Monitoring the Queensland Police Service

Interactions between police and young people

CRIME AND MISCONDUCT COMMISSION

QUEENSLAND

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CMC vision:

To be a powerful agent for protecting Queenslanders from major crime and promoting a trustworthy public sector.

CMC mission:

To combat crime and improve public sector integrity.

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Acronyms

AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
ARC	Australian Research Council
CARRS-Q	Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety — Queensland
CRYPAR	Coordinated Response to Young People at Risk (program)
CMC	Crime and Misconduct Commission
IPCA	Injury Prevention and Control Australia
PYIS	Police–Youth Interaction Study
QPS	Queensland Police Service
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
SPIY	Skills for Preventing Injury in Youth (program)
UQ	University of Queensland

Executive summary

The Crime and Misconduct Commission's (CMC) public attitudes surveys have consistently found that young people are more likely to report negative assessments and dissatisfaction with police than older people. Similarly, other Australian research has continually highlighted the problematic nature of relations between police and young people, which are often characterised by tension, mistrust, conflict and, at times, more adverse consequences such as charges against young people and complaints against police.

In 2004 the CMC, the School of Social Science at the University of Queensland (UQ) and the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety — Queensland (CARRS-Q) at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) were awarded an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant to more fully examine the factors that influence relations between police and young people. At the same time, the UQ and QUT groups received funding from Injury Prevention and Control Australia (IPCA) to undertake studies of risk-taking behaviour among young people.

This paper presents the results of three separate but related studies emanating from these two grants. It includes an analysis of complaints against police made to the CMC and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) by young people as well as the results of two school-based intervention programs designed to reduce injury and risk-taking by young people and improve young people's attitudes towards and perceptions of police.

The CMC's complaints analysis found that 60 per cent of young people were participating in some type of criminal behaviour prior to their interaction with police. Young people who do make complaints against police are most likely to take issue with the way they are spoken to or handled by police, with the majority of allegations concerning an officer's demeanour and attitude, and excessive use of force.

Results of the QUT and UQ school-based intervention programs were mixed. QUT's program indicated that after the intervention there was some reduction in self-reported risk-taking behaviours by young people. From open-ended comments provided by the young people, there were also suggestions that part of the value of the intervention was the increased ability of the students to protect their friends if necessary.

Examining overall perceptions of police and images of police, the UQ study found that young people's responses to the intervention program varied. These responses were coded into four groups. Two groups of respondents maintained the same perceptions and image of police both before and after the intervention. For one of these groups, their responses were consistently positive; the responses of the second group were consistently negative. After reporting negative perceptions and image of police prior to the

intervention, the third group shifted to positive perceptions and image after the intervention. The final group shifted from positive before the intervention to negative after the intervention. These results suggest that changing young people's perceptions of and attitudes towards police is not straightforward and may require unique and targeted interventions for different groups of young people, or intervention at a younger age.

The three police–youth studies examined different aspects of relations between police and young people. Although none of the studies provides definitive answers to improve relations between police and young people, all three increase our understanding of the nature and complexity of these relations.

1

Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of previous research on relations between police and young people, and introduces the three studies that form the basis of this report.

How can relations between police and young people be characterised?

Research has consistently highlighted the problematic nature of relations between police and young people. Interactions between police and young people are often characterised by conflict and tension, with high levels of anger, fear and mistrust on both sides (Borgquist, Johnson & Walsh 1995; Liederbach 2007; White 1997).

From the perspective of young people, there are perceptions of both over-policing in public spaces and under-policing in cases of victimisation. Perceptions of racism, intimidation and violence have also been identified.

Police, on the other hand, are reported to experience constant 'hassles' and uncooperative behaviour from young people. In addition, a general lack of respect for police is often signalled by poor attitudes and demeanour (Cunneen & White 2007; White, 1998). In short, the typical relationship between young people and police can be characterised as one of negative perceptions from both sides.

Why do some young people have negative perceptions of police?

The prevalence of negative perceptions on the part of young people towards police has been linked to the tendency of young people to come to the attention of police more often than older people (e.g. see Cunneen & White 2007). A number of factors could explain this. For example, young people are more likely to:

- be the victim of an offence (ABS 2006; QPS 2007; AIC 2008)
- engage in a criminal activity (Stewart, Dennison & Hurren 2005; Skrzypiec & Wundersitz 2005; Hua, Baker & Poynton 2006; Smart et al. 2004)
- be charged with an offence (QPS 2007; AIC 2008)
- engage in risky, delinquent or antisocial behaviours that may generate police interest (McAra & McVie 2005; Smart et al. 2004; Western, Lynch & Ogilvie 2004)

- spend more time in public spaces, which may increase visibility and police scrutiny and aggravate the need for police to demonstrate control (Cunneen & White 2007; Liederbach 2007; McAra & McVie 2005; Muncie 2004; NSW Ombudsman 1999; White 1998).

While these factors bring young people and police together, empirical research conducted throughout the 1990s suggests that many young people consider that much of the police contact and intervention in relation to young people is unnecessary (Alder et al. 1992; Collins et al. 2000; White 1998; Youth Justice Coalition of NSW 1994).

Some studies have also revealed that young people may experience intimidation, verbal abuse and physical violence in their interactions with police (e.g. see Alder et al. 1992; Borrero 2001; Youth Justice Coalition of NSW 1994). For example, in a study commissioned by the National Youth Affairs Research Scheme, it was found that one-third of the 383 young participants claimed they had been 'roughed up' by police (Alder et al. 1992). Of those young people taken to a police station (50%), many said they were yelled or sworn at (70%), pushed around (55%) or hit (40%). The use of intimidation and physical violence has been reported in the policing of Indigenous young people (Alder et al. 1992; Cunneen 1990, 1994), fuelling perceptions of racism and the targeting of minority groups on the part of police (James & Polk 1996; Hagan, Shedd & Payne 2005; Hurst, Frank & Browning 2000; White 1994, 1997).

Why do some police have negative perceptions of young people?

For the police, on the other hand, adverse interactions may arise from perceptions that young people are uncooperative and disrespectful of the law and law officials, or from their own experiences of harassment, verbal abuse and physical violence directed at them by young people (Alder et al. 1992; Drury & Dennison 2000; White 1994, 1998). In one of the few studies that have examined police perceptions of young people, it was found that almost half of the 90 police officers interviewed felt that 'few' or 'very few' young people showed respect for authority or police (Alder et al. 1992). In addition, most of the officers reported being assaulted or harassed by a young person in the course of their duties.

Police perceptions of young people may also reflect the perceptions of society more broadly. 'Moral panics' created and perpetuated by political campaigns and the media that represent young people as lawless and violent, involved in 'crime waves' and 'ethnic gangs', can instil a general fear of crime within the community. The result of this fear is greater pressure on police to 'clean up the streets' so that young people do not 'get into trouble' (Alder et al. 1992; Bolzan 2003; Collins et al. 2000; Cunneen & White 2007; Hayes 1999; James & Polk 1996; Muncie 2004; NSW Law Reform Commission 2005; O'Connor, Daly & Hinds 2002; Omaji 2003; White 1994, 1998). Whether accurate or not, these perceptions influence policing policy, powers and practices and often justify police intervention in their dealings with young people (Cunneen & White 2007; Omaji 2003).

What is the impact of poor relations between young people and police?

Mutually negative perceptions and interactions between police and young people can result in adverse outcomes for both parties.

The negative perceptions held by young people may lead to dissatisfaction with police as well as a lack of confidence in the police more generally. A number of studies examining public attitudes towards police support this view and have shown that, in comparison with older people, young people tend to be more dissatisfied with police and have lower assessments of police competency (e.g. see Borrero 2001; Brown & Benedict 2002; CMC 2006; Ede 2003; Sced 2004a, 2004b; Taylor, Turner, Esbensen & Winfree Jr 2001).

For example, in 2002, the CMC conducted a public attitudes survey of Queensland residents which found that respondents aged 18–24 years were significantly more likely than older respondents to report negative assessments of and dissatisfaction with police (Ede 2003). Similar results were also found in the CMC's 2005 survey, although there was a significant decline in the proportion of young respondents reporting dissatisfaction (CMC 2006). Additional analysis of the 2005 public attitudes survey found that more young people than older people believed that there was no point in reporting corruption in the Queensland Police Service (QPS) because nothing useful would be done about it.[1] Preliminary results of the CMC's 2008 survey have shown that young people's negative perceptions and experiences with police have returned to levels similar to the 2002 survey (CMC 2009).

Negative perceptions of young people towards the police are therefore likely to lead to less cooperation and compliance from young people, as well as lowered satisfaction with and support for the police more generally. Ultimately, this has implications for how well police can do their job and, hence, for overall public safety.

Poor relationships with police also have implications for young people. Acting as gatekeepers to the criminal justice system, police have a lot of discretion in their relations with young people (e.g. see Stewart & Smith 2004). However, negative perceptions by police towards young people are likely to adversely influence how police apply this discretion. Previous research has shown that the attitudes and personality of the police officer, as well as characteristics of the young person — such as gender and Indigenous status, and their attitudes, demeanour and behaviour towards the police — are likely to impact on police decisions when dealing with young people (e.g. see Alder et al. 1992; McAra & McVie 2005; Parker, Mohr & Wilson 2004).

1 $\chi^2 = 17.85$, $p < .05$. Almost a quarter of young people (24.8%) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'there is no use reporting corruption in the QPS because nothing useful will be done about it', compared with only 15 per cent of older people.

Further, police discretion may have a significant impact on the criminalisation of young people. A number of recent studies indicate that early encounters with police may lead to a greater likelihood of future encounters with the criminal justice system in later adolescence or adulthood (Chen, Matruglio, Weatherburn & Hua 2005; Hua, Baker & Poynton 2006; Lynch, Buckman & Krenske 2003; Skrzypiec & Wundersitz 2005; Weatherburn, Cush & Saunders 2007). For example, following a cohort of Queenslanders born in 1984, Dennison, Stewart and Hurren (2006) found that first-time offenders between the ages of 10 and 16 who were cautioned were less likely to have additional contact with the juvenile justice system before age 17 than those whose first offence had led to a court appearance. This suggests that perceptions of, and interactions between, young people and the police may either escalate or divert future involvement by young people in the criminal justice system.

In short, negative consequences from police–youth interactions are likely to reinforce the already unfavourable attitudes and perceptions that exist between these groups. Understanding how perceptions and attitudes are formed between police and young people is essential to improving these relationships and minimising any adverse consequences. How young people perceive the police will shape how they interact with law enforcement officers, and their levels of confidence in, and satisfaction with, police more generally. Similarly, how police perceive young people will largely influence how they decide to respond to a youth-related incident or manage a particular situation.

Background to this report

While there is considerable research on the nature of relations between police and young people, our understanding of the different factors shaping these interactions, as well as solutions for improving them, is more limited. In 2004, the Crime and Misconduct Commission (CMC), the University of Queensland (UQ) and Queensland University of Technology (QUT) were jointly awarded an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant to address this gap and examine factors influencing relations between police and young people. Additionally, the UQ and QUT research teams received funds from Injury Prevention and Control Australia (IPCA) to explore risk-taking behaviour among young people.

The overall purpose of the collaborative project was twofold. First, we wanted to examine interactions between young people and the police to more fully understand the reasons for young people's dissatisfaction with police, and the concerns and challenges involved with police–youth interactions. Second, we wanted to identify youth-centred approaches with the potential to improve relations between the two groups.

To achieve these objectives, we conducted three separate but related research studies. The first study involved an analysis of complaints against police made to the CMC and the QPS by young people aged 15–24 years. Complaints against police generally represent key examples of the types of interaction that can occur between the two parties

— that is, extreme examples of negative interactions and the consequences that can take place between police and young people. The aim of the complaints analysis was to describe the nature and types of interactions that generate complaints against police involving young people, as well as features of the complaint itself.

In the second study, supported by IPCA funds, the UQ and QUT researchers examined risk-taking behaviour by young people with a particular emphasis on those behaviours that are likely to cause injury and even death. Risk-taking behaviours such as risky driving, interpersonal violence, and drug and alcohol consumption have been consistently linked to injuries sustained by young people. The CMC complaints analysis also identified various types of risk-taking behaviours by young people that are more likely to generate police interest and result in police action. In this report, we present the findings of a school-based intervention program designed by QUT to address risk-taking behaviour and reduce the likelihood of injuries to young people.

The third study focused on improving interactions between police and young people more generally. The potential for negative views and attitudes between police and young people to perpetuate a cycle of negativity and adverse consequences has been well documented. In light of this, a school-based intervention program which aimed to change young people's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, the police, and improve interactions between these groups, was designed by the UQ researchers in collaboration with an officer from QPS's CRYPAR (Coordinated Response to Young People at Risk) program.

This report presents findings from each of these studies. It begins by describing how complaints against police are managed by the CMC and the QPS.

