)

1. Introduction

The Social Service Inspectorate was set up in 1999 to inspect social services in Ireland. It was administered by the Department of Health and Children (DoHC) until May 2007, when it was established on a statutory basis as the Office of the Chief Inspector of Social Services within the Health Information and Quality Authority (the Authority).

The Authority conducts inspections of statutory residential childcare services and foster care services run by the Health Service Executive (HSE) under statutory powers contained in Section 69 of the Child Care Act, 1991. It also inspects detention schools under the auspices of the Irish Youth Justice Service (an executive office of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law reform). Inspectors are authorised to enter any centre and examine the state and management of the premises and the treatment of children there. They are also permitted to examine such records and interview such members of staff as they deem appropriate. Inspections are conducted within clearly defined national standards and regulations.

At the request of the the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), the Irish Association of Young People in Care (IAYPIC) carried out ten consultation focus group events. The consultation process was facilitated by the Aftercare Support Network Coordinator and a Children's Rights and Participation Officer in IAYPIC, and took place throughout December 2009.

The purpose of the consultation was to ascertain young people's views and experiences of the inspection process of the residential services, special care and children detention schools, conducted by the Social Service Inspectorate within the Authority, to inform future practice by the Authority.

The Authority provided IAYPIC with the names of the managers and contact details for ten residential centres.

The Authority gave a commitment that on receipt of the final report it would write to the young people involved in the consultation to inform them about how the findings would be used.

Profile of young people involved

Of the 41 young people invited to participate in the consultation, 22 took part. Table 1 gives a gender and age breakdown of participants. There were 11 males and 11 females between the ages of 10 and 19 years of age. The majority of young people (18) were between 13 and 17 years old.

Age (years)	No. of boys	No. of girls
10	1	0
11	0	0
12	0	0
13	1	2
14	2	1
15	4	1
16	2	1
17	1	4
18	0	1
19	0	1
Total	11	11

Table 1: *Profile of young people involved*

Profile of centres

Table 2 shows that of the ten centres participating in the consultation, five were based in Dublin City or County and five were located outside Dublin.

Counties/cities	Number of centres
Dublin City	3
Dublin County	2
Limerick	2
Cork	1
Westmeath	1
Longford	1
Total	10

Table 2: *Geographical location of centres*

The centres involved comprised one special care unit, two children detention schools, six community-based children’s residential centres and one leaving and aftercare centre. This breakdown of centres involved in the research represent a total of 33.3% of all special care units within Ireland, 50% of children detention schools, 11.5% of community-based children’s residential centres and 100% of leaving and aftercare centres (there is currently only one leaving and aftercare service in Ireland inspected by the Authority).

Pre-consultation phase

Initial contact with each centre manager was made by the Authority. IAYPIC then contacted the managers and asked their permission to meet with them and their staff

to explain the purpose of the consultation. Arrangements were also made to meet with the young people in their care who had an experience of the inspection process.

All managers and young people received a letter from IAYPIC, which gave information about the aim of the consultation and what it would involve. An IAYPIC poster was also sent to every centre to notify the staff and young people of the date and time that the consultation event would take place. On request, and where necessary, consent forms for young people were provided to residential centres.

2. Methodology

The facilitators from the Irish Association of Young People in Care took into account the following factors when designing the consultation style that would be most appropriate for the young people:

- age of the young people
- gender mix
- young people's literacy levels
- recognition that the young people would be working as a group
- the fact that they may not have been involved in a consultation before
- the type of care placement – residential care, special care or children
- detention schools.

Research methodology

The main research method used in the consultation was a focus group. Focus groups produce data based on interaction and communication between the participants. This method facilitates obtaining different viewpoints at the same time. During the focus groups, the number of young people who were involved in each group differed across the centres and depended on who was in the centre at the assigned time.

A consistent approach was taken in collecting data from young people. Two IAYPIC facilitators were present at each of the 10 consultation focus group events, with one leading the group by asking the questions and the other observing and making written notes.

Data was recorded on a flip chart which was in full view of the young people taking part. The facilitators chose this way of documenting young people's views as it was visible and transparent to young people, while also giving young people the opportunity to check and clarify anything that had been written down on the chart.

The consultation involved asking young people both closed questions (using multiple choice answers within pre-defined categories) and open questions, which gave the young people opportunity to explore their own experiences in more detail. Therefore, the information collected consisted of both quantitative and qualitative data.

The questions were incorporated into a "Talking Mat" designed in the style of a board game with questions divided under the headings: preparation, process, feedback, and "your ideas". In addition to the use of the Talking Mat, the facilitators had five prompts to show young people. These were the:

- Authority's letter to the young people announcing an inspection
- Authority's leaflet for young people about inspections
- Authority's inspection – young people's feedback reports (2 examples)

- Authority’s questionnaire to young people as part of the inspection
- *National Standards for Children’s Residential Centres.*

These were shown to young people at every consultation focus group event and were used to establish young people’s familiarity with the documentation and whether they remembered receiving a copy.

Data analysis

Given the quantitative and qualitative nature of the data collected, data analysis involved two strategies.

Firstly, frequency tables based on the quantitative data (questions with pre-defined categories) which provided a count of the number of times a response was selected.

Secondly, doing a content analysis of qualitative data (open questions) which involved grouping similar responses together and assigning thematic categories to identify the key issues that were coming up for young people.

3. Findings

This section presents the findings from the focus groups, divided into four main sections: preparation, process, feedback, and the ideas board. In relation to the quantitative results, some of the statistics refer to the total number of centres (10) while others are based on the number of young people (22). This will be specified throughout.

Preparation

How the young people heard about the inspection

Table 3 (below) shows that the most common way that the young people heard about an inspection taking place was through the Authority’s letter. This was selected by young people in 6 out of 10 centres.

