

“TEENS OF THE NIGHT” – THE YOUNG NIGHT DRIFTERS IN HONG KONG

Abstract

This paper describes a recent study on young night drifters in Hong Kong, which is currently an alarming youth problem in the territory. The social background, subculture and problems faced by these young people are introduced. Employing an environmental perspective, the causes of their night drifting behavior are suggested. In addition, the identified service needs of and proposed services for these young people are also presented. It is believed that this study has implications for youth policy makers and service providers in countries that have encountered similar problems.

“TEENS OF THE NIGHT” - THE YOUNG NIGHT DRIFTERS IN HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, the situation of young people hanging around in groups in public places all through the night has become prevalent. This has drawn much attention from the public and the media (East Week, 11.5.94; Eastern Express, 5.4.96; Next Magazine, 21.4.95, 25.8.95; Wah Kiu Yat Pao, 29.8.94, 30.8.94). The behaviors of these night drifting young people (e.g. chasing around, vandalizing, taking soft drugs, harassing people passing-by, petting publicly), considered by many a public nuisance, have also generated much public concern. Reports have revealed that these youth have a high risk of running up against the law (Next Magazine, 7.1.94, 24.3.95; Wah Kiu Yat Pao, 30.8.94). Most of these young people are suspected to be runaways or throwaways from their families (Newbery, 1993). This ‘tone dang’ (night drifting) phenomenon of the young people indicates the loosening of conventional family ties as well as the social control function of the family and school systems.

Some indigenous small scale studies have been conducted to try to gain an understanding of the issue (HKFYG, 1989, 1995; Tang and Davis, 1997). All these studies have generally concluded that the night drifting behaviors of the young people have made them vulnerable to establishing a normal social life within their families and subject them to the negative influence of bad elements (e.g. Triad gangs).

Although the size of the youth population involved in this night drifting behavior is unknown, in response to the anxiety regarding the phenomenon expressed by the public, in October 1997, the government launched a two-year pilot project – Youth Mobile Team Service⁽¹⁾ – to provide crisis intervention service to the night drifting

young people. This 'tone dang' phenomenon of the young people, which is a kind of youth problem, deserves our attention and concern.

As there is a lack of literature on studies of night drifting behavior among the young people, those of runaway youth might shed some insights into the problem. Studies have indicated that separation and divorce of parents are causes of teenage runaways (Byles, 1980; Grinnel and Loftis, 1977; Kohn and Sugarman, 1978). 'Violent and chaotic homes' has also been identified as a main cause for adolescent runaways (Janus et. al., 1987; Powers and Jaklitsch, 1989). Inadequate communication in the families has been reported as a reason for young people to run away from home (Adams and Munro, 1979; Blood and D'Angelo, 1974; Ferran and Sabatini, 1985; Rothman, 1991). All these might also be causes for the young people to engage in nocturnal activities.

The Study⁽²⁾

As a systematic investigation of this phenomenon has never been conducted in Hong Kong, an exploratory study was carried out. This study had five objectives:

- (1) To understand the social background (e.g. family, school, work, peers, etc.) of the young night drifters;
- (2) To explore the 'night drifting' situation of these young people;
- (3) To identify the causes of their 'night drifting' behavior;
- (4) To explore the service needs of these young people; and
- (5) To recommend relevant service programs for these young people.

Six research assistants, who were trained social workers and have detached youth work⁽³⁾ experience, were recruited. They paired up to carry out the collection of field data in three selected popular night drifting spots of the young people in the territory. With the provision of a list of observation guidelines (Appendix 1), a total of 128 sessions (each for about four hours) of semi-participant observation on sixteen identified groups of night drifting young people were carried out. After each observation session, a report was written with reference to the guidelines provided. Also, sixty such adolescents in different spots were approached and in-depth individual interviews were conducted with the help of an interviewing schedule (Appendix 2)⁽⁴⁾. With the consent of the interviewee, each individual interview was tape-recorded. Transcription of each interview was made. Analyses of the findings were made based on the observation reports and content analysis of the individual interviews.

Based on the analyses, this paper will introduce the young people's general social background, subculture and their problems identified. Employing an environmental perspective, the causes of the night drifting behaviors of these young people is proposed. The identified service needs of and proposed services for these night drifting teens will also be presented.

Environmental Perspective of Night Drifting Behavior

Before introducing the more detailed findings of the present investigation, the theoretical framework employed in the present study will be introduced. The environmental perspective of deviancy (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1981; Clarke and Mayhew, 1980; Davidson, 1981; Farrelly, 1983; Lee, 1992; Newman, 1972; Smith, 1986) was employed for this study. This perspective basically proposes that the causes of deviance have a social environmental dimension and a physical environmental dimension, which in turn exert predisposing and precipitating effects for the occurrence of deviance. The social environmental dimension basically includes the social make-ups of, and interpersonal and social relationship and influence among the people concerned. The physical environmental dimension includes the physical features or milieu that the concerned people are exposed to. It is the interplay of these two dimensions that result in deviance. So under this perspective, the causes of the night drifting behavior of the young people can be understood from two dimensions, namely the social environmental factors and the physical environmental factors.