2

Complaints against police

This chapter describes how complaints against police are managed by the CMC and the QPS.

How are complaints against police dealt with?

Complaints against police officers can be made to the CMC or the QPS, and the types of complaints that can be managed and investigated by each are set out in the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001* and the *Police Service Administration Act 1990*. Depending on the nature of the allegation/s made by a person, complaints are categorised as either a 'breach of discipline' or a 'misconduct' matter.[2]

What is a 'breach of discipline'?

Breach of discipline matters tend to involve less serious allegations that generally relate to police conduct that contravenes police procedures, standards or directives.[3] Section 1.4 of the *Police Service Administration Act 1990* defines 'breach of discipline' as a breach of:

i. the *Police Service Administration Act 1990*, or

ii. the *Police Powers and Responsibilities Act 2000*, or

iii. a direction of the Police Commissioner.

It does not include misconduct.

Examples of breach of discipline matters include allegations that a police officer was rude or verbally abusive — and there is no other serious aspect to the behaviour — and other minor or technical examples of official conduct, such as loss or minor misuse of police property, insubordination or failure to comply with operational procedures. Generally, conduct that is found to be a 'breach of discipline' may result in informal resolution

2 In assessing the type of complaint made against a police officer, each allegation included in the complaint is primarily classified as either 'misconduct' or 'breach of discipline'. The whole complaint is then categorised on the basis of the most serious of the allegations: for example, a complaint containing an allegation of 'misconduct' and allegations of 'breaches of discipline' would be categorised as a 'misconduct' complaint.

3 In *Schauer v. Banham* (Appeal no. 11 of 1996, Misconduct Tribunal, page 16) Dr J R Forbes found that a 'breach of discipline' was akin to a technical breach, in that 'reasonable people may say, "he could have done better there" or "that was a bit risky"'. He referred to 'breach of discipline' as being a 'shortfall in perfectly meeting departmental instructions', and recognised that not every breach of discipline could be '… classifiable as "disgraceful" or "show[ing] unfitness to be an officer"' or even below 'the standard of conduct [that] the community reasonably expects of a police officer'.

whereby the police officer receives managerial guidance from his or her supervisor or participates in mediation with the person who made the complaint. In some cases, an officer may be called to a disciplinary hearing if it is decided that other action should be taken against the officer.

The QPS has exclusive responsibility for dealing with all breach of discipline matters, and is not required to report suspected or known breaches of discipline complaints to the CMC. The CMC has no jurisdiction to investigate breach of discipline matters; if the CMC receives a complaint of this nature, the matter is referred to the QPS.

What is 'misconduct'?

Misconduct complaints include allegations of a more serious nature. There are two types of misconduct complaints — official misconduct and police misconduct.

The *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001* (sections 14 and 15) defines official misconduct as conduct (or conspiracy or attempt to engage in conduct) that:

a. 'could adversely affect, directly or indirectly, the honest and impartial performance of functions or exercise of powers … of any person holding an appointment'

b. involves 'the performance of the person's functions or the exercise of the person's powers, as the holder of the appointment, in a way that is not honest or not impartial' or

c. involves 'a breach of the trust placed in the person as the holder of the appointment' or

d. involves 'a misuse of information or material acquired in or in connection with the performance of the person's functions as the holder of the appointment, whether the misuse is for the person's benefit or the benefit of someone else'.

AND the conduct could, if proved, be —

a. 'a criminal offence'; or

b. 'a disciplinary breach providing reasonable grounds for terminating the person's services, if the person is or was the holder of an appointment'.

Police misconduct is defined by the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001* (Schedule 2) as 'conduct, other than "official misconduct", of a police officer that —

a. is disgraceful, improper or unbecoming a police officer; or

b. shows unfitness to be or continue as a police officer; or

c. does not meet the standard of conduct the community reasonably expects of a police officer.'

In its administration of complaints matters the QPS does not distinguish between police misconduct and official misconduct. Rather, the service uses a general category of

misconduct which is defined by section 1.4 of the *Police Service Administration Act 1990*. It should be noted that the definition of misconduct is consistent with the definition of police misconduct as defined by the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001*.

Misconduct complaints against police officers are to be dealt with either by the QPS or by the CMC, depending on the seriousness of the complaint. Under the Crime and Misconduct Act, the QPS has primary responsibility for dealing with complaints of police misconduct and the CMC has primary responsibility for dealing with official misconduct complaints. However, under the principle of devolution introduced by this legislation most police misconduct and official misconduct complaints involving police are referred to the QPS to deal with, subject to monitoring and oversight by the CMC. The CMC investigates a small number of the most serious cases.

In the event that the QPS or CMC finds that the misconduct allegations made against a police officer are substantiated — i.e. there is evidence to support that the alleged behaviour or conduct occurred — a police officer may be charged with a criminal offence, brought before a disciplinary hearing on a disciplinary charge, or subjected to other managerial action. If the prescribed officer at a disciplinary hearing determines that the misconduct allegations are proven, a sanction may be imposed on the officer. Sanctions range from reprimands and cautions to being dismissed from the service.

3

Study one: CMC analysis of complaints against police by young people

This chapter describes the CMC analysis of complaints against police made by young people aged 15–24 years. Complaints involving young people were most likely to be made by young males and allegations against police most commonly related to excessive force without a weapon or an officer's demeanour and attitude. Many of the young people were engaged in illegal or risk-taking behaviour prior to their interaction with police and almost half of the young people were charged by police for an offence.

Background

Despite alleged incidents of police harassment, intimidation and violence in relation to young people, research has suggested that few young people choose to make formal complaints about police (Borrero 2001; Cunneen 1990; O'Connor, Daly & Hinds 2002; Youth Justice Coalition of NSW 1994). Research has found that many young people, particularly Indigenous youth or those from minority groups, are afraid to report incidents for fear of police retaliation or because they felt threatened by police warnings against making a complaint. In addition, many young people feel that complaining about police would not do any good because they perceive police harassment and violence to be 'normal' and to be expected (Borrero 2001; Cunneen 1990; White 1997).

Where complaints against police have been made by young people, few studies have examined the nature of the complaints or the types of interactions that have led to a formal complaint being made. To address this gap, we examined complaints made against Queensland police officers by young people aged 15–24 years.

Research methodology

The aim of our analysis was to describe the nature and types of interaction that generate complaints by young people, as well as the characteristics of the complaints. Specifically, we examined three key areas:

- *Complaint management:* Who made the complaint? Where was the complaint made? How long did it take to process the complaint?

- *The incident*: Where did the initial interaction take place? What was the young person doing before police intervened? How did the police and young people come into contact with each other? Were any arrests made?
- *Allegations and outcomes:* What were the allegations made by young people? What were the outcomes of the complaint assessments and investigations?

To answer these questions, we identified all police complaints *reported* or *referred* to the CMC or the QPS between 1 October 2005 and 31 December 2006. Cases were included if the complaint was made by, or on behalf of, a young person aged 15–24 years.

Relevant cases were identified by searching the CMC complaints database for police misconduct and official misconduct files, and the QPS complaints database for breach of discipline files.[4] This process yielded 376 CMC and 57 QPS files.

Overall, complaints by young people accounted for 17 per cent of all police misconduct or official misconduct complaints received by the CMC, and 12 per cent of all breach of discipline complaints received by the QPS. On average, these figures are consistent with the proportion of young people aged 15–24 years in the community.[5]

Fifty (50) CMC misconduct cases were then randomly selected for detailed analysis. When combined with the 57 QPS breach of discipline files, this resulted in a total of 107 complaint files for examination.

Hard copies of the 107 complaint files were obtained from the CMC and QPS file registries.[6] Generally, complaint files include the complainant's submission, complaint management details, transcripts of interviews, and investigation reports.

Upon reviewing the 107 files, 15 files were excluded from the analysis.[7] Ninety-two (92) complaint files, comprising 46 misconduct and 46 breach of discipline files, were subsequently analysed.

Complaint file narratives

It is important to note a key limitation we faced with using information contained on complaint files to analyse interactions between police and young people. Principally, there were often discrepancies in the version of events provided by young people and those that were provided by police. For example, young people often claimed that police

4 The CMC maintains summary files for all police misconduct and official misconduct complaints reported to the CMC and the QPS. The QPS maintains files for all breach of discipline complaints.

5 In the 2006 census, young people aged 15–24 years comprised 14 per cent of Queensland's population. See Australian Bureau of Statistics, Catalogue No. 2068.0 — 2006 Census Tables, *2006 Census of population and housing, Queensland (state), age by sex*.

6 The corresponding QPS complaint files were obtained for each of the 50 CMC complaint files. As the QPS deals with most police misconduct and official misconduct matters (see page 8), investigative reports for these complaints are usually kept by the QPS rather than the CMC.

7 These files were excluded because the files (a) were not complaints made by or on behalf of a young person, (b) did not involve a young person, or (c) did not involve a complaint against a police officer.

were rude, were verbally or physically aggressive, or harassed and targeted them for 'trivial' offences. On the other hand, police generally claimed that it was the young person who was rude, aggressive and uncooperative, or that the alleged behaviour did not occur. These differences highlight common difficulties faced by investigators considering complaints against police and, indeed, the nature of many interactions between police and young people as noted in the introduction to this report.

Given the type of information available on complaint files and the difficulties associated with determining the most accurate version of events, we accepted the narratives and respective claims made by both parties — young people and police officers — rather than any one particular version of events, and based our analysis on that.

In addition, we analysed the complainant's version of events without reference to the outcomes of the allegations made against officers. In other words, we did not exclude a complainant's account or description of an incident if the allegations made against officers were subsequently not substantiated. This is particularly important when considering that most of the allegations made against police by young people were not substantiated (see page 22) by the QPS or the CMC.

In fact, a finding of 'not substantiated' reflects the outcomes of most complaints made to the CMC and the QPS, not simply those by young people.[8] However, this does not necessarily mean that the alleged behaviour of the subject officer did not occur. Rather, a finding of 'not substantiated' means there was insufficient evidence to prove an allegation of misconduct or breach of discipline. Research has found that allegations of assault or excessive force — which featured heavily in the complaint-related incidents we examined — are among the most difficult matters to investigate and prove to the necessary legal standard. The main reason for this is that these complaints rarely have any corroborating evidence, and rely on the word of the complainant against the word of one or more police officers (Brereton & Burgess 1997). This finding applies across numerous jurisdictions.

This being the case, we included and analysed the accounts of both parties to describe the nature of relations between police and young people, independent of the outcome of the complaints.

Key findings

We examined the misconduct files and breach of discipline files separately to determine whether any of the characteristics of the complaints (e.g. location of the interaction and offences committed) or the complainants (e.g. gender or age) differed by the severity of the allegations made. For the majority of factors examined, we did not detect any statistically significant differences. We therefore combined both types of complaints and, for the most part, present aggregated results. However, we report the results separately where differences between the two complaint types were detected.

8 Unpublished data, Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2008.

We begin this section by describing the demographic profile of the young people who were involved in complaints against police. In the second section we focus on the incidents that led to complaints being made. This includes the behaviours of young people, the location of incidents, who was with the young people at the time of the incident, and who initiated contact between young people and the police.

We also examine any charges laid against young people — in particular, whether they related to the specific interaction between young people and police or to other criminal behaviour. Finally, we examine the formal complaints made by young people, including the complaint allegations and the outcomes of these complaints.

Complaints snapshot

Who made the complaint?
Most complaints against police were made by a single complainant (71.7%), followed by two (25.0%) or three (3.3%) complainants. In most cases, the complainant/s was also the young person involved in the incident (79.5%). Fewer complaints were lodged by the parents of the young person (10.7%), other family members and friends (3.3%), or government agencies (6.5%).

Which agency was it sent to?
The QPS was the first point of contact for almost three-quarters (71.7%) of all complaints; just under a quarter (23.9%) of complaints against police were lodged with the CMC. Specifically, all (100%) breach of discipline complaints and about half of the misconduct complaints (43.5%) were made directly to the QPS.

How was it made?
Complaints were either made in person (52.2%) or over the phone (34.9%). Fewer complaints were lodged by postal mail (6.5%) and email (4.3%).

When was it made in relation to the related incident?
Approximately one-third (33.7%) of all complaints were made on the same day the incident took place. In total, over 40 per cent of complaints were made in the week following the incident, while approximately 60 per cent were made more than a week after the incident occurred.

How long did the complaint take to resolve?
On average, breach of discipline complaints took 71 days to finalise, and misconduct complaints took 140 days to finalise.[9]

In summary, a typical complaint by young people is made in person to the QPS by an individual. It is made more than a week after the related incident, and takes around 78 days to finalise.

Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 92 complaint files.