Information source	No. of centres	% of centres
Letter from the Authority	6	60
Other young people	4	40
National Standards for Children’s Residential Centres	3	38**
Keyworker	3	30
Authority’s leaflet	1	10
Parent	1	10
Poster	0	0
House meeting	0	0

Table 3: *Source of information about inspections**

* *Table 3 adds up to more than 100% as more than one information source could be selected.*

** *Based on eight centres as the two children detention schools that were part of the consultation are outside the remit of the National Standards.*

However, when young people were shown a copy of the letter from the Authority, many of them had a limited recollection of it. The second highest information source was “other young people”, which was chosen by young people in 4 out of 10 centres. Young people also indicated that they had heard about the inspection from their keyworker – chosen by young people in 3 out of 10 centres. None of the young people participating in the consultation in the above centres recalled hearing about the inspection from a poster or a house meeting.

The *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* was selected by young people in 3 centres out of 8, which represents a general information source about inspections. When young people were shown a copy of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, they all recognised it and had seen it in their residential units. In one unit, a young person recalled that the inspectors had it out on the table when they visited. Some young people said they had received it on their entry to a residential centre. When asked if they had read it, many young people said they had not as they thought it was boring, not very interesting or not very colourful. Of those who said they had read the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, they said they read it either because it was their first time in care or because they were bored. Young people from just one centre were aware that the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* related to the inspectors visiting their centre.

Young people in one centre recalled seeing the Authority's information leaflet. This leaflet was shown to young people at each consultation. The facilitators noted that the information on the leaflet does not explicitly link inspections carried out by the Authority to the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*.

Announced or unannounced inspections

The young people were asked if they had experienced an announced or unannounced inspection and young people's responses are in relation to their recollection of experiencing an inspection. Only one young person had experienced both an announced and unannounced inspection during his/her time in care. Facilitators did not have information on the number, type of inspections or timeframe in which inspections were held in each of the 10 centres.

The majority of young people said that the inspection was announced, 91% (20), while only 9% (two) said it was unannounced and they were not aware the inspection was taking place.

One young person said he/she found out about the inspection at the last minute when the inspectors arrived. This young person does not live in the residential unit full-time but happened to be scheduled to stay in the unit on one of the inspection days. One young person said he/she did not feel prepared for it.

Young people's feelings about the unannounced visit

This question only related to two young people from the 10 centres. Comments included:

“I just came home and they were there and asked if I'd talk to them. Staff told me they were inspectors.....I just thought that's the way it was.”

Another young person said that he understood that inspectors could come unannounced just like health inspectors come unannounced to restaurants.

Young people's understanding of the reasons for inspections

It is worthy of notice that two-thirds of the young people participating in the consultation focus groups (68% or 15 young people) believed they understood why the inspectors were visiting their unit. One young person said that the inspectors wanted to get his experiences. Another young person commented that the purpose of inspection was "to check how things are". Although the majority of young people said they understood the reason for inspection, it is significant that almost one-third (32% or seven young people) said that they did not understand why the inspectors were in the centre.

When young people were asked to give reasons for the inspection, 60% thought the inspectors were coming to inspect their accommodation, the facilities available to them and the condition/cleanliness of their house/unit. A few young people spoke about the inspectors looking around the house and checking the young person's sleeping accommodation, how the house was run and whether it was up to standard. One young person said the staff were "cleaning everything".

In addition to looking at physical aspects of the centre and the facilities, young people also stated that another reason for the inspection was to consider child welfare and safety concerns. Several aspects of children's wellbeing were identified by young people, which ranged from meeting basic physical needs such as having proper food to ensuring that young people are being treated fairly and respectfully, as well as considering their general happiness. In addition, one young person mentioned that inspections were done to obtain young people's experiences which could then improve inspections in the future. Comments from young people included:

"That you are safe."

"Not being treated unfairly."

"That we are happy."

"To get the young person's point of view of how things could be improved."

Some other young people thought that the inspections were about the staff and to see if the staff were doing their "jobs properly" in terms of how they treated young people and how the house was run. One young person expressed the view that the inspections were solely about the staff rather than the young people themselves.

Young people were most likely to understand that inspections were carried out to examine the quality and condition of the centre. Young people also linked the inspections to a concern for their own safety and welfare, which is an important connection for them to make in terms of their understanding of the purpose of inspections. Finally, some young people said that the inspections were being done to look at staff practice.

Two young people said that they did not know what the inspectors were inspecting. Another young person made the point that he felt he needed to be told about the inspection in advance in order for him to prepare for the visit. Therefore, where young people had little understanding of the reasons why the inspection was taking place, this was likely to be due to lack of information.

A further question considered the issue of who young people would ask if they had queries about an inspection. Of the 10 centres, young people in eight of them said that they knew who they would ask if they had a question about an inspection. However, in two of the centres young people felt they did not know who to ask about the Authority's

inspections. Further exploration found that young people were most likely to ask staff (9 out of 10 centres), the centre manager (5 out of 10 centres) or their keyworker (4 out of 10 centres). Therefore, if young people felt the need to ask someone about an inspection, they focused on individuals connected to the centre rather than identifying anyone else outside the centre or the Health Information and Quality Authority inspectors.

Process

Young people’s feelings about having inspectors in the residential centre

Young people were asked to indicate how they felt about having inspectors in the residential centre by selecting one or more cards that had different feelings written on them. Table 4 shows the number of centres in which one or more young person/people chose each feeling.

Feelings described on cards	No. of centres (out of ten)
Grand	7
Okay	6
Didn’t care	6
Delighted	4
Happy	3
Anxious	3
Worried	2
Relieved	2
Annoyed	1

Table 4: Feelings about inspections in the centre*

*More than one option could be selected

Overall, young people expressed very little concern about having the inspectors in their residential centre. Table 4 shows that young people in a relatively high number of centres said that they felt “grand” (7 out of 10 centres) or “okay” (6 out of 10 centres). The fact that the young people could meet the inspectors privately and that the staff would no be informed of the content of the meeting was an important issue for a number of the young people. Young people in two centres expressed a sense of relief as they got an opportunity to tell inspectors how things were from their own perspective. Comments included:

“In the past, places like those around the country, young people got battered, it’s good to see that someone makes sure bad things aren’t happening.”
“Doesn’t bother us, used to seeing people coming in.”