- a. Social Environmental Factors: These are aspects belonging to the social components of the people concerned that have predisposed their commitment to deviance (in this context, night drifting of the young people).

- b. Physical Environmental Factors: These are aspects of the physical components that the concerned people are exposed to that have precipitated their commitment to deviance (in this context, night drifting of the young people).

The Social Background

Personal Particulars

A majority of the night drifting young people in the study were boys. This is consistent with the profile of the night drifting young people observed at different spots. Most of these night drifting teens were between the ages of 15 to 17; while nearly half of the young people interviewed had their highest educational level at junior secondary school (29, 48.3%). Although some of them came from the neighborhood, a significant number came from other districts in the territory.

Family Situation

Quite different from the family situation of the runaway youth (Byles, 1980; Grinnel and Loftis, 1977; Kohn and Sugarman, 1978), most of the young night drifters reported that their parents' marriages were intact (66.7%). Also as opposed to some foreign studies that suggested that domestic violence is a main cause for adolescent runaways (Janus et. al., 1987; Powers and Jaklitsch, 1989), most of the young night drifters interviewed described their homes as non-violent. However, they generally depicted their family relationship as one of indifference and there was a lack of caring and communication in the families. This inadequate communication in the families is the main similarity between the young night drifters and the young runaways (Adams and Munro, 1979; Blood and D'Angelo, 1974; Ferran and Sabatini, 1985; Rothman, 1991). Most of the young night drifters interviewed said that their family members had taken either a negative or an indifferent attitude towards their 'night drifting' behavior.

“They (parents) always scold me for not coming home at night and they even stop giving me money. They said that all my friends are bad. But I have my own ways to ‘wan chin’ (get money) (through trafficking soft drugs).”

“They (parents) never ask me where I’ve been in the day time or at night. In fact, we seldom talk.”

“My home is like a hotel. We live under the same roof, but they (parents and sisters) leave early in the morning and come home late at night.”

Schooling/Work

Among the sixty young people interviewed, 26 (43.3%) of them still attended schools and half of them had dropped out from schools (31, 51.7%). A significant number of them said that their relationships with teachers were poor (26, 43.3%), but most of them reported that they had good relationships with schoolmates (38, 63.3%). A majority of them also reported that their academic performance was poor (37, 61.7%). It has been pointed out that ‘negative experiences at school’ is a risk factor for homeless youth (van der Ploeg, 1989). Some studies have also indicated that a lack of academic success is a reason for teenagers to run away from home (Berg et. al., 1978; Levine et. al., 1986). So, in this aspect, the young night drifters were similar to the runaway youth. A significant number of the night drifting teens interviewed (26, 43.3%) said that their conduct in schools was average and 36.7% (22) said that their conduct was poor. Although a significant number felt that their schooling experience was negative (28, 46.7%) compared to their present situation, nearly all of the school dropouts regretted dropping out of school. The following are some of their comments on their school life:

“I always ‘kai ngan’ (have confrontations) with my teachers. They all see me as a bad student.”

“Most of my classmates and I are ‘sai dong’ (best friends). But the teachers, they always pick on me.”

“I know my academic performance is poor. I have tried my best but I still don’t know what they (teachers) are teaching. Still, they should not ‘jump dui’ (pick on) me.”

Among the 34 young people who were not attending schools, only half of them were working and the rest were unemployed. Their jobs were mainly of an unskilled or semi-skilled nature (e.g. courier, office attendant, kitchen helper and printing worker). Job changing was a common phenomenon among these young people.

Peers

Previous studies on runaway or street youth have concluded that these young people usually have few friends and are social isolates (Levine et. al. 1986; Price, 1989; van der Ploeg, 1989). A more recent study on the social support network of the runaway youth is inconclusive on this aspect (Bradley, 1997). However, it is interesting to note that nearly all of the young night drifters interviewed in this study reported that they had close peer groups (57, 95%). A majority of them reported that the friends with whom they had close and good relationships were in their ‘night drifting’ groups. Most of them regarded their ‘night drifting’ peers as their good friends. They commonly defined ‘good friends’ as those who are ‘having common interests’, ‘caring’, ‘helpful’, ‘supportive’ and ‘willing to share’. These findings, which are quite different from those identified from studies on runaway and street youth in other

countries, indicate that, in Hong Kong, 'young night drifters' are quite different from 'runaway youth'. This aspect will be further discussed in a following section.

As revealed from the above findings, most of the social background of the young night drifters (e.g. family situation and peers) is quite different from those of the homeless and runaway youth. This indicates that the young night drifters are in fact a unique youth population.