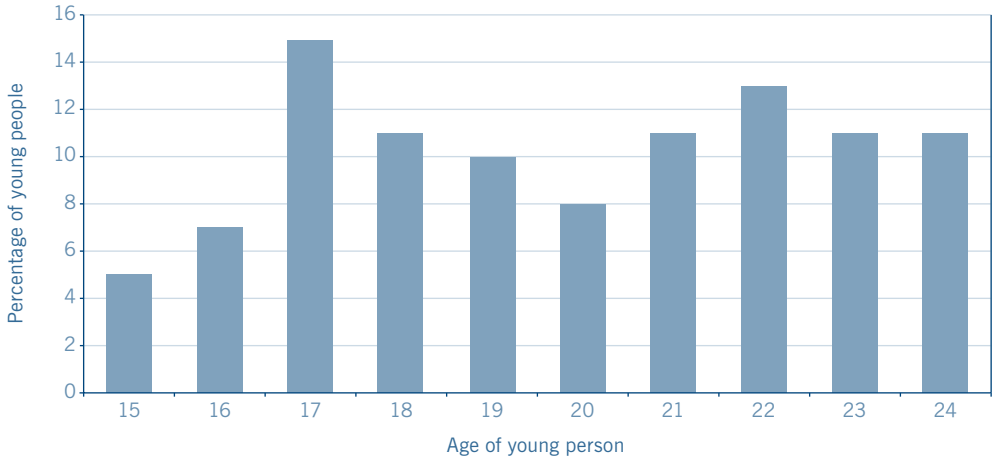
9 The median time to finalise a complaint was 78 days. One complaint was closed the day it was made with no further action while another complaint took almost two years (679 days) to resolve. This latter complaint was complex in nature. It was a high-profile matter characterised by allegations of serious misconduct and related to several other complaint matters under investigation.

Demographic profile of complainants

Across the 92 complaint files examined, 102 young people were identified as complainants — that is, a person who made an allegation against a police officer.[10] Approximately three-fifths (60.8%) of these young people were male compared with 39.2 per cent who were female. This represents a statistically significant difference, indicating that young men are more likely to make complaints against police than young women.[11] This finding is also consistent with the profile of complaints more generally and suggests that men are more likely to have the types of police interactions that generate formal complaints.[12]

Figure 1 shows the percentages of young people aged 15–24 years who made a complaint to the CMC or QPS. While the average age of complainants was 19 years, the highest proportion of young people who made a complaint were aged 17 years (15%), followed by 22 years (13%). Only 5 per cent of young people who made a complaint against police were aged 15 years.

Figure 1: Age of young people who made a complaint against police, 2005–06



Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 102 young people.

The majority of young people were Caucasian (63.7%), while 8.8 per cent were Indigenous. Smaller numbers of young people were from Middle Eastern (4.9%), Pacific Islander (2.0%), or other ethnic backgrounds, such as Asian or European (2.0%). In just under one-fifth (18.6%) of all cases the ethnicity of a young person was not recorded.

10 A complaint file may contain more than one complainant.

11 $\chi^2_{(1)} = 5.14$, $p < .05$. This finding shows a statistically significant difference in the number of young males and females who made a complaint against police.

12 Unpublished data, Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2008.

Incidents that led to the complaints

What types of behaviour were young people involved in?

As discussed in the introduction to this report, the frequency of contact between young people and the police has been closely associated with the propensity of young people to engage in criminal activity or risky or delinquent behaviours that generate police interest. Our research identified that criminal behaviours featured in the majority of complaint-related incidents that we examined, with evidence to suggest that 60 per cent of young people were engaging in some type of illegal activity or risk-taking behaviour prior to their interaction with police. In some of these cases these behaviours led to charges being laid against those involved. This is discussed more fully on pages 19–21.

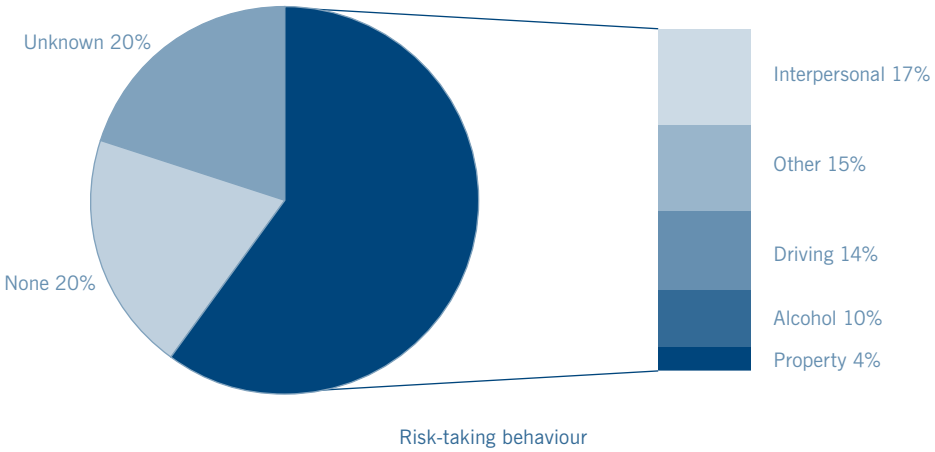
Figure 2 shows the types of illegal behaviours identified in the complaint-related incidents. For the purpose of this project, we defined five types of illegal or risk-taking behaviours: [13]

1. driving-related behaviours such as speeding, drink driving or driving unregistered or unroadworthy vehicles
2. interpersonal violence or abuse, including physical assault and verbal abuse
3. property-related offences such as theft, vandalism, and damage to public and private property
4. excessive alcohol consumption
5. other behaviours such as fare evasion, obstruction of officers, and obstruction in relation to police search warrants.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of young people engaged in these types of illegal behaviour during the complaint-related incident. The most common type of illegal behaviour undertaken by young people was interpersonal violence or abuse (17%), followed by other behaviours (15%) and driving incidents (14%). Fewer proportions of young people were detected for alcohol (10%) or property-related behaviours (4%).

13 Although some types of behaviour young people were involved in were clearly illegal (e.g. drink driving or assault), we do not focus exclusively on these types of behaviour. Instead, we also included in our analysis risky, delinquent behaviour (e.g. excessive consumption of alcohol). We do not distinguish between risk-taking and illegal behaviours, because we were interested more in how and why young people were brought to the attention of police, rather than whether or not the behaviour could be considered criminal.

Figure 2: Illegal behaviours of young people identified in complaint-related incidents



Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 92 complaint files.

While it was the illegal activities of young people that generally preceded an interaction or contact with police, some young people engaged in further risk-taking or illegal behaviour by actively resisting or challenging police after being detected. For example:

- A 16-year-old male failed to stop for police after he was detected driving a stolen vehicle. A police pursuit commenced and was abandoned three times due to the dangerous nature of the pursuit. After the stolen vehicle collided with a tree, the male and his companions then fled on foot before being located by police.
- A 15-year-old male was detained by police at a railway station after railway staff made a complaint of wilful damage. The male fled from police on foot and refused instructions to stop. He was subsequently tackled by police and sustained minor injuries.
- An 18-year-old male tried to prevent police from arresting his friend who was wanted for alleged offences. When they tried to place his friend in the police vehicle, the male obstructed them, became abusive and subsequently threw a drink at a police officer.
- A young female refused to leave a train after being detected by police without a valid ticket. Police claimed the young person was argumentative.
- A 19-year-old male admitted to provoking a police officer by fabricating a story. The male told police he had just bashed his friend because his friend pulled a knife on him. After speaking with the friend, the officer instructed the male to go home but he refused. The situation escalated, with the two becoming embroiled in a physical struggle.

Not all cases, however, were characterised by the criminal behaviours of young people. In 20 per cent of complaint-related incidents there was no evidence to suggest that young

people were engaging in illegal behaviours that would generate targeted or special attention by police. These cases tended to include those where the young person reported being the victim of an offence (e.g. an unprovoked assault or property theft), or where the young person witnessed the behaviour of police while at the same location (e.g. licensed premises or public spaces).

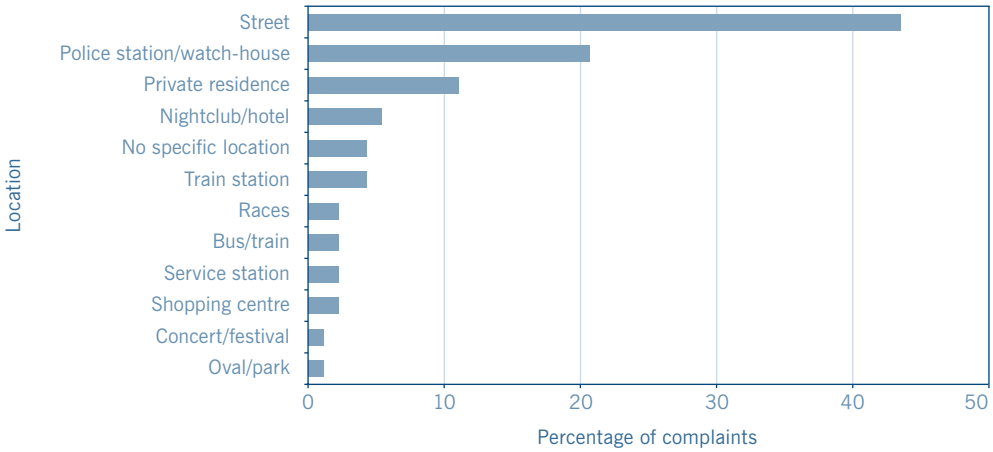
For example, a mother of a 17-year-old male lodged a complaint with the QPS alleging that a male constable did not sufficiently investigate the unprovoked assault of her son. The mother claimed that the officer's management of the case did not meet the standards of conduct reasonably expected by the community, parents and students of the school where the constable was appointed as a school-based officer. In another case, a 23-year-old male complained to the QPS after allegedly seeing four police officers smoking near a police vehicle that was parked at the train station. The male alleged the police vehicle was parked in a thoroughfare and when the male approached one of the police officers he was called a derogatory name.

In 20 per cent of cases, it was not clear from the information on the file what type of behaviours or incident preceded a young person's interaction with police.

Where did the incident take place?

Figure 3 shows the location of complaint-related incidents between police and young people. Approximately two-fifths (43.5%) of all incidents that resulted in a complaint occurred on the street, while about one-fifth (20.7%) took place at a police station or watch-house. Other common locations were private residences (10.9%), nightclubs or pubs (5.4%), and train stations (4.3%).

Figure 3: Incident location of police and young person interactions



Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 92 complaint files.

Generally, the complaint-related incident took place in the same location where the young person was engaging in illegal or risk-taking behaviour, except in the case of

police stations or watch-houses. In these cases, the complaints generally relate to how a person was treated after they were detained for certain behaviour or when a young person went to a police station to make a complaint or report an incident. For example:

- A male claimed that, after he had been taken to the watch-house for disobeying a 'move on' direction, police did not allow him to call his mother and made a rude hand gesture towards him. The male also complained about the condition of the watch-house, which he described as 'disgusting'.
- A juvenile male alleged that he was manhandled and shoved while being escorted from a shared cell in a watch-house to a padded cell. He also claimed that he was put in a padded cell for no reason.
- A young female reported that she was strip-searched in an area that was visible to male officers, which made her feel uncomfortable.
- The mother of a young male claimed that while her son was in custody police made insensitive remarks, assaulted him and treated him improperly by not providing him with access to legal advice or medical treatment.

Who was with the young person?

Young people are more likely to attract the attention of police when they are with other young people, such as when they are congregating in public spaces. We were therefore interested to see if young people were alone or with others at the time of the complaint-related incident.

Our analysis found that over half (51.5%) of young people who made a complaint against a police officer were with one or more friends when the incident that resulted in a complaint took place.[14] Specifically, approximately one-third of young people were with two or more friends (30.1%), and fewer people were with one friend (21.4%). On the other hand, approximately one-third (31.1%) of young people were alone during their interaction with police. This information was not available on complaint files for the remaining young people (17.4%).

Who initiated contact between police and young people?

Some of the discontent expressed by young people towards police stems from perceptions of being unfairly targeted or harassed by police (e.g. see Alder et al. 1992; Collins et al. 2000; White 1998; Youth Justice Coalition of NSW 1994). While research has identified that young people are more likely to come into contact with police because they are more likely to be involved in an offence as either a victim or an offender, or engage in risky or delinquent behaviour, little is known about how police detect this behaviour or, more specifically, how police and young people actually came into contact. In other words, who initiates this interaction? Is there evidence that police target young people while on duty?