A few young people said that they felt worried, which could indicate some level of anxiety among the young people prior to and at the early stages of the inspection. Young people may also be picking up on some level of anxiety and preoccupation by the staff and management in relation to the inspection. One young person did say that he/she did not know the inspectors were coming so he/ she did not know what to think.

In addition to the closed responses given in Table 4, young people were offered blank cards to write answers on if they felt none of the feelings adequately reflected their views. Eight young people chose to write on a blank card, with the following remarks:

- “don’t know” (three young people)
- “don’t mind” (four young people)
- “felt nice” (one young person).

Therefore, when the question was opened up to other possible responses, these results did not add anything different to that recorded in Table 4.

Taking account of all of the data in relation to young people’s feelings about inspections, the facilitators felt that many of the young people were happy to take part and some young people viewed the inspectors’ visits in a positive light. Some fears and anxieties were expressed in a few centres, which would need to be addressed. Adequate information and preparation before the inspection could help to allay young people’s fears and anxieties, where this was an issue.

Communication between young people and inspectors during the inspection

Table 5 shows that almost all the participants spoke with the inspectors individually (86% or 19 young people). This could be on a formal basis, where conversations were recorded, or else informally while out in the garden, showing the inspectors their room or in the kitchen.

Option	No. young people	% young people
Spoke with the inspector individually	19	86%
Completed the questionnaire	11	50%
Chose not to meet the inspector	2	9%
Met with the inspector as a group	1	5%

Table 5: Methods of communication between young people and inspectors*

* Table 5 adds up to more than 100% as young people could select more than one option

One young person spoke with the inspectors individually but had not planned to. He/she felt obliged to talk to them as he/she was in the kitchen when the inspectors arrived. The young person said staff had “shuffled” out of the kitchen and left him/her with the inspector. Some young people recounted talking to the inspectors as having “talked to them like normal”.

Half of young people (11) said they completed the questionnaire for the inspection. However, there was some confusion about this as some young people had no recollection of ever seeing the questionnaire. Some could not remember if they had filled it in while others were very clear that they had filled it in themselves or had done so with the help of their keyworker (one young person).

The issue of literacy came up for one centre where a young person made a general comment about the potential difficulties that someone may have in filling in the questionnaire if they had a learning difficulty. This comment was met with agreement by the other two young people from this centre who were present at the consultation focus groups.

Of those who had filled in the questionnaire, two young people recalled their questionnaires not being taken. One young person said the inspector “flicked” his/her questionnaire and handed it back to him/ her. The facilitator asked the young person if he/she had spent much time filling out the questionnaire and he/she said “45 minutes”. The other young person said he/she had filled out his/her questionnaire but was never asked for it. This shows that the inspector’s response when given the questionnaire was important to the young person, and could make a difference by valuing the young person’s opinions as well as acknowledging the effort made to fill it in.

Table 5 shows that two young people chose not to meet with the inspectors. The reasons given for this were that one of the young people said he/she did not speak to the inspector as he/she did not understand why they were visiting the unit in question. The other young person said, “I wasn’t in the humour.”

Young people’s feelings about speaking to the inspectors

Most young people spoke fairly positively of their meetings with the inspectors describing the inspectors as “very nice”. Some described themselves as being nervous when first meeting the inspectors but then relaxing having met them. The inspectors were described as “wearing suits”, “asking millions of questions” and “a little intimidating”. One young person said he/she did not have a sense of the type of people the inspectors were, and it would be nicer to get to know the inspectors “before they start firing questions at you”.

Some of the comments made were as follows:

“Happy to talk to them.”

“I didn’t talk to them but I didn’t mind them being in the house.”

“They were alright, they were nice and one was a vegetarian.”

“There really were a lot of questions – like ‘did you get on with your keyworker?’”

During the discussion, a few young people spoke about experiencing feelings of upset and anxiety during the inspection. One young person described how he/she was a bit upset having met the inspectors as he/she had spoken about his/her past during the interview. When asked by the facilitator how he/she felt about this experience, he/she replied, “first it would put me off – but life goes on.” Another young person described how he/she had asked to meet with the female inspector but was told by the staff that he/she had to meet both inspectors. He/she went on to say the following:

“I was a bit afraid, I asked staff to come up, they said go up on your own.”

Another issue that came up for young people was the methods used to record information. One young person described the Inspector’s visit as “scary” and went on to say:

“Scribbling everything you say down and you can’t see what they are writing.”

A number of other young people also made comments about the recording methods used during inspections. When asked to compare the flip chart method of recording used in the focus groups to those used during inspections, young people said they were more comfortable with how information was recorded in the focus groups. When this was explored further by the facilitator, two young people said that the Talking Mat allowed them to see the questions they would be asked and the flip chart allowed them to see what was being recorded.

This information indicates that attention may need to be given to the methods used by inspectors to record information from young people's perspective in order to ensure that young people are relaxed and comfortable during inspections. Some young people said they would have liked the information they had given to inspectors, and which was recorded during the inspection, read back to them. This could be something that inspectors check with young people at the end of each inspection.

In some instances, young people expressed feelings of confusion during inspections. One young person was not sure which inspectors he had met as he recalled meeting a male and female inspector as well as meeting two other inspectors. This may be due to the fact that this centre is inspected by the Irish Youth Justice Service and the Department of Education. Another young person was a little confused as to whether he/she was speaking to inspectors or the HSE's monitoring officer as he/she recalled being given a number to contact a female inspector. When the facilitator spoke to the manager of the unit she believed the young person was recalling a visit by the monitoring officer. This data highlights the importance of clarifying the roles of inspectors, as well as ensuring that young people know the identity of the inspectors before the visit.