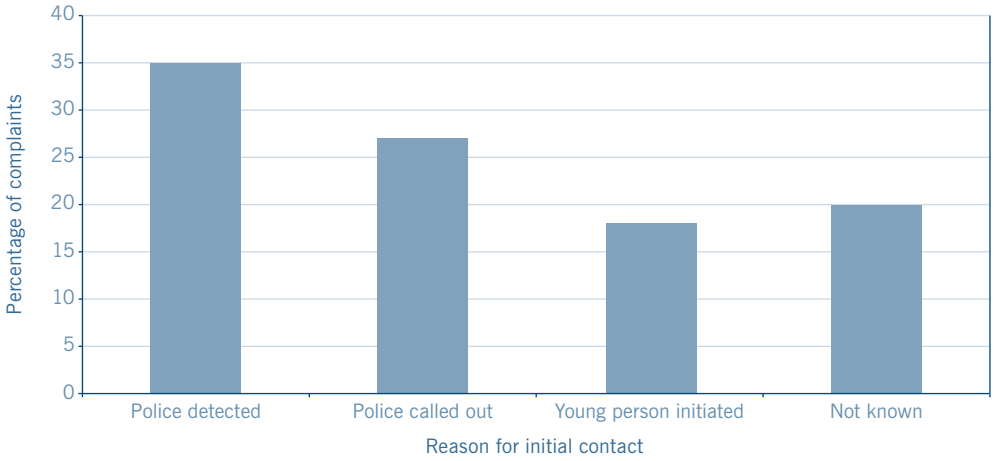
14 Percentages based on a sample of 102 young people.

Our research identified three main ways in which police and young people came into contact with each other:

1. police detected behaviour while on duty
2. police responded to a call for service involving a young person
3. young people contacted police to make a report.

These results are shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Source of initiated contact between police and young people



Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 92 complaint files.

In 35 per cent of incidents examined, police and young people came into contact with each other after police witnessed or detected behaviour while on duty. Some of these interactions resulted from police targeting specific offences such as drink driving (through random breath testing) and speeding. Others were the result of police witnessing antisocial or criminal behaviour while on duty in an area frequented by young people, such as a central business district, a licensed premises or at the races.

For example, police intervened in an incident at the races when two groups of people started verbally harassing each other. A young female alleged that police manhandled and shoved her when they were trying to remove her and her boyfriend from the area. In a separate incident, a young male who was with a group of friends became involved in a physical altercation with a nightclub bouncer after the bouncer tried to move them away from the front of the nightclub. Police were attending to another matter across the road from the nightclub when they witnessed the scuffle and intervened.

In 27 per cent of incidents involving young people, police intervened after responding to a call for service. The majority of these incidents (76%) involved a young male complainant rather than a female complainant (24%). While information such as the circumstances preceding the call or the relationship between the caller and the young

person was not always available on the complaints files, the files did provide us with some examples of the reasons police were called to an incident involving a young person. These reasons included:

- occupants of a residence or dwelling contacting police about a domestic disturbance or incident
- business owners or staff contacting police about damage to their property
- security staff and personnel of licensed premises contacting police about difficult, drunk or rowdy patrons
- public transport staff contacting police about problematic behaviour by commuters
- members of the community reporting antisocial or criminal behaviour such as young people drinking or breaking into vehicles.

In fewer cases (18%), contact between police and young people was the result of young people initiating contact with police. Of these incidents, the majority were young females (65%) rather than young males (35%). In these cases, young people generally contacted the police about being the victim of a crime. For example, a young female lodged a complaint with the QPS after a police officer was allegedly abrupt and confrontational with her when she reported being the victim of a rape by someone known to her. A young male made a similar complaint because an officer was reportedly rude and abrupt when he reported being the victim of an assault. And another young female made a complaint against police for not responding to her request to attend the scene of a motor vehicle accident that she was involved in.

While a higher proportion of incidents involving young people were the result of police detecting or witnessing behaviour, in over a quarter of cases police were responding to a call for service made by third parties. This is an important finding and challenges assumptions about police targeting young people while on duty.

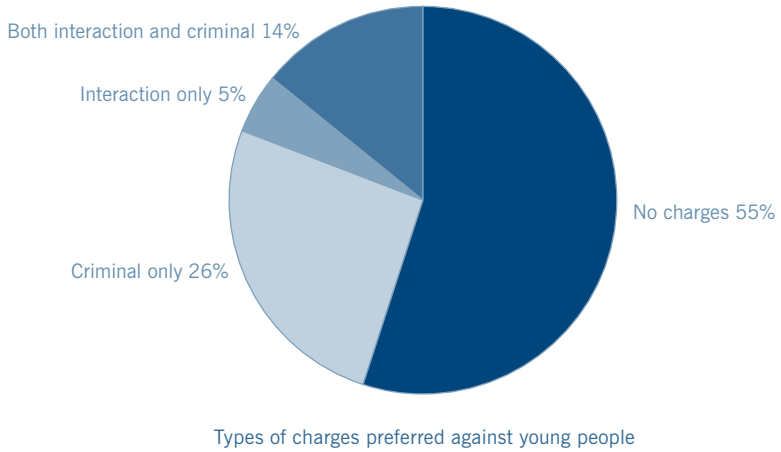
Were young people charged with offences?

Charges made against young people represent one of the most negative outcomes that may arise from interactions with police. We were interested, then, in examining the kind of charges young people received as a result of complaint-related incidents and, in particular, whether they related to the specific interaction between young people and police or to other types of criminal behaviour. This distinction is important for two reasons. Charges related to criminal behaviour highlight the behaviours of young people that occur independently of police, and why police may have come into contact with a young person. Interaction-related charges, on the other hand, highlight outcomes that could perhaps have been avoided if young people or the police behaved differently during the interaction. It is this latter set of charges that may have the most impact on relations between police and young people.

To explore this, we divided charges against young people into two categories: those offences arising from the interaction or contact between police and young people (interaction-related offences), and those offences arising from suspected involvement in other criminal activity (criminal offences).[15] We also examined whether any young people were charged with both types of offences. These results are shown in Figure 5.

In the sample under study, 45 per cent of the young people involved in a complaint-related incident were charged by police for an offence.

Figure 5: Charges against young people arising from complaint-related incidents



Note: Percentages are based on a sample of 92 complaint files.

Forty (40) per cent of the sample were charged with an offence related to suspected involvement in criminal behaviour. This included 26 per cent of young people who were charged with a criminal offence only and 14 per cent of young people who were charged with both an interaction-related offence and a criminal offence. The most common criminal charges related to traffic offences such as drink driving and speeding, and public nuisance offences. Fewer young people were charged with being drunk in a public place.

Nineteen (19) per cent of the sample were charged with an interaction-related offence. This comprised 5 per cent of young people who were charged with an interaction-related offence only, and 14 per cent who were also charged with a criminal offence. Generally, interaction-related offences occurred during a verbal or physical altercation between police and young people or once a young person was restrained or detained by police. The most common interaction-related offences charged against young people included assault and obstruct police, resist arrest and contravene a direction.

15 Offences categorised as *interaction-related* were assault/obstruct police, resist arrest, disobeying a direction and disrupting police in the line of duty. All other offences were categorised as *other criminal offences* and included offences such as assault, drink driving and street offences. The broader category of other criminal offences may include some offences that could be classified as both an interaction-related offence and another type of criminal offence (e.g. public nuisance offences, see CMC 2008).

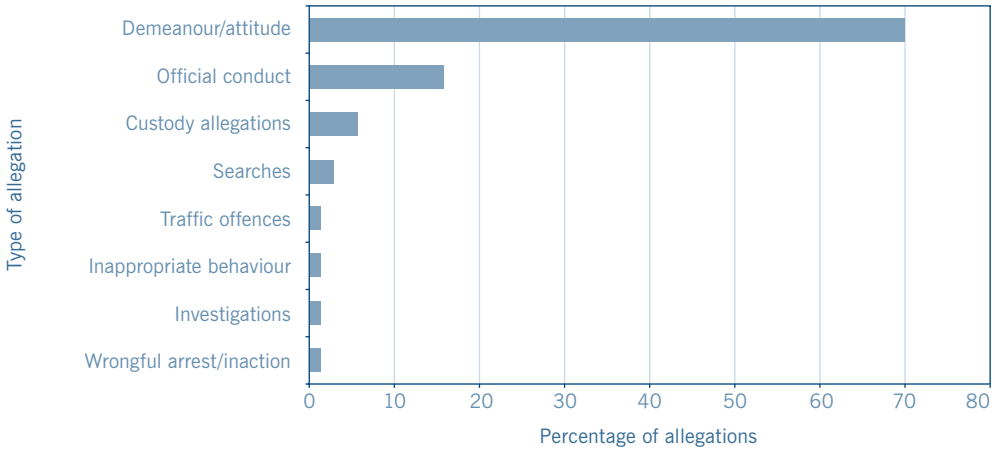
Fifty-five (55) per cent of young people who made a complaint against police were not charged with any offence.

Complaint allegations and outcomes

Breach of discipline

Across the 46 breach of discipline complaints examined, there were 69 allegations against police. Over three-quarters (76.1%, *n* = 35) of the complaints involved a single allegation only while the remaining breach of discipline complaints included between two and nine allegations. Figure 6 shows the types of allegations made by complainants. As can be seen, the most common relate to a police officer's demeanour and attitude (69.6%, *n* = 48), and specifically concern incivility, rudeness or verbal abuse by an officer.

Figure 6: Breach of discipline allegations made by young people



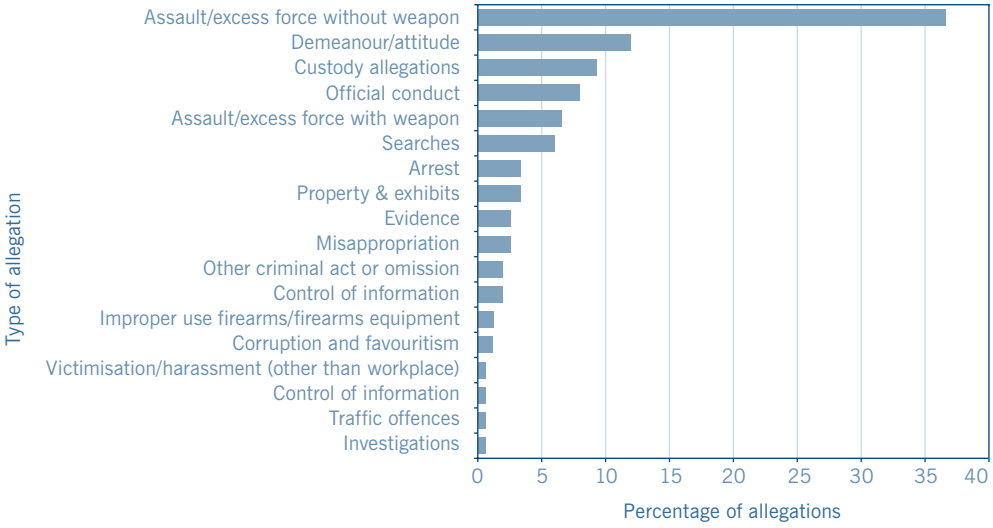
Misconduct complaints

Compared with breach of discipline complaints, misconduct complaints were more likely to involve more than one allegation. In total, 150 allegations were made across the 46 misconduct complaints examined. Just over 30 per cent of complaints made against police involved two allegations, while over 45 per cent involved three or more allegations. The highest number of allegations made by a young person was 18 allegations. In comparison, less than a quarter (23.9%) of complaints involved one allegation against an officer.

The majority (66.0%, *n* = 99) of misconduct allegations related to official misconduct and the remaining (34.0%, *n* = 51) related to police misconduct (see definitions on pages 6–8). Figure 7 shows the most common misconduct allegations made by young people. Allegations of assault and excessive force without a weapon represented over a third (36.7%, *n* = 55) of all allegations made against police. Generally, these cases

involved allegations of police pushing/shoving or manhandling young people, and allegations of young people being punched, kicked or kneed by police officers. Twelve (12) per cent (n = 18) of misconduct allegations related to the police officer's demeanour or attitude.

Figure 7: Misconduct allegations made by young people

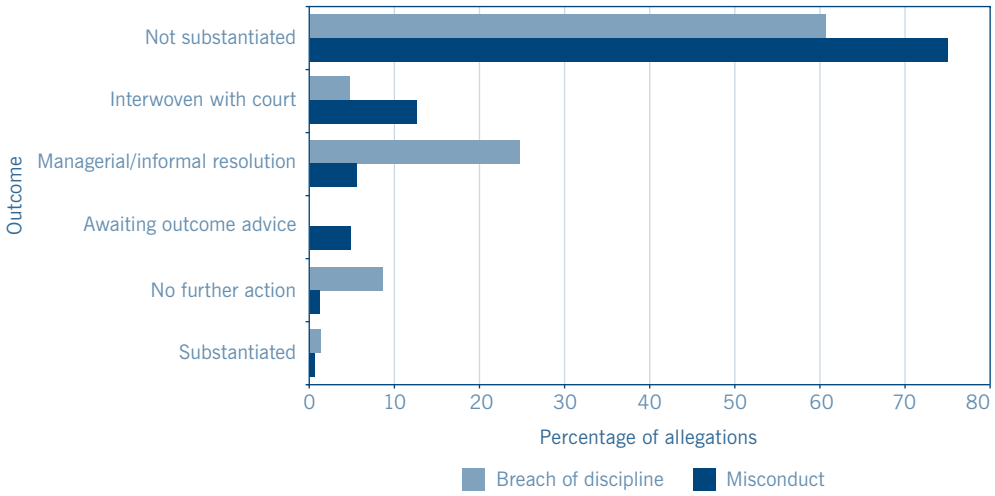


Outcomes

The QPS investigated all of the breach of discipline complaints and the majority of misconduct complaints (97.3%, n = 91). The CMC only investigated one complaint.

Figure 8 shows the outcomes of allegations made against police officers by young people. The majority of both misconduct allegations (74.7%, n = 112) and breach of discipline allegations (60.9%, n = 42) were not substantiated. Almost a quarter (24.6%, n = 17) of all breach of discipline allegations were dealt with through informal resolution, which included the officer receiving managerial guidance from his or her supervisor. Only one breach of discipline allegation and one misconduct allegation were substantiated.

Figure 8: Outcomes of allegations made by young people



Notes: 'No further action' generally relates to matters considered to be an unjustifiable use of resources under s. 46(2)(g) of the *Crime and Misconduct Act 2001*. In most cases this is because the complaint cannot be productively investigated or otherwise dealt with for various reasons (e.g. the information given is not sufficiently detailed, there is an absence of any reliable evidence to corroborate the allegation, or there is a lapse of time between the alleged misconduct and the making of the complaint such as to impact upon the availability and reliability of any evidence).

A complaint is considered to be 'interwoven with court' when the circumstances giving rise to a complaint are inextricably woven with the circumstances of a charge brought against the complainant arising from the same incident. In these cases, the court hearing the criminal proceedings is considered the appropriate forum to determine the facts of the matter in the first instance. Upon conclusion of the criminal proceedings, a complainant may re-enliven the matter if (a) the complainant has been acquitted, (b) adverse comments or findings were made by the court in relation to the conduct of the police, or (c) the issues arising from the complaint are not resolved.

In a small number of complaint-related incidents, young people reconsidered the allegations initially made against police officers. In some cases this was the result of young people being presented with video footage or an audio recording of the incident, or conceding during the complaints process that the alleged incidents may not have occurred. Some examples are:

- A young woman agreed that an officer who pulled her over while driving was not rude and unhelpful upon hearing the tape recording of the incident.
- A young male admitted during a taped interview that officers did not — as he initially claimed — throw him to the ground and bash his head, but rather he fell over and hit his head.
- A young man who reported that police left him unconscious and handcuffed at the watch-house said he was 'happy' with the police response after viewing the watch-house footage.

- A young female who asserted that a police officer behaved unprofessionally and left her waiting for a substantial amount of time later admitted that she was upset and busy and had left the station without providing the officer with her contact details.
- The parents of several complainant children said they suspected that police did not use excessive force on their children but rather their children were lying about the incident.

In each of these cases, the allegations against police were not substantiated.

Conversely, in two cases, it was the police officers who conceded that their behaviour may not have been justified in the circumstances.

One case involved a 19-year-old woman who attended a police station with a group of friends to make a complaint that her vehicle had been broken into. She had just been released from custody after being arrested for public nuisance and the officer refused to take her complaint on the basis that she was intoxicated. The woman was told to leave the station and, when she asked, the officer would not supply his name. The woman made a complaint against the officer for failing to take a crime report and failing to identify himself. During the investigation, the officer admitted that his assessment of the woman's demeanour may have been influenced by the behaviour of her friends (who were intoxicated) and, in hindsight, the woman was probably capable of providing a report. The officer also admitted to not providing his identifying details. The matter was informally resolved and the officer was counselled about the situation.

In a separate incident, a police officer apologised to a young male — in the presence of the male's father — after the male alleged the police officer harassed him twice in two days, made derogatory comments to him, and threatened him. The police officer admitted that during the most recent interaction he overreacted and mistakenly thought the male was someone who had made derogatory comments to him previously. The male and his father were subsequently satisfied that he had not been harassed by police.

Both cases were informally resolved with the officers receiving managerial guidance.

Conclusions

The majority of incidents that result in a complaint by a young person usually occur on the street, and involve a male who is in the company of one or more friends. The majority of the breach of discipline complaints against police (69.9%) relate to police officers' demeanour and attitude, while the most common misconduct complaints relate to an allegation of assault or excessive force by an officer (e.g. manhandling or shoving, 36.7%) or concern the demeanour and attitude of the officer (e.g. incivility, rudeness or verbal abuse, 12.0%). This profile of complaints and complainants is consistent with the type of complaints generally received by the CMC (CMC 2008).

In the complaint files examined, the interaction between police and young people was a result of police witnessing or detecting behaviour while on duty (35%), police responding to a call for service (27%), or young people initiating contact with police (18%). These findings challenge the assumption that police target young people while on duty. Interestingly, young male complainants were more likely to be involved in incidents where police had been called out, and young females were more likely than young males to initiate contact with police.

Two findings from our analysis are particularly important for understanding and improving relations between police and young people:

- there was evidence to suggest that 60 per cent of young people were engaging in criminal or risk-taking behaviour prior to their interaction with police
- the majority of breach of discipline allegations against police concerned incivility and rudeness (70%) and the majority of misconduct allegations concerned excessive force (37%).

It is fair to suggest that if young people were not engaging in illegal or risk-taking behaviours it is unlikely that they would generate police interest. Once engaged by police, however, young people are most likely to take issue with the manner or way they perceive treatment by police. Similarly, police also describe situations in which they allege it was the young person who was rude, uncooperative, or generally showing disrespect for the police. These findings reinforce the negative attitudes and perceptions in relations between young people and police.

The next chapters of this report detail the results of two youth-centred approaches aimed at reducing the risk-taking behaviours of young people (Study 2) and improving young people's perceptions of police (Study 3).

4

Study two: Preventing risk-taking behaviour and injury in youth

This chapter describes a school-based program designed and implemented by the Queensland University of Technology to reduce injuries and risk-taking behaviour by young people. The results indicate some preliminary support for the intervention program, where students in the control group reported significantly higher risk-taking behaviour at six-month follow-up, while the risk-taking behaviour of those students in the intervention group did not significantly increase. Many students in the intervention program also moved to a lower risk classification following the intervention.

Background

The Skills for Preventing Injury in Youth (SPIY) program[16] was designed to equip students with skills in injury prevention and treatment by combining first aid training with cognitive behavioural prevention strategies. The program aimed to reduce targeted adolescent risk-taking behaviour and encouraged adolescents to protect their friends from engaging in risk-taking behaviour. The intervention focused on reducing risk-taking behaviours related to violence between individuals (e.g. fighting or threatening to hurt someone) and risk-taking behaviours related to driving (e.g. not wearing a helmet or riding with a drunk driver).

Project description

The SPIY program was implemented through the high school curriculum of Year 9 health classes in a sample of South-East Queensland state education schools. The program primarily involved a set of classroom activities delivered over eight weeks of 50-minute lessons. Typically, each lesson included the presentation of a risk-taking and injury scenario, an introduction to managing first aid for the resulting injury, and a cognitive behavioural strategy for preventing the risk-taking behaviour, including strategies to protect friends.

16 See L Buckley, R Chapman & M Sheehan, *Skills for preventing injury in youth: teachers' program manual*, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 2006; L Buckley, R Chapman & M Sheehan, *Skills for preventing injury in youth: student workbook*, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, 2006.

The first aid material was included to provide a context regarding the serious implications of risk-taking behaviour and consequences of injuries. Additional resources such as teacher training, a teacher's manual and a student workbook were included to assist in the delivery of the program.

Evaluation design

The evaluation of the SPIY program involved a pre- and post-implementation survey in two intervention and four control schools. The pre-intervention survey was administered to all school students in the week prior to the intervention (constituting the baseline), while follow-up surveys were distributed three months (immediately post-intervention) and six months after the implementation.

Where possible, established survey measures were used. The survey included questions on demographics and on relationships with peers, parents, teachers and police, as well as items on delinquency, injury, self-control (temper), masculinity, attitudes to risk, and first-aid knowledge. Additional items related to program evaluation were included for the intervention group at follow-up. The focus here was on self-reports of risk-taking behaviour, delinquency and attitudes towards police, as well as open-ended comments from students.

Table 1 shows the baseline demographic characteristics of students in the intervention and control schools. It should be noted that there were some statistically significant differences between the intervention and control groups in the number of students in some of the country of birth and ethnic background categories.

Table 1: Students who participated in the SPIY program

Demographic variable	Overall (both intervention and control groups)		Intervention group		Control group	
	n	(%)	*n*	(%)	*n*	(%)
Sex						
Male	168	46.4	106	47.1	62	45.3
Female	194	53.6	119	52.8	75	54.7
Country of birth						
Australia	310	85.6	185	82.2	125*	91.2
New Zealand	34	9.4	27	12.0	7*	5.1
Other	18	5.0	13	5.8	5	3.6
Ethnic background						
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	10	2.8	9	4.0	1	0.7
Pacific Islander	28	7.7	24	10.7	4*	2.9
Asian	37	10.2	30	13.3	7*	5.1
Other†	262	72.4	137	60.9	125	91.2
Missing	25	6.9	25	11.1	0	0

* Denotes statistically significant difference between the intervention and control groups ($p < .05$).

† The higher rates of missing data indicated probable confusion by participants about the category 'Other', which includes Caucasian background.

Note: Percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Key findings

This chapter presents findings only in relation to the evaluation of the SPIY program; it does not discuss the design or development of the program.[17]

To assess changes in students' involvement in risk-taking behaviours, self-reported risk-taking behaviour assessed at the baseline survey was compared with self-reported risk-taking behaviour at the six-month follow-up. Figure 9 on page 29 shows the percentage change in self-reported risk-taking behaviour between these two surveys for behaviour related to violence between individuals. Figure 10 shows the percentage change between the baseline and the six-month follow-up for driving behaviours.

For the control group, there was an increase in the percentage of students who reported engaging in risky behaviour for many of the risk-taking behaviours between the baseline and the six-month follow-up. In contrast, those students who received the SPIY intervention reported lower occurrence of some of the risk-taking behaviours at the six-

17 Some of this research has been published or submitted for publication. For further details, see all references for Buckley et al. 2004–09 and Soole et al. (2007).

month follow-up. The increase in reported risk-taking behaviour in the control group was statistically significant for several types of risk-taking behaviour, including behaviours relating to violence between individuals (fighting, threatening someone) and driving behaviours (not wearing a helmet, riding with a dangerous driver, riding with a drink driver and riding a motorbike on the road). Table 2 presents the percentage of students who self-reported engaging in risk-taking behaviours at baseline and six-month follow-up, as well as the significant changes.

Figure 9: Percentage change in self-reported risky behaviour between baseline and six-month follow-up for behaviour related to violence between individuals

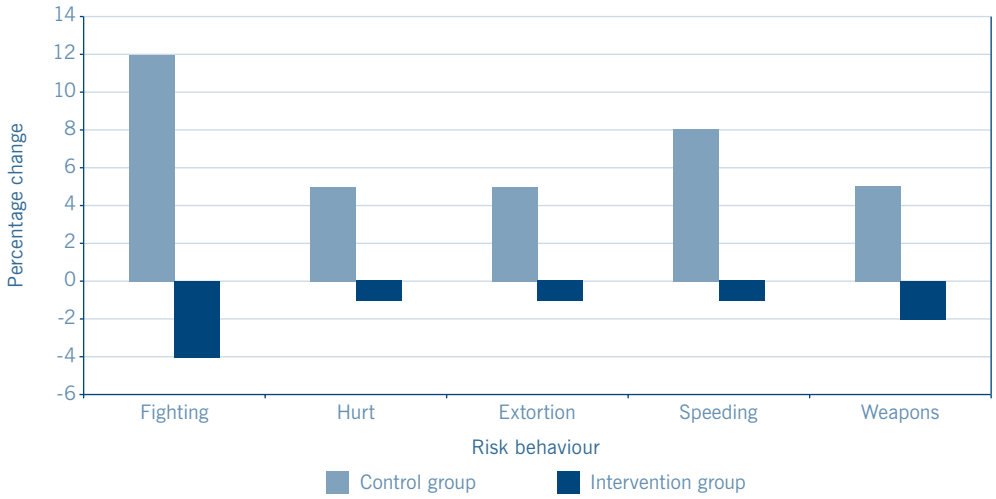


Figure 10: Percentage change in self-reported risky behaviour between baseline and six-month follow-up for driving behaviours