Young people's views about the inspectors

Overall, the young people described the inspectors as being nice and friendly. Other descriptions included "easy to talk to", "lovely", "jolly" and "alright". One young person said that the inspectors spent most of their time in the office and spent half an hour having a cup of tea. Another young person said the inspectors looked "pure suss" and went on to say that staff were trying to impress the inspectors "the rules were enforced and things were being done".

Many of the comments by young people were about the inspector's presentation, especially in terms of the type of clothes they wore. Some of the young people described the inspectors as wearing suits and that the inspectors looked professional, like business people. One young person said it showed respect and that it was part of the inspector's job to wear a suit. When asked by the facilitator how they felt about the inspectors wearing suits, some of the young people were not concerned with what the inspectors wore. However, a few young people said that it made them feel uneasy, with one young person saying that they felt inferior to the inspectors, and another described feeling slightly "intimidated". Some of the comments included:

"They were nice, friendly."

"Dressed very smart, wearing suits like in an office ... made me feel like nothing."

"They [the inspectors] probably have to wear suits to be professional It can be a bit intimidating, like you're in trouble, they should wear like jeans and a top."

Inspectors should be aware of the potential impact of their attire on young people, particularly in terms of reinforcing notions of inequality of power. Although many young people understood why they wore suits and were quite happy about this, for others it caused some difficulty as they felt that the inspector was superior to them. Quite a few young people suggested that inspectors should dress more casually, with one young person suggesting that they should wear a tracksuit.

Gender of the inspectors

As part of the consultation, the facilitators were asked to find out if the gender of inspectors was an issue for young people. Overall, young people did not have a strong preference about gender. Some of the comments made were:

"Well, I don't really mind as long as they were nice."

"It didn't bother me; I'm used to talking to men and women."

There was a general consensus that one male and one female inspector was a good balance, which was the typical gender mix reported by young people based on past inspections. In the case of one centre which cared for females only, two young people expressed a preference for female inspectors. A third young person (male) stated a preference for speaking to a male inspector. However, these were the only exceptions to the general consensus of having one female and one male inspector.

One consideration that did emerge from some of the comments was that young people should be given a choice as to the inspector whom they spoke to. Therefore, if there was one male and one female inspector present, the young person could decide which inspector they spoke to depending on how comfortable they felt. It was acknowledged by a few young people that the gender of inspectors could be significant for other young people, although they themselves did not have an issue with it.

Contacting inspectors after inspections

The majority of young people did not know how to contact the inspectors after the inspection had taken place (82% or 18 young people), while the remaining 18% (four young people) said they would know how to contact them. When asked to suggest ways that young people might use to contact the inspectors, two young people felt they could look up the Inspector's telephone number using a directory inquiry service or could ask staff how they could contact them. One young person who recalled being given a contact number may have received this from the HSE monitoring officer.

There was some confusion over whether young people could contact inspectors. Two young people said they were told they could not contact the inspectors after the unit was inspected. They did not think they would be allowed to have the Authority's contact details on their contact cards. Some others were very clear that they were not given contact information by the inspectors.

Feedback to young people after inspections

Young people were asked if they had received any feedback following the inspection. The majority of young people said that they did not hear anything about the inspection after it had taken place. Only 18% (four) of the young people reported that they had received any form of feedback. Table 6 shows the method of feedback to young people.

Method of feedback	No. young people	% young people
Received a letter	2	9
Received a report	1	5
Manager spoke to young person	2	9
Looked up the report on the Authority's website	0	0

Table 6: *Methods of feedback to young people*

Table 6 shows that young people were most likely to receive feedback in the form of a letter or from the centre manager. After being shown a copy of a report by the Authority, one young person felt that he may have received a report as it looked pretty familiar to him (this same young person had also received a letter). It is interesting to note that none of the participants looked at the Authority's website.

After being shown sample materials, eight of the participants could not recall receiving a letter or a report and could not identify them. One young person said he/she got a letter back, which was unlike the ones shown by the facilitator, but this may have been from the HSE monitoring officer.

When asked what happened as a result of the inspection, some of the comments made by young people were as follows:

"After the inspectors came I noticed the rooms got painted."

"Nothing happened."

Young people's knowledge and use of the Authority's website

None of the young people said they had looked up the Authority's website (www.hiqa.ie). However, many of young people who took part in the consultation did not have access to the Internet in their unit. If they do have Internet access, it tends to be limited to certain sites. One young person commented:

"No, never heard of it before... don't have Internet access in the unit."

Similarly, when young people were asked if they knew that the Authority's website had information for young people, all of them replied "no". It was clear that young people were not aware of the Authority's website and therefore not aware of information being available for young people on the site. Young people's responses included the following:

"Hadn't a breeze."

"What information is on it?"

Young people's views on whether inspections are a good idea

When asked if inspections were a good idea, the majority of young people responded positively. A few young people said that inspections were important and saw them as a way of making improvements in the centre if staff were unable to make the changes. Comments in this regard included:

"If something is not right and staff aren't doing anything, then you can say it to the inspectors.... If a manager and staff can't do it at least the inspectors can."

"It's kinda good that people are coming out to see how you are We are being fed and we are being looked after... the mattresses are hard but they've been that way for years."

However, two young people felt that inspections were pointless. One of these young people said that when the inspectors left the centre, they did not hear from them again. Another young person said that inspections did not result in any change. Other young people said that it was important for change to happen as a result of inspections, where this was necessary. There were also examples reported of positive changes for young people as a result of inspections, such as a change of doctor.

Another young person highlighted the significance of getting feedback from the inspectors, which would show that their comments were valued, which adds further support to the earlier findings about feedback to young people following inspections. Comments included:

"It would be nice to see your time wasn't wasted.... If the inspectors would get back to us about stuff."

The last section in the findings presents the results on young people's recommendations for inspections.