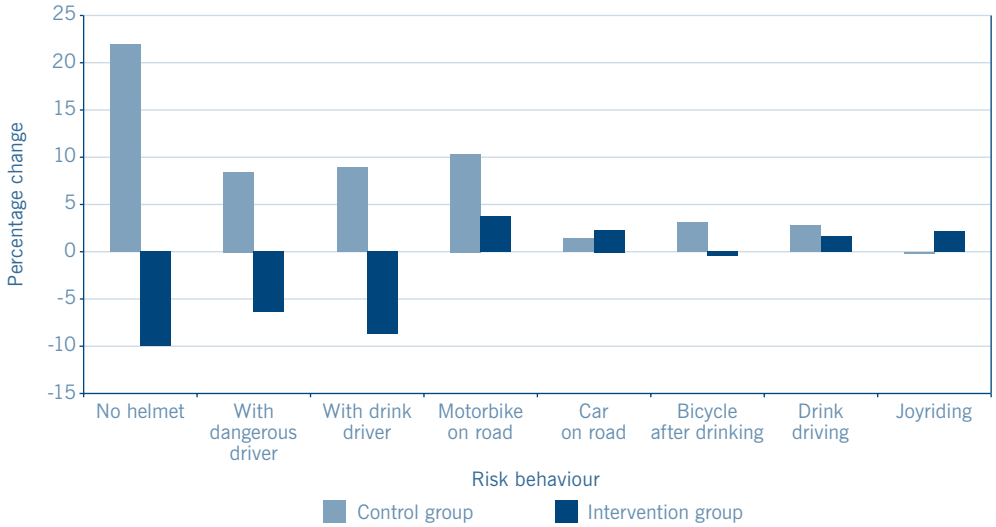


Table 2: Percentage of students who answered 'yes' for risky behaviours at baseline and six-month follow-up

Risk measure	Control group		SPIY-group	
	Baseline	6-month	Baseline	6-month
In the past 3 months have you done any of these:				
Ridden a bicycle on the road without a helmet	26.9	48.8*	37.1	27.1
Ridden with someone who is driving dangerously	16.7	25.0*	22.9	16.6
Taken part in a fight between two or more groups	13.9	26.2*	25.4	21.7
Ridden in a car with someone who has been drinking	11.8	20.7*	18.7	9.9
Deliberately hurt or beaten up somebody	11.1	16.1	12.9	12.2
Driven a motorbike on the road	5.6	15.9*	11.1	14.9
Driven a car on the road	10.2	11.6	10.0	12.2
Threatened someone/forced someone to give you things	5.6	10.4*	10.5	9.5
Driven a car or motorbike above the speed limit	3.7	11.6	9.4	8.3
Used anything as a weapon in a fight	2.8	7.9	2.9	4.4
Ridden a bicycle after drinking	3.7	6.7	7.6	7.2
Deliberately damaged property by starting a fire	4.6	4.9	4.1	3.9
Driven a car or motorbike when you've been drinking	0.9	3.7	2.3	3.9
Broken into a car or motorbike to go for a joyride	1.9	1.8	1.8	3.9

* Denotes statistically significant change between the baseline and the six-month follow-up ($p < .05$).

Therefore, students who did not receive the SPIY intervention were significantly more likely to engage in several types of risk-taking behaviours at the six-month follow-up, while those students who participated in the intervention program reported participating in many of the behaviours less often (although not statistically significant). This provides support for the SPIY intervention program.

We were also interested in assessing whether the SPIY program was effective in reducing the risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviours for students considered high risk-takers. To identify high risk-takers, students in the intervention school were categorised into four relatively equal groups based on their reported prevalence rates for risk-taking behaviours (Mak Delinquency Scale) as measured in the baseline survey. These four categories were:

- low risk-takers (27%)
- low–medium risk-takers (25%)
- medium–high risk-takers (23%)
- high risk-takers (25%).

Using the same scoring criteria, at three-month follow-up we found that of the 57 students classified as high risk-takers at baseline, 18 (32%) moved to a lower risk classification following their participation in SPIY.

Across all students in the intervention group, 32 per cent had moved to a lower risk classification, while 19 per cent had moved to a higher risk classification. Almost half

(49%) of intervention school students remained stable in their risk classification from baseline to follow-up. This is an important finding given the trend of increasing risk-taking behaviours throughout adolescence and suggests that the intervention may reduce the risk of engaging in risk-taking behaviours for some risk-takers.

In contrast to the effects of the intervention on reported risk-taking behaviours, there were no significant program effects on overall attitudes to police at follow-up in either students in the SPIY program or students in the control group, including after statistically controlling for gender and baseline attitudinal positions toward police score.

Students' perceptions of change in behaviour

Students in the intervention group were also given the opportunity to provide comments on their perceptions of changes in their risk-taking behaviour between the baseline and the post-intervention follow-up. Some example quotes from students are provided in Table 3.

Table 3: Themes, content and example quotes of behaviours

Themes	Content	Example
Reduce risk-taking behaviour		
	Avoid risks	*Like you've got to take more care in what you do and that* (male)
	Reduce influence of peer pressure	*Like on a motorcycle, if you're, everyone's like egging you on and you don't want to … it's dangerous and stupid. You can injure yourself.* (male)
		Don't have to do unnecessary things (male)
Protecting friends: post-injury		
	First aid skills	*More likely to help people* (female)
	Considerations	*I'd be scared. In case you did something wrong* (female)
		But if there's someone better than you, of course you're going to let them do it (female)
Protecting friends: preventing injury		
	Actions	*Take their keys off of them so they don't* (male)
		Try and talk them out of it (male)
		Don't let them have too much alcohol (female)
	Conditions	*Depends on who they are … (*male)
		Whether I reckon it's risky enough (male)
		If they're a good friend (male)
	Considerations	*But if you stop them from doing it, they'll still have to have the same level of confidence* (male)
		Interviewer: *Is that hard?* (to say something).
		Yeah, they're like, 'oh you're ruining everything' (female)

Process evaluation[18]

According to ratings from an independent observer, student feedback and teacher reports, the program was generally well implemented. Table 4 shows the ratings from the observer regarding the percentage of material she observed that related to the aims of the program and adherence to overall objectives.

Table 4: Independent observer ratings of project implementation

Observation	Per cent observed
Adherence to objectives	78
Interactive material delivered as identified in the manual	49
First aid material delivered as identified in the manual	66
Peer protection/risk reduction material delivered as identified in the manual	70

Note: The base of percentages is the observation across all lessons.

Conclusions

This research has provided a set of baseline measures for risk-taking in adolescents of 13–14 years living in South-East Queensland and adds to our understanding of the extent of risk-taking behaviours in this age group.

There are indications that the SPIY program had a positive effect on young people by reducing reports of some risky behaviour among participants or effectively slowing the natural rise in risk-taking behaviour identified among adolescents. Supporting evidence for the rise in risky behaviours over time is provided by results from the control student group. In contrast, students who received the intervention program did not similarly experience such a rise in risk-taking behaviour, providing preliminary support for the effectiveness of the SPIY program in reducing risk-taking behaviours.

The SPIY program demonstrated benefits in first aid and peer protection. The inclusion of first aid skills served to personalise the outcome of injury from risky behaviours. Further, there was strong qualitative evidence that students valued the idea of protecting friends.

18 For further information on the process evaluation, see L Buckley & M Sheehan, 'A process evaluation of an injury prevention program for adolescents', *Health Education Research* (in press).

5

Study three: Police–youth interaction study

This chapter presents some preliminary findings of a school-based program designed to improve young people's perceptions of police. The results revealed that the majority of students in both the control and the intervention groups showed consistency in both their general attitudes towards police (positive or negative) and their overall image of police (positive or negative) across the two waves of data collection. The attitudes towards, and descriptors of, police shifted from positive to negative, or negative to positive, for a smaller proportion of students. Further analyses to more comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention program are also suggested.

Background

Building more positive relations between police and young people requires a greater understanding of current perceptions of the police by young people, as well as youth attitudes towards police. These issues were the focus of the Police–Youth Interaction Study (PYIS) by the University of Queensland.

This research examined relations between young people aged 13–14 years and police in Queensland. It aimed to:

- investigate the nature of, and the factors shaping, interactions between police and young people — in particular, to understand, from the perspective of young people, their concerns and the reasons for high levels of dissatisfaction with the police
- explore alternative strategies for enhancing police–youth relations, and increase the confidence of young people in the police.

Project description

The study involved an intervention program which was developed to complement a referral program for QPS officers — the Coordinated Response to Young People at Risk (CRYPAR).[19] CRYPAR provides police with information about a range of specialised

19 CRYPAR was designed by the Metropolitan North Region of the QPS.

community and support agencies in their region to which young people at risk can be directed for assistance.[20]

The intervention program developed by UQ builds on CRYPAR. It provides a range of youth-specific activities designed to improve young people's attitudes towards, and perceptions of, police by encouraging young people to critically think about the types of behaviours and situations that may lead to negative interactions with the police. The intervention comprises a two-stage workshop delivered during the school curriculum and has three key objectives:

- to encourage young people to explore their experiences with police
- to help young people identify risk-taking behaviours and associated situations, and their consequences
- to discuss methods of problem solving and ways of minimising harm.

Evaluation design

The PYIS was conducted using a school-based sample of Year 9 students in public and private schools located in northern and southern regions of Brisbane. The intervention invited students to reflect on their experiences with police, make plans with respect to future risky situations, and meet with a police officer who attended the school. The students completed pre- and post-intervention surveys designed to assess any attitudinal shifts as a result of the intervention.

Sampling

Five schools participated in the research. In selecting the public and private schools to participate, we over-sampled schools where young people were deemed 'at risk' of engaging in delinquent and criminal behaviour. To do this, the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA) — Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage (IRSED) was used to identify schools located in Statistical Local Areas (SLAs) of low socio-economic status. Of the five schools that participated, three were located in neighbourhoods that carry IRSED levels lower than the median aggregate score for Queensland. This sampling strategy enabled the project team to work with schools in areas where relations between youth and police had historically been difficult.

Two schools were assigned to complete the intervention program while three were retained as control schools. All Year 9 students (aged 13–14 years) who participated in the PYIS did so after written consent from the student and his or her parent had been obtained.

For both the control and the intervention cohorts, pre-testing (or the first wave of data collection) commenced in April and May of 2006. The intervention cohort then

20 Early evaluations of CRYPAR suggest that it is a good example of an early intervention model that has adopted a holistic and proactive approach to minimising young people's involvement with the juvenile justice system.

participated in the intervention program between July and September 2006. Approximately three months after participating in the intervention, these students completed post-test surveys to determine whether any changes that may have occurred as a result of the intervention had been maintained. The control group also completed their second wave of data collection in July and August 2006, three months after the initial pre-testing.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire included a number of questions related to those risk and protective factors commonly associated with youth offending — e.g. demographic and family characteristics were investigated in detail. The family status of respondents was measured (i.e. whether respondents lived with both biological parents, or in other family arrangements), in view of the research findings that adolescent offenders disproportionately come from single-parent families (Haskell & Yablonsky 1982; Rosen & Neilson 1978).

Parental attachment and the nature of parent–child relationships were also examined due to the prevalent research finding of an inverse relationship between attachment and delinquency (Hirschi 1969; Hindelang 1973; Gibbs, Giever & Martin 1998). Furthermore, respondents were asked how often they had moved house in the last two years — as a way of measuring the stability of family life — while family financial stability and social status were assessed with questions on the status and nature of parents' employment.

In addition to addressing the nature of family relationships, the stability of school life for respondents was examined. Students were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a number of statements pertaining to their own relationships with teachers (e.g. 'if a teacher asks me to do something I do it') and their broader sense of student–teacher relations in their school (e.g. 'students are rude to teachers').

As peer delinquency constitutes a strong predictor of engaging in delinquent activities (Agnew 1991; Empey & Stafford 1991; Johnson, Marcos & Bahr 1987; Matseuda 1988; Mears, Ploeger & Warr 1998; Thompson, Mitchell & Dodder 1984; Warr 1993), questions addressing the nature of respondent–peer relationships (the number and relative age of close friends and the involvement of friends in delinquent activities) were incorporated in the questionnaire. Additionally, 26 items from the Australian Self-Report Delinquency Scale (Mak 1993) were included in the questionnaire to ascertain the extent and nature of respondents' delinquency.

In addressing young people's perceptions of police, the questionnaire contained items that prompted respondents to nominate what traits they thought typified the conduct of police officers (e.g. approachability, helpfulness). A set of 14 statements reflecting attitudes or perceptions of the police (e.g. 'police need better training in dealing with young people'), with Likert scale responses, was also included.

Intervention program

The intervention program conducted as part of this study was facilitated by an unsworn QPS staff member, a police liaison officer and a UQ PhD candidate. It commenced with brainstorming exercises and was followed by a series of games, small-group activities and a poster development task.

The 'brainstorming' exercise invited students to discuss their perceptions of, and experiences with, police. Students were encouraged to identify and analyse any possible misconceptions. Following this exercise, students participated in two games designed to provide an interactive environment for identifying and discussing risky behaviours and their consequences.