Young people's views on criteria for inspections

Young people made comments about the criteria that inspections should be focused on. The responses were coded into categories and are presented below, in order of rank importance (the first being the most popular response). Young people believed inspections should focus on:

- the physical condition of the house and facilities available – for example, the standard of all the rooms, whether kitchen equipment works, and the availability of sports equipment
- how staff treat young people – in particular that everyone is treated fairly and the same way as others (fair treatment was mentioned by three young people). One young person felt that staff behaviour towards young people changed during the inspection
- relationships between staff and young people – ways in which staff and young people interact
- rules in the centre – that they are fair, stay the same and that young people understand them. Maintaining consistent rules in different units was also mentioned by one young person
- disciplinary procedures – are consistently applied in relation to how staff deal with difficult behaviour. This was a particular issue for young people in children detention schools and special care units, where two young people mentioned the use of restraints
- the importance of listening to young people and acting on the information they give to inspectors. For example, one young person said, "they should do something with what we tell them"
- young people's daily experiences in the centre
- information and reports in the centre's office, for example staff logs
- young people's privacy in the centre.

Ideas Board: children and young people's advice to inspectors

The final part of the consultation involved asking young people to give their ideas as to how inspections could be improved in future. In addition, they were asked to identify what they thought inspectors should look at whilst carrying them out. These two questions were asked in the Ideas Board. The majority of the responses given by young people could be divided into the three stages of the consultation that were the basis for most of the questions: preparation, process, and feedback. This is not surprising as these particular issues had been discussed by young people during the earlier part of the consultation, and therefore they were likely to be at the forefront of their minds while taking part in the Ideas Board. As a result, this piece on young people's recommendations for future inspections is divided into the same three categories.

Preparation

Suggestions made by young people focused on three main aspects of preparation:

- Ensure that all young people (including children who recently moved into a centre) know when the inspection is taking place with an adequate number of days' notice. One young person also mentioned the need for parents to know about the inspection, although it is clearly stated in the *Social Service Inspectorate Information for Young People* leaflet that inspectors talk to the parents of young people.
- Information about inspections and the reasons for them should be clear to young people and any letters or leaflets should be received by young people before the inspection takes place. For example, one young person said:

"Let young people know why they are here and the reasons behind it."

- Inspectors should take more time to talk to young people about inspections before the inspection takes place. This was also a suggestion made by several young people in relation to the process of carrying out the inspections.

Process

Suggestions made by young people related to the following aspects of the inspection process:

- Spend more time with young people (identified by six young people) so that inspectors can get to know young people and see them doing everyday normal activities in the centre. It was felt that this would help to ensure that inspectors were well informed about the young people who were taking part in the inspections.
- Follow-up inspections should be done by the same inspectors where possible and during a fixed timeframe after the initial inspection. One young person said that if different inspectors do the follow up, then young people should be made aware of this beforehand.
- Carry out unannounced visits (four young people).

For example, one young person said:

"They should be in every once in a while [unexpected] to know the way things are run in the house."

- Young people also had suggestions about the presentation of inspectors. In particular, several young people (n=4) felt that inspectors should wear more casual clothes so that the inspections would be less formal. One young person felt that this was important when inspections were being carried out in centres which cared for younger children.
- Inspectors should spend more time with staff in the house (two young people) and talk more to the staff (another two young people) to get a good insight of how the house is run. Similarly, two young people suggested that inspectors should stay overnight in the house as part of the inspection.

Feedback

Inspectors should give feedback to young people after a reasonable amount of time.

- Any feedback given by inspectors should directly respond to concerns raised by young people and should be clear about what will happen as a result of an inspection.
- One young person said that they experienced positive change as a result of the inspection.

“Things changed when the inspectors came. I got a change of doctor after speaking to the inspector. I was asking staff to change my doctor for ages.”

- Young people should be able to contact inspectors after the inspection has been carried out (two young people).

4. Conclusion

This conclusion identifies four key themes which are based on the findings from the consultation with young people. It finishes with a set of recommendations which have been compiled using the views of young people in conjunction with some of the observations made by the two facilitators throughout the process.

Key themes

1. The nature of information received by young people was insufficient. While the majority of young people said the inspection was announced, a few reported that they did not know about the inspection. In addition, hearing that an inspection was taking place from peers was the second most likely way that young people found out about an inspection, the first being receiving a letter or leaflet from the Authority.

Information provided to young people needs to be clear and easy to understand, as well as being easily recognisable as being issued from the Authority. In many cases, young people said they did not recognise the Authority's materials shown to them during the consultation. There was some confusion expressed by the young people as to whether they had completed the the Authority's questionnaire.

2. The length of time that inspectors spent with young people was deemed as not long enough by young people, both prior to and during inspections.

Spending time with the young person prior to the inspection will help to build trust and help the young person to be as honest as possible. More time spent with

young people during the course of inspections will help to ensure that inspectors are fully informed about young people's life in the centre. Several of the young people reported that they were unclear about the inspector's role compared to other professionals that they were in contact with.

3. Young people's understanding of the reasons for inspections could be enhanced. Two-thirds of young people said they knew why inspections took place and were able to give some feedback as to their purpose. However, they rarely made any connection between inspections and the National Standards for Children's Residential Centres. In addition, young people were more likely to identify aspects of the physical conditions of the centre than issues associated with child welfare concerns. Appropriate information about the purpose of inspections will help to allay any fears or anxieties that young people may have around inspections taking place. In addition, young people in special care units or children detention schools felt that disciplinary procedures should be one of the criteria that inspectors looked at.

4. The lack of feedback reported by young people.

This relates to the small numbers of young people who said that they received any formal feedback from the Authority after inspections. Also, some young people felt that they would like some feedback during the inspection in terms of having the information they gave to inspectors read back to them. Overall, young people were not sure if they could contact inspectors after they had left the centre.

5. Recommendations from the Irish Association of Young People in Care

1. Information in Health Information and Quality Authority reports, letters and leaflets must be clear and young-person friendly with due consideration made to literacy levels. For example, it might be a worthwhile exercise to ask a group of young people to go through the materials and give their comments before they go to print.
2. The information in the Authority's leaflet should include a group photo of the inspectors so young people can identify the inspectors when they visit their unit.
3. The Authority's leaflet should state explicitly that inspectors visit centres to inspect them against the standards for those centres i.e. *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, *Standards & Criteria for Children Detention Schools*, and *National Standards for Special Care Units*.
4. The Authority should consider having an information campaign to inform young people about the purpose and process of inspections. This could be done formally by Authority inspectors or informally through peers using young people who have experienced inspections to inform other young people about what to expect.
5. Authority materials used to communicate with young people regarding the inspection process i.e. *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*, leaflets, letters, reports and questionnaires need to use a single identifiable logo or image in order to ensure young people link this directly with the inspector's visits.

6. IAYPIC would suggest running a poster campaign among the residential centres which would allow young people to design the poster as well as raising young people's awareness of the Authority.
7. Any posters sent to units to announce a forthcoming inspection should use the same logo or image.
8. The *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* document needs to reflect the connection/relationship between the Standards inspected and the Authority's inspections.
9. The presentation and layout of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* needs to be interesting, colourful and young-person friendly.
10. HSE/Authority should ensure that young people are given copies of the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres* prior to the inspection.
11. Inspectors should specify which standards are being reviewed in the forthcoming inspection in the letter sent to the young people before inspections take place.
12. The message that parents and social workers are consulted as part of the inspection process, although clearly stated in the Authority's leaflet, needs to be reinforced. In addition, young people should be told that files and documentation about them, for example care plans, placement plans, files and daily logs are also reviewed by the inspectors as required under the *National Standards for Children's Residential Centres*.
13. It is the practice of the Authority to inform young people by letter of announced inspections. The Authority should also ensure staff and management also inform young people of pending announced inspections. Consideration should be given to young people who receive respite support from services and may be resident during the inspection.
14. The Authority should consider whether inspectors could spend more time in the company of the young people prior to the inspection to build trusting and open relationships. This would also help to allay any of the young people's fears or concerns about the inspection process. For example, one possible way to achieve this would be for inspectors to carry out a preliminary visit to centres.
15. All inspections are carried out in a consistent way, for example all questionnaires collected from young people, providing young people with inspectors' contact details etc.
16. Practice guidelines should be closely adhered to by all inspectors involved in the inspection process.
17. Inspectors should consider how they record information during their meetings with young people. Inspectors should consider offering young people an opportunity to have their responses read back to them. This also offers the young person a chance to clarify what they have said.
18. The Authority should ensure that its contact details are on the contact sheet of all young people who are in the care of the state. Each centre should advise the young people of the contact details if they wish to contact the Authority.
19. Inspectors should provide each young person with a laminated contact card before they complete an inspection.

20. The Authority provides young people with a feedback report after the inspection. Follow up by the Authority may be required to ensure that young people have received their copy of the report. The report should be clear about recommendations identified and whether changes are required or not within the service and clearly stating the reasons for the decisions made.
21. Young people need to be made aware of the Authority's website and the information it contains relevant to them. In order to facilitate young people's use of the website, the issue of Internet access needs to be addressed by centre staff, with a possible role for the Authority.

Note

The full version of the report on which this Research Digest draws is available at:
http://www.hiqa.ie/media/pdfs/HIQA_IAYPIC_experience_of_inspections.pdf

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Book Reviews



Ursula Kilkelly

Children's Rights in Ireland: Law, Policy and Practice

Haywards Heath: Tottel Publishing, 2008. 601 pp. €150.00 hb.

Norah Gibbons,

Director of Advocacy,
Barnardos.

Children's rights in Ireland are a relatively new concept and remain contentious in 2010. Ireland has been slow in the past to change the law in the area of child care; for example, the Children Act 1908 continued to govern how children who required intervention by the State to secure their well-being were treated until the 1991 Child Care Act was commenced. Ireland ratified the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 but that signal, significant though it was, was not followed up by a comprehensive programme of constitutional and legal recognition and implementation of those rights.

This book takes a methodical and thorough approach to children's rights and most importantly for practitioners it considers how children's rights are or can be implemented in both international and national law. Reading a book that seeks to set out the law on any subject is a daunting prospect for those of us who are not legally trained but need to be informed. Ursula Kilkelly's book provides that information in a clear way and in setting out the background and outlining the discourse both internationally and nationally it leads the reader into the topics covered in a way that is accessible.

It is not possible to go through every chapter of a book that covers all aspects of children's law. I want to highlight a few areas for particular note. Chapter 1 provides a very useful outline introduction to children's rights and highlights the legislative and policy initiatives that have occurred since the 1991 Child Care Act. It also gives a clear summary of the barriers to the fuller implementation of children's rights and in particular speaks of the invisibility of children in law, in policy formation and in decision making. Chapter 4 covers interesting ground in defining childhood – where it begins and where it ends. This is not the simple matter it first appears and the chapter makes for compelling thoughtful and easy reading as it guides the reader through a complex range of legal and indeed moral questions. It usefully considers the use of age limits as a means of protecting the young from damaging behaviour and from exploitation and harm. In public discourse on children there is often confusion over questions such as the age of majority, the age of consent for sexual activity, for medical procedures, for compulsory school attendance and many others and this is laid out succinctly for the reader.

A more recent emerging issue, the abduction of children by one of their parents, is covered in chapter 6. The framework through which these cases are resolved, the Hague Convention on Child Abduction, Brussels 11 regulation and other relevant legislation is laid out clearly. There is a very perceptive analysis of how the best interest principle of an individual child may not be well served through these agreed mechanisms because they seek to be concerned with the right of children as a group. This area of work is highly complex and poses new questions and challenges whether for social workers, guardians-ad-litem, other professionals or indeed family members who find themselves involved in considering how to respond to child abduction cases.