The two games involved presenting students with a series of common delinquent activities or potentially risky activities. Students were asked to consider what they believed would be the ramifications of these activities. Through their responses to each situation, students could explore the varying consequences and harms that could occur. The aim of these activities was to encourage students to be 'street smart' about the consequences of their actions (actions that were likely to bring them to the attention of the police), and to become more aware of their rights and responsibilities.

A sworn police officer was also involved in each school's intervention session.[21] The officer discussed the role of police in relation to young people and crime prevention, the nature of the situations in which they commonly encounter young people, and how young people can avoid confrontations with police. Students were encouraged to ask questions throughout the program and to engage with the QPS officer. Information was also disseminated to the students about how they could access police (e.g. via police beats).

The time taken to complete the workshops ranged between 80 and 180 minutes, with the content being flexible to meet the needs and time constraints of individual schools and classes. In taking into consideration the unique time constraints of each school, the brainstorming and board game activities were controlled to run for shorter or longer periods as time permitted. However, care was taken to ensure that each school received the same substantive content in the intervention.

The panel samples

The findings reported here are based on the sample of young people who participated in both waves of the control or intervention programs — i.e. 137 control group students and 123 intervention group students.

Student demographics

Table 5 shows the key demographic details of the intervention and control students. There were proportionally more males (87.0%) than females (12.2%) in the intervention

21 The officers involved were senior sergeants.

group compared with the control group. This was due to one of the intervention schools being a single-sex school. In the control group, males comprised 44.5 per cent of students while females accounted for 54.7 per cent of students.

While the majority of students in both the intervention and the control groups were born in Australia, a higher proportion of students in the intervention group (13.0%) were born outside Australia and New Zealand compared with the control group (3.7%). As well, a greater proportion of students in the intervention group reported participation in acts of delinquency compared with the control group. In particular, twice as many students in the intervention group (47.8% versus 23.7%) reported that they had carried out an act of violence ('taken part in a fight between two or more groups', 'used anything as a weapon in a fight' etc.) in the three months preceding data collection. Close to three-quarters (73.0%) of intervention students also reported participation in non-violent delinquency compared with just over half (54.48%) of the students in the control group. These differences in acts of violence and delinquency between the intervention and control groups are important and should be kept in mind when considering the results which follow.

Table 5: Demographics of the participating students

Intervention students (n = 123)		Control students (n = 137)	
Characteristic	%	Characteristic	%
Gender		**Gender**	
Male	87.0	Male	44.5
Female	12.2	Female	54.7
Missing	0.8	Missing	0.7
Mean age (in years)	**13.7**	**Mean age (in years)**	**13.6**
Country of birth		**Country of birth**	
Aus	84.6	Aus	91.2
NZ	2.4	NZ	5.1
Other	13.0	Other	3.7
Ethnic background		**Ethnic background**	
Indigenous Australians	0.8	Indigenous Australians	0.7
Pacific Islander	4.9	Pacific Islander	2.9
Asian	4.9	Asian	5.1
Other	83.7	Other	91.2
No response	5.7	No response	0
Delinquency participation*		**Delinquency participation***	
Acts of violence	47.8	Acts of violence	23.7
Non-violent delinquency	73.0	Non-violent delinquency	54.5

* Represents participation in one or more activities in both an 'acts of violence' subscale (5 items from the Self Report Delinquency Scale used in the questionnaire) and a 'general delinquency' subscale (the remaining 21 items from the same battery).

Wave 1 results

Perceptions of police

Table 6 shows the proportion of students who reported agreement at wave 1 with a number of statements about police. As can be seen, the proportion of students agreeing with each of the scale items was very similar across the intervention and control groups. Over 65 per cent of students in both groups (range 65.8% to 78.2%) agreed with all the positive perception statements about police (statements 1 to 6 in Table 6). Conversely, there were much lower levels of agreement by students, between 9.8 per cent and 45.8 per cent, for all but two of the negative perception statements (statements 7 to 14 in Table 6).

Comparing the two groups, the greatest difference was apparent for the perception 'police use unfair methods to arrest young people' — 35.3 per cent of the intervention group agreed with this statement compared with 45.8 per cent of the control group. Smaller differences were reported for the statements 'I have great respect for the police' (65.8% of intervention group and 72.6% of control group) and 'my friends have had bad experiences with the police' (29.5% of intervention group and 23.7% of control group).

Table 6: Student perceptions of police

	Intervention wave 1 (n = 123) %	Control wave 1 (n = 135) %
1. Most of my good friends respect the police	65.9	71.1
2. The law usually treats people fairly	74.6	73.1
3. I would go to the police for help if I needed it	74.6	73.1
4. In general, the police do a good job of stopping crime	76.9	77.4
5. My parents like the police	75.4	78.2
6. I have great respect for the police	65.8	72.6
7. Police tend to believe what parents have to say rather than what young people have to say	75.0	76.3
8. In general, the police are not friendly when dealing with young people	39.7	37.8
9. My friends have had bad experiences with the police	29.5	23.7
10. My parents have said that I shouldn't trust the police	9.8	13.3
11. Police need better training in dealing with young people	60.7	60.2
12. Police use unfair methods to arrest young people	35.3	45.8
13. My parents have had bad experiences with the police	9.9	12.8
14. Police should deal with serious crime and leave young people alone	35.5	32.6

Note: Values represent the percentage of respondents who either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with each statement.

Descriptions of police

Table 7 presents a series of traits that police might be said to display in interactions with young people, and the responses of the intervention and control group samples at wave 1. Again, the responses of both groups are quite similar: higher proportions of students tended to agree with the positive police traits (traits 1 to 4) compared with the negative traits (traits 5 to 8), which recorded much lower levels of agreement.

Slightly higher proportions of students from the intervention group reported that police are helpful (55.3% versus 48.9%) and approachable (47.2% and 43.1%), while higher proportions of students from the control group reported that the police are kind (26.5% versus 22.0%) and aggressive (11.0% versus 6.5%).

Table 7: Descriptions of police based on beliefs and experiences

	Intervention wave 1 (n = 123)	Control wave 1 (n = 137)
Police are:	%	%
Helpful	55.3	48.9
Friendly	29.3	28.5
Approachable	47.2	43.1
Kind	22.0	26.5
Rude	10.6	12.4
Scary	10.6	12.4
Aggressive	6.5	11.0
Prejudiced	4.9	4.4

Note: Values represent the percentage of respondents who indicated a 'yes' response to the police quality.

Wave 2 results[22]

Perceptions of police

Table 8 provides a comparison of the intervention and control group responses to the 'perceptions of police' items at both waves.

Within the intervention group, for four of the items ('police use unfair methods to arrest young people', 'police need better training in dealing with young people', 'my friends have had bad experiences with the police' and 'my parents have said that I shouldn't trust the police') the differences between waves 1 and 2 were statistically significant. In the control group, the differences in responses to three of the items ('the law usually treats people fairly', 'in general, the police do a good job of stopping crime' and 'I have

22 It is important to note that the differences observed across the waves of data collection (Tables 8 to 13) are aggregate differences, and therefore mask different patterns of change. Further analyses on these different patterns of change are being conducted.

great respect for the police') were also statistically significant. For all of these significant differences, in both the intervention and the control groups, these changes were in the negative direction.

On the face of it, these results may appear to suggest that the intervention has had little impact on respondents' perceptions of police. The intervention and control groups show similar direction and pattern of change between wave 1 and wave 2, and where the differences were significant in the intervention group the direction of change was toward less — rather than more — favourable attitudes. However, it is also important to examine the effects on overall perceptions of police, rather than examining these attitudes in isolation.

Table 8: Perceptions of police at waves 1 and 2[a]

Variable	Intervention			Control		
	W1 (n = 123) %	W2 (n = 121) %	Direction of change[b]	W1 (n = 135) %	W2 (n = 137) %	Direction of change
Most of my good friends respect the police	65.9	58.3	–	71.1	62.8	–
The law usually treats people fairly	74.6	66.9	–	73.1	61.3*	–
I would go to the police for help if I needed it	74.6	71.7	–	73.1	70.1	–
In general, the police do a good job of stopping crime	76.9	66.9	–	77.4	66.7*	–
My parents like the police	75.4	74.8	None	78.2	70.4	–
I have great respect for the police	65.8	62.2	–	72.6	61.5*	–
Police need better training in dealing with young people	60.7	73.3*	–	60.2	66.2	–
Police use unfair methods to arrest young people	35.3	47.5*	–	45.8	48.5	–
My parents have had bad experiences with the police	9.9	15.8	–	12.8	18.3	–
Police should deal with serious crime and leave young people alone	35.5	39.7	–	32.6	36.8	–
Police tend to believe what parents have to say rather than what young people have to say	75.0	74.4	None	76.3	75.7	None
In general, the police are not friendly when dealing with young people	39.7	44.2	–	37.8	44.8	–
My friends have had bad experiences with the police	29.5	50.8*	–	23.7	29.4	–
My parents have said that I shouldn't trust the police	9.8	18.5*	–	13.3	14.0	None

a Values represent the percentage of respondents who either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with each statement.

b Direction of change post intervention:
– = negative change,
+ = positive change,
none = no change.

* Statistically significant finding ($p < .05$).

In order to examine overall effects, we grouped together items relating to positive attitudes (variables 1 to 6 in Table 8) and those items relating to negative attitudes towards police (variables 7, 8, 10, 11, 12 in Table 8) to create a 'positive attitude' factor and a 'negative attitude' factor.[23] On the basis of respondents' scores on these two overall factors, respondents were classified as being 'high' or 'low' on both positive and negative attitudes at both wave 1 and wave 2. This allowed us to classify respondents into four attitude change groups:

1. those whose attitudes remained consistently 'positive' at both wave 1 and wave 2
2. those whose attitudes remained consistently 'negative' at both wave 1 and wave 2
3. those whose attitudes changed from 'positive' at wave 1 to 'negative' at wave 2
4. those whose attitudes changed from 'negative' at wave 1 to 'positive' at wave 2.

The percentage of respondents in both the intervention and the control groups classified into each of these for the positive attitude factor is shown in Table 9. This table shows that 44.2 per cent of the intervention sample and 42.2 per cent of the control sample retained positive attitudes over time (positive-positive), while 27.5 per cent and 34.8 per cent respectively of the two groups maintained negative attitudes (negative-negative). Among the intervention group 10.0 per cent changed from negative to positive attitudes, while among the control group 5.2 per cent underwent a positive shift. The change from positive to negative attitudes was the same for both samples, at around 18 per cent.

Across both the intervention and the control group respondents, when we examine all of those students who began with positive attitudes at wave 1 (i.e. the positive-positive and positive-negative groups), approximately 29 per cent changed to negative attitudes at wave 2. However, the pattern is different for those who initially held negative attitudes at wave 1. Among the members of the intervention group commencing with negative attitudes, 27 per cent underwent a positive shift in attitudes, while among the control group students only 13 per cent shifted to positive attitudes. This result suggests that more intervention than control group students shifted from initially negative perceptions to positive positive perceptions and, therefore, the intervention may be having some effect on attitudes and perceptions.

23 We grouped these items on the basis of factor analysis results (with varimax rotation). Two of the negative attitude items did not fit the factor structure and were not, therefore, included in these groupings.

Table 9: Stability and change on the positive attitude factor between wave 1 and wave 2

Change wave 1 to wave 2	Intervention (%)	Control (%)
positive-positive	44.2	42.2
negative-negative	27.5	34.8
negative-positive	10.0	5.2
positive-negative	18.3	17.8
Total *n*	**120.0**	**135.0**

Table 10 shows the percentage of students in each of the four attitude change groups for the negative attitude factor. The overall patterns of change suggest that in the intervention group there was a greater move from positive attitudes to negative attitudes (20.8%) than there was in the reverse direction (from negative attitudes to positive attitudes, 10.8%). In the control group, however, there was very little difference between the proportion of students who shifted from positive to negative attitudes (17.0%) and the proportion who shifted from negative to positive attitudes (15.6%).

Overall, in the intervention group there was an attitude change for 38 per cent of those respondents with positive attitudes at wave 1, while only 24 per cent of those who initially held negative attitudes reported a change. Among the control group, the change in attitudes was roughly the same (around a third), regardless of respondents' position (negative or positive) at wave 1.

This examination of the data indicates that, while the intervention has not been a magic bullet, neither has it been completely ineffective. Rather, these outcomes are characteristic of interventions generally: there have been positive impacts on certain subgroups but not others. Most noticeable, perhaps, is the difference between the intervention and control groups for the nature of change from negative to positive for the positive attitudes factor. Change to a more positive orientation was more likely for the intervention group than it was for the control group. The challenge for continuing analyses is to determine the characteristics of the different subgroups with different propensities for change, and to understand their significance in determining the success or otherwise of successive interventions.[24]

24 These types of analyses are being conducted and will appear in other publications.

Table 10: Stability and change on the negative attitude factor between wave 1 and wave 2

Change wave 1 to wave 2	Intervention (%)	Control (%)
positive-positive	33.3	32.6
negative-negative	35.0	34.8
negative-positive	10.8	15.6
positive-negative	20.8	17.0
Total *n*	**120.0**	**135.0**

Descriptions of police

Table 11 provides a comparison of the intervention and control group responses to the selected traits used to describe police. The percentages identify the proportion agreeing that the descriptors accurately capture their view of the police.