Finally chapter 11 is new and different in a book on legal issues. This chapter argues that the importance of socio-economic rights should be recognised in international law as central to wellbeing and the exercise of other rights. It also analyses the legal challenges in Irish discourse around children and health care. It points out that Irish law contains few references to children's rights in health care which may come as a shock to many parents. In recent years the public have been outraged about the lack of suitable provision for children and young people with mental health needs and the lack of provision for young people suffering from cystic fibrosis, to name but two areas of health care where the State fails children and young people. Kilkelly sets out the serious problems that arise for children and young people in areas of health care and this chapter alone should give our policy makers serious food for thought. It should help parents and all those who have children as their prime focus to consider why as the author puts it 'so little attention has focused holistically on children's rights to health and health care'.

In 2010 the Government has promised to hold a referendum to insert a clause into the Irish Constitution on the constitutional rights of children. The call for such a referendum has been made repeatedly since 1993 when Judge Catherine McGuinness first recommended it in her report on the Kilkenny Incest Investigation. The amendment proposed in 2007 is considered here and is itself useful notwithstanding the fact that a new proposal is being considered by the Attorney General at this time. The author argues for insertion into the Constitution of a strong, unequivocal provision for children's rights. The question remains are we the voting adults in Ireland ready to do things differently and fulfil the promise of one of the founding documents of the State, the Proclamation of Easter 1916, namely to cherish all the children of the nation equally?



Catherine Forde, Elizabeth Kiely and Rosie Meade (eds)
Youth and Community Work in Ireland: Critical Perspectives
 Dublin: Blackhall Publishing, 2009. 290 pp. €40.00

Matthew Seebach

Youth Participation Manager
 Youth Work Ireland

The editors of the text under review set themselves several not insubstantial tasks. The book is first of all a textbook, the readers of which are identified as degree, diploma or postgraduate students and practitioners in community and youth work. It sets out to take stock of the current context within both the youth and community sectors by applying a critical analysis and engaging in a re-evaluation of the 'values, intentions and outcomes'. Importantly, it also proposes to 'address the deficiency in Irish material by theorising the policy and practice of youth and community work in the country' (p. 2).

The book consists of a collection of ten essays provided by contributors from academic institutions and relevant senior management positions. The ten chapters are organised into three thematic sections: the first deals with *concepts* within youth and community work, the second with the challenges within the current policy *context* and the third with youth and community work's *futures*.

This collection works well as a textbook to the extent that the editors, Catherine Forde, Elizabeth Kiely and Rosie Meade seem to have given a brief to contributors, which ensures that individual chapters do not read as stand alone essays. Instead, the various contributions, largely speaking, cover closely related aspects of various critical concerns in youth and community work. There are consequently, as is to be expected in a collection of essays, some minor instances of overlap and repetition, particularly in relation to discussion of historical developments. Nevertheless, the overall effect is to provide a close examination of the subject at hand from several perspectives.

As a textbook should, this work provides useful introductory essays to the key theoretical concepts underpinning both youth work and community work. These include Maurice Devlin's contribution 'Theorising Youth', which provides a well-digested primer on the concept of youth. This piece seems to be reaching out to the student reader, in particular, by contextualising and explaining the importance and utility of theory in youth work practice.

Hilary Tovey in her chapter 'Theorising Community' provides a similar treatment to the concept of community. Besides providing an entry point to the understanding of the various iterations of this specific concept, Tovey also very helpfully gives a working definition of the term 'contested concept'. Given the critical nature of this textbook and the plethora of 'contested concepts' within it, the provision of a practical definition will doubtless be a help to some readers.

The second purpose of the book is to address the deficiency in Irish material, which it does remarkably well. A number of contributions build arguments from an almost entirely indigenous evidence base, and the book includes both documentation of historical developments within the community and youth sectors in Ireland and Irish sociological and theoretical commentaries.

It should be said that confining oneself to a discussion of Irish evidence is less of a challenge for those writing on community work. However, anyone who has taken up the task of writing about Irish youth work will appreciate the difficulty of developing an academic discussion based entirely on current and relevant Irish evidence. This is particularly the case when one seeks commentary on current practice and policy concerns from youth work theorists. The inevitable consequence is that one is sometimes forced to support one's points with such stock phrases as 'in the British context', before citing evidence from relevant developments in the United Kingdom. While the text under review is not free from such devices, it is admirable for the effort made to develop a thoroughly Irish resource and certainly does illuminate a number of uniquely Irish phenomena in the youth and community sectors. In this way, it significantly adds to the body of theory and scholarship on the Irish youth and community sectors and will ease the task of future writers and researchers who seek to focus specifically on the Irish context.

Most crucially, this book also aims to be a critical examination or reappraisal and to create space and occasion for critical reflection on the part of readers. Success in attaining this goal is perhaps most evident in the degree to which the text can be deemed 'challenging' in a number of ways. Firstly, this text presents a number of analyses which challenge the values, intentions and outcomes of our work within the youth and community sectors. To begin with, the chapter on 'Irish Youth Work Values' by Elizabeth Kiely critically challenges a number of the principles used to define and validate youth work, including participation, universalism and non-formal education. This is accomplished through demonstrating the scant degree to which these principles can be said to be meaningfully in evidence within Irish youth work practice. Like Kiely's chapter, Rosie Meade's contribution 'Community Development: A Critical Analysis of its "Keywords" and Values' looks at some of the key words, concepts and values that are called upon to legitimize and substantiate the practice of community development and justify its support from the public and the State. As with Kiely, these concepts and values, including participation, process and empowerment, are shown to be often nullified or undermined by opposing forces or tendencies within community development.

Sinead McMahon in 'The Voluntary Youth Work Sector's Engagement with the State: Implications for Policy and Practice' disputes one of the most fundamental tenets of youth work, the assumption that the youth sector serves the interests and needs of young people. This contention is supported through demonstrating how youth work has historically sold itself to fit the state agenda and has purposely become involved in neocorporate arrangements which compromise the ability of the sector to serve young people first. Neocorporatist arrangements are also challenged in Catherine Forde's 'The Politics of Community Development: Relationship with the State'. This chapter charts the rise of neocorporatism and the formalisation of the State and civil society relationship through the development of mechanisms such as social partnership and

County Development Boards. Rather than supporting participation, as these mechanism were intended to, Forde demonstrates the capacity they have for extending state control over civil society and community development practice.

Seamus Bane's chapter 'Professionalisation and Youth and Community Work' challenges both the concept of and the wisdom of professionalisation. Bane suggests that professionalisation is not in the best interest of youth and community work and supports this contention with a number of arguments that parallel concerns identified elsewhere in the text, including the issue of social control. Likewise, David Treacy's contribution 'Irish Youth Work: Exploring the Potential for Social Change' picks up on several themes developed elsewhere in the book. In doing so Treacy starkly challenges the view that youth work has of itself. He makes a compelling case for understanding Irish youth work as fundamentally conservative, and asserts that much of the provision over the last decade 'can be described as substandard recreation at its worst [and] at best it can be seen as limited to narrow personal development outcomes that are targeted at *some* young people' (p. 194).

Chris Mc Inerney's chapter 'Community Development and Participatory Theory: Problems and Possibilities' argues that the State 'has little interest in community development as a process of empowerment and inclusion, seeing it more as a means of service delivery and, ultimately, social control' (p. 200). This contention may not challenge the conception of community development held by some. However, the nuanced and rigorous examination of these processes may challenge the view that such control is a simple one-dimensional process. McInerney recognises that there may be a latent progressive vision of citizen involvement, but that there is an 'ongoing struggle...in the minds of political and administrative elites, between involving citizens and their organisations in decision making, on one hand, but being unwilling to disturb the dominance of representative and administrative decision making on the other' (p. 205).

Lastly, the international context is treated in Eilish Dillon's 'Youth and Community Work in Ireland in the Context of Globalisation: Towards a Politics of Transformation'. This essay challenges a one-dimensional, or simple view of globalisation. In doing so, practitioners are presented with the relevance to their practice of the themes within globalisation and challenged to shape such practice in ways that engage with inequality and exclusion in Ireland.

Dillon isn't the only author to suggest new ways of working or organising the sector. As we have seen, the critique provided by this book identifies a number of disjunctures between the values and the actual practice and outcomes of youth and community work. These theoretical concerns are not without significance for our working lives; rather the editors consider theorising to be a 'political act', and a number of authors explicitly ask that readers consider action to make participation, inclusion and empowerment real in youth and community work. In this way, the text gives a number of unambiguous challenges to practitioners, managers and policy makers within the youth and community sectors.

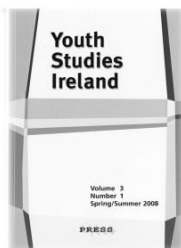
Kiely for one suggests that those within the youth sector must campaign for universal service, and work to articulate a clear vision of precisely what youth work is. Treacy likewise calls for the development of a clear vision of purpose and practice of youth work that includes provision for the 'young people's right to participate in the

public sphere and enables young peoples voices to be heard' (p. 196). In fact, Treacy argues that *Youth Studies Ireland* is one place (among others he mentions) where the debate on the purpose of youth work in this State can take place.

The contributors to discussions of community work are no less challenging in their suggestions for reform within the sector. Meade, for instance, asks community workers to seriously consider abandoning partnership with the State even though such an action entails obvious risks. Similarly, Forde offers the choice between 'assisting in maintenance of the status quo and seeking a more equitable alternative' (p. 148), while McInerney provides a menu of ways to address the failures of current arrangements within the community work sector to realise meaningful citizen participation and social inclusion. These include:

1. Accept the status quo – do not challenge state control;
2. More autonomous service delivery role – continue advocacy efforts and source funding from intermediate funding organisations;
3. Ambitious pragmatism – explore more fully the dual role of acting in partnership while consciously developing and pursuing more challenging agendas;
4. Disengagement – self exclusion from 'invited spaces'.

Apart from such challenges, it is worth noting in the context of a review that this book is also simply challenging to read. This is because it seeks to introduce a deep understanding of a great many nuanced and contested concepts. For this reader the challenge was unexpected. In fact, the sight of the names Forde, Kiely and Meade on the cover led me to the very wrong conclusion that this was an update to or replacement of the University College Cork *Youth & Community Work Course Reader* (1996). The present text is directed at a slightly different readership and unlike the previous work may challenge some readers with the conceptual density of certain chapters. It is a challenge, though, that once taken up, may reward the reader with a thorough and critical understanding of the youth and community work sectors. Reflective practice needs time and space, and the patient, careful reading that this text requires will be well justified.



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NUI MAYNOOTH

Ollscoil na hÉireann Má Nuad

Department of Applied Social Studies

Centre For Youth Research

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The work of the Centre for Youth Research is integrally related to the Department of Applied Social Studies' *professional education and training programmes* in community and youth work, and proposals are welcome for *MLitt and PhD research*. For details of undergraduate and postgraduate professional programmes and of research opportunities visit: <http://cappss.nuim.ie/>

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http://www.youth-partnership.net/youth-partnership/about/MA_presentation.html

The Centre is also closely associated with the Research Committee on Youth (RC34) of the International Sociological Association: <http://www.rc34youth.org/>

The Centre for Youth Research is very pleased to be associated with *Youth Studies Ireland*, itself a partnership initiative at national and international level.

For further details contact: maurice.devlin@nuim.ie. Tel: 353-1-7083781



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Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh, Éire
University College Cork, Ireland

Civil society, youth and youth policy in modern Ireland

This Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) funded research project aims to provide a historical social scientific analysis of youth policy in Ireland.



Irish Research Council for the Humanities & Social Sciences
An Chomhairle um Thairdeána Dána agus na hEolaíochtaí Sóisialta



The research will chart the changing nature, form and consequences of youth policy from the time of the formation of the state to the present day.



The research will explore the historical role played by youth organisations in civil society, and their impact on Irish social life.



The project also aims to survey the contemporary provision of youth work in Ireland.



Research team: Prof. Fred Powell; Dr. Martin Geoghegan; Dr. Margaret Scanlon; Ms. Katharina Swirak.

Youth Studies Ireland

Notes for Contributors

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