The differences between the intervention and control groups were small at wave 1, but were quite substantial at wave 2. The larger differences at wave 2 were due to statistically significant changes in assessments by the control group. Specifically, four descriptors of police were more positive at wave 2, and three of these positive changes were statistically significant. For the remaining four descriptors, changes were all in the negative direction and three were statistically significant. For the intervention group, six of the changes were in the negative direction, but only two were significant. The only positive shift was not significant.

While there were notable differences between the wave 2 responses of the intervention and control group students, two are perhaps the most remarkable. Compared with the intervention group, nearly four times as many control group students at wave 2 reported that the police are 'scary' and nearly three times as many reported that the police are 'aggressive'. The differences between the groups on these items were not significantly different at wave 1; however, at wave 2 following the intervention, they were. It should be noted that, while the differences were significant, the majority of both control and intervention students (75% to 80%) do not find the police either 'scary' or 'aggressive'.

Table 11: Percentage of respondents who indicated a 'yes' to each police descriptor at waves 1 and 2

Variable	Intervention			Control		
	W1 (n = 137) %	W2 (n = 123) %	Direction of change[a]	W1 (n = 135) %	W2 (n = 137) %	Direction of change[a]
Helpful	55.3	48.0	–	48.9	62.0*	+
Friendly	29.3	26.0	–	28.5	45.3*	+
Approachable	47.2	34.2*	–	43.1	51.8	+
Kind	22.0	17.1	–	26.5	42.3*	+
Rude	10.6	15.5	–	12.4	19.0	–
Scary	10.6	6.5	+	12.4	23.4*	–
Aggressive	6.5	7.3	None	11.0	19.0*	–
Prejudiced	4.9	17.1*	–	4.4	13.1*	–

a Direction of change post intervention:
– = negative change
+ = positive change
none = no change

* Statistically significant difference between wave 1 and wave 2 ($p < 0.05$).

To evaluate the effect of the intervention more broadly, we again created two major factors based on these descriptors of police to create an overall image of police.[25] The first was defined by the three positive items 'helpful', 'friendly' and 'kind', and the second by the three negative items 'rude', 'aggressive' and 'prejudiced'. We refer to these two factors as 'positive police image' and 'negative police image'. As we did for the attitudes of police, we used respondents' scores on these two factors to create four image change groups.

Table 12 shows the percentage of respondents in both the intervention and the control groups in each of the four image change groups for the positive police image factor. Few respondents in the intervention group changed their positive image of police over time, where 80.0 per cent of respondents held the same views both before and after the intervention. A few of these respondents (12.2%) retained a consistent positive image, while the majority (67.8%) sustained a negative image: for them the police were not 'helpful', 'friendly' or 'kind'. Greater shifts were registered within the control group, although 69.9 per cent remained constant in their views. Similarly to the intervention group, the tendency was for negative views to be retained.

For the intervention group, change was more likely to be from the positive to the negative, while the opposite is true for the control group. Of the 32 students in the intervention group who had a positive image of the police at wave 1, about half had

25 These two factors were again created following factor analyses with varimax rotation. The descriptors of 'approachable' and 'scary' did not load on either factor and therefore were excluded from the analyses.

formed a negative image at wave 2. Among the control students, of those with a positive image at wave 1, only 12 per cent had shifted.

Table 12: Stability and change on the positive image factor between wave 1 and wave 2

Change wave 1 to wave 2	Intervention (%)	Control (%)
positive-positive	12.2	19.9
negative-negative	67.8	50.0
negative-positive	6.5	25.7
positive-negative	13.8	4.4
Total *n*	**123.0**	**136.0**

For the negative image of police descriptors (see Table 13), over three-quarters of both the intervention (78.0%) and control (78.0%) groups showed no change over time. In contrast to the results of the positive image descriptors, the majority of respondents maintained positive descriptors of police in both the intervention (65.0%) and the control (60.3%) groups, rejecting negative descriptions of police as 'rude', 'aggressive' and 'prejudiced' at both waves. Far smaller numbers (13.0% of the intervention group and 17.7% of the control group) maintained over time that the police are 'rude', 'aggressive' and 'prejudiced'.

The direction of change in both groups is very similar. Almost 18 per cent underwent a negative shift, while around 4 per cent underwent a positive shift in each sample. Those who commenced with a negative image at wave 1 were just as likely to change or maintain their image as those whose initial image had been expressly positive.

Table 13: Stability and change on the negative image factor between wave 1 and wave 2

Change wave 1 to wave 2	Intervention (%)	Control (%)
positive-positive	65.0	60.3
negative-negative	13.0	17.7
negative-positive	4.1	4.4
positive-negative	17.9	17.7
Total *n*	**123.0**	**136.0**

These findings are far from conclusive and further analyses need to be undertaken. We have seen that particular groups have maintained either positive or negative views of the police over time, while some have undergone negative to positive shifts in their views and others have shifted from positive to negative. Do those who have changed from negative to positive views resemble those who have maintained positive attitudes over time; and do those who changed from positive to negative resemble those who maintained negative attitudes over time? Before we can comprehensively determine the impact of the evaluation, these and related questions need to be answered. The analysis that is currently under way is directed to providing these answers.

Conclusions

The aim of this intervention was to make young people more aware of the possible consequences of behaviour that might bring them to the attention of the police, and to help them develop awareness of basic elements of the criminal justice system, and their rights and responsibilities in relation to these. The expected overall impact of the intervention was to improve young people's attitudes towards and their image of police.

To assess the impact of the program we developed a series of measures. The first were attitudinally based, where students were asked to nominate their agreement or disagreement with general statements about police and police work. The second were more specific and asked about images of the police based on a number of single-word descriptors. The analysis to date suggests that the intervention program may have had a greater impact on more general, overall attitudes and image than on specific attitudes and descriptors. However, as discussed above, further analysis is necessary before we can definitively answer questions regarding the impact of the intervention.

Unavoidably, intervention programs are not conducted in an environment devoid of other influences. General social events may impinge on individuals subject to intervention programs and dissipate their effects. Additionally, the characteristics of the recipients may also intrude. The apparent resistance to change in respondents' attitudes may reflect strong age-based patterns in antisocial attitudes and behaviours. For example, researchers have documented a peak in antisocial attitudes and behaviours in mid to late adolescence (see Emler & Reicher 1995). Therefore the timing of our data collection may well have occurred at a developmental period in which negative youth attitudes to the police are forming (as reinforced by the control group results). This suggests that, strategically, an intervention of this nature may need to be delivered to young people at an earlier age. As noted, work on this analysis and other aspects of this project is ongoing.

6

Discussion

This chapter discusses the findings of the three studies and the implications for improving relations between police and young people.

Relations between police and young people are often described as problematic. Shaped significantly by negative attitudes and perceptions from both sides and often characterised by tension, mistrust and conflict, interactions between police and young people have resulted in adverse consequences for both sides, including charges against young people and complaints against police. Such negative interactions have also served to reinforce the unfavourable attitudes and perceptions that exist between these two groups, thereby perpetuating a cycle of dissatisfaction and mistrust.

As part of a 2004 ARC Linkage Project grant, and an IPCA-supported project, the CMC, QUT and UQ conducted three separate but related studies to further explore the relations between police and young people, and the factors that shape these interactions. In doing so, our research has identified a number of findings that may help to inform strategies aimed at improving police–youth interactions and minimise some of the negative consequences that can arise from these interactions.

Negative perceptions of young people towards the police have been linked to the frequency of contact between these two groups, and the CMC analysis of complaints found a range of reasons why police and young people come into contact with each other. Police might detect antisocial or criminal behaviour while on duty, police may be called to respond to an incident involving a young person, young people may seek assistance from police, or police and young people may simply be in the same place at the same time.

Evidence from the analysis suggests that 60 per cent of the young people who were involved in a complaint against police were engaged in some type of criminal or delinquent behaviour prior to their interaction with police, with some 45 per cent subsequently charged with offences relating to the incident. Similarly, approximately half of the students who participated in QUT's SPIY intervention program were classified as high- or medium-risk adolescents, while many young people also self-reported participation in violent and delinquent behaviours (between 23.70% and 73.04%) in the PYIS study. Clearly, young people who engage in crime or antisocial activities are at risk of being detected by police and are also at risk of being charged with an offence related to this behaviour.

Results from QUT's evaluation of the SPIY program indicate that this school-based injury prevention program can be effective in reducing risk-taking behaviours of young people as well as encouraging young people to protect their friends from engaging in

such behaviours. These are positive results. Such programs may not only help minimise the frequency of contact between police and young people, but perhaps, more importantly, change the nature or reason for the interaction between police and youth — in other words, reduce the likelihood of adversarial-based interactions.

However, not all interactions between police and young people are preceded by the delinquent or criminal behaviour of young people. And it is not only those types of interactions that may lead to adverse consequences or feelings of tension and mistrust. Most of the complaints we examined from young people, regardless of how they originated, related to an officer's demeanour and attitude (in particular, incivility, rudeness and verbal abuse) or use of force (specifically, pushing, shoving or manhandling). While the majority of these allegations were not substantiated, the complaints do highlight elements of police–youth interaction that are of most concern for young people — i.e. the way young people are spoken to and managed by police.

Students who participated in the PYIS intervention also shared this view. After the program, significantly more students (close to three-quarters of the sample) agreed that 'police need better training in dealing with young people'. Approximately 60 per cent of control students also reported agreement with this statement. Given these survey results and the consistency of such findings in the CMC's public attitudes surveys over time, programs for police that raise their awareness of these concerns and emphasise effective interpersonal and communications skills may help officers to reduce the likelihood of negative consequences occurring in their interactions with young people.

As discussed in Chapter 5 of this report, the intervention program administered under UQ's police–youth interaction study produced equivocal results. The majority of respondents showed no change in attitudes following the intervention; however, a minority of students who initially held positive attitudes underwent a negative shift in attitudes. Clearly, the intervention program did not have an overall impact, though it did seem to have a positive impact on certain groups. The analysis UQ is currently undertaking is directed at identifying the characteristics of these groups. This is an important task as it will help inform changes that may be necessary to improve the intervention program.

Unavoidably, other factors may have influenced the effectiveness and results of the UQ intervention. For example, the levels of self-reported delinquency varied between the intervention and control samples, as did reported prior contact with the police. The attitudes and perceptions of young people can also be influenced by a range of external influences, such as family, friends, peers and the media, that may contribute to their resistance to change or the patterns of change they display. For example, there were significant increases in the proportion of intervention students who reported post-intervention that their 'friends have had bad experiences with the police' and that their 'parents have said that [they] shouldn't trust the police'.

The attitudes displayed by the intervention and control students in that study are also consistent with the attitudes of young people more generally. Preliminary results of the CMC's latest public attitudes survey conducted in 2008 found that young people are still significantly more likely than older people to report negative assessments of and dissatisfaction with the police.[26] The students may also have been influenced by media or other events which helped shaped their attitudes towards police, particularly if there were negative media reports about police or young people at the time of the intervention. For example, in the latter half of 2006, there was a great deal of media coverage relating to the decision by the Director of Public Prosecutions not to lay charges against a senior sergeant after an Indigenous man died in custody on Palm Island in 2004. This decision was a controversial one as the Deputy State Coroner had previously ruled that the senior sergeant had caused the fatal injuries to the man.

The point to be emphasised here is that, with such a range of potential influences shaping the attitudes and perceptions of young people, plus their own experiences with delinquency and police, school-based intervention programs may require more intensity to cut through and challenge youth. For example, the intervention may need to be adapted and strengthened to engage and challenge young people who may already have had contact with police or who have higher levels of delinquency. In other words, these young people may require more targeted intervention.

The PYIS intervention program might usefully be extended in time. Given the range of external factors contributing to the views and attitudes of students, reinforced messages and more positive interactions with police may help break down some of the negative perceptions and counteract adverse messages from other sources. Involving parents in such programs may also be beneficial, especially if parents impart negative views to their children.

Finally, the intervention programs may need to be administered earlier in the schooling of young people — e.g. with Year 7 and Year 8 students — and reinforced throughout the schooling years. Research has suggested that antisocial attitudes and behaviours of young people peak in mid to late adolescence. Programs targeting younger students may therefore have a stronger impact.

Improving relations between police and young people will not necessarily be realised through a program or intervention alone. Experiences of young people and police, influences of family and peers, and personal beliefs and attitudes towards one another all help to shape perceptions and behaviours. Addressing those influences which contribute to negative interactions experienced by police and young people will require a combination of factors to come together and be sustained over time.

26 CMC 2009.

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