The Subculture

Appearance

The appearance of these youngsters, especially the girls, was quite trendy. Their hair styles were fashionable and they usually dyed their hair different colors. Their clothes (blouses, tight trousers, skirts and coats) were in attractive colors. Some of them wore several ear-rings and had make-up. This is evidence of the impact of western youth culture on the young Chinese in Hong Kong. Comparatively speaking, the boys wore more casual clothes such as jeans, T-shirts and jackets.

Leadership

Sub-groups were observed to exist in most of the large groups. However, it was also noticed that there were usually one to two leadership figures in the groups. These group leaders, who were usually boys, were observed to have great influence on the members. The topics of their conversation (e.g. working experience, dirty jokes, gang

fight, opposite sex, conflict with police), the nature of their activities (e.g. talking, chasing around, flirting with girls) and the mobility of the groups (drifting to other spots) were mainly determined by the leaders.

Relationships

Although leaders existed in the groups, the relationship among most of the members in different groups was observed to be good and close. They shared and chatted with each other freely. The atmosphere in the groups was quite relaxed and carefree.

Some of them even offered accommodation to those who had no place to spend the night. It was later learned that most of them were either classmates, neighbors, colleagues, or 'brothers' in the Triads. Even though some of these young people were new acquaintances, they could develop a friendly and close relationship within a short period of time. This was especially the case between boys and girls. They admitted that flirting with the opposite sex was common among them and 'one night stands' were also prevalent. However, it was observed that the relationship between a few particular groups in the same spot was cool. It was later learned that these groups belonged to different Triad societies (gangs).

Activities and Behaviors

With the exception of one group in one spot who concentrated on demonstrating their skills in roller-blading and another group in another spot who concentrated on skateboarding, vandalizing the properties in the locations (e.g. punching and drawing graffiti on benches and rubbish bins), chasing around, teasing and fighting with each

other and other groups, 'kau lui' (flirting with girls), smoking, swearing, chatting and drinking (beer) were the most commonly observed behaviors of these groups of young people. The young people in the groups lived in their own world. They usually ignored the people passing-by. It was also observed that most of the people who passed by these young people in the locations usually ignored them too, unless the young people were demonstrating their roller-blading or skate-boarding skills.

'Night Drifting' Situation

Many of the young night drifters reported that they started off their nocturnal activities in their early teens (12-15 years of age). Their length of engaging in 'night drifting' varied, ranging from three months to three years. 'To be with friends', 'bored at home', 'get used to this (night drifting) pattern' and 'enjoy the comfortable and relaxing mood (in the spots)' were commonly given as the reasons for their engagement in this mode of nocturnal activity. These young people reported that their 'night drifting' companions were mostly their friends, neighbors and work colleagues. In their own words, the following are some typical reasons they gave for drifting the night:

"I want to be with my friends. Since they all 'tone dang' (drift the night), so I also 'tone dang.'"

"I am always alone at home. I feel bored, so I come out and play."

"I have nothing to talk with my parents about; they don't understand me. But my friends are different, so I come out at night to play with them."

"Here, you can forget all the troubles in the day time and just enjoy the relaxing environment in this place."

When they had money, they would prefer going to enjoy themselves in some entertainment places (e.g. billiard rooms, karaoke clubs, video game centers). Sticking together in their 'private nests' (residential domiciles belonging to some youngsters), in which they would engage in drinking (alcohol), taking soft drugs, petting or having sex, was the second choice when they had run out of money. Finally when 'private nests' were unavailable, they would 'drift' in outdoor locations.

Runaways (?)

One significant discovery in this study is that although it has been suggested and is commonly believed that most of the young night drifters are runaways or throwaways (Newbery, 1993), in fact, not many of these night drifting young people were runaways or had runaway experience. Among the sixty young people interviewed, only fourteen said that they had runaway experience. Out of these fourteen youngsters, only three admitted that they were runaways at the time. Most of them said that their parents knew about their nocturnal activities but they just did not care. They said that they would go home to rest or take a bath after 'drifting the night' or when they became tired. Most of them also said that they had means to contact their families (i.e. through pagers or mobile phones) and some of them said that their family members would contact them while they were outside. Applying the definitions of Bucy (1987), the young night drifters in Hong Kong are neither runaways, throwaways, homeless youth, street kids nor system kids. They can be regarded as a different kind of at-risk youth group.

Attitudes and Values

Only a few of them saw 'night drifting' as dangerous and not good. Some of them saw both positive and negative aspects of their behavior; most of them regarded it as normal and non-problematic.

The information from the individual interviews revealed that most of these young people had an easy attitude toward heterosexual relationships. 'One night stands' and changing of boyfriends or girlfriends within a short period of time were acceptable and common among them.

Most of them did not have a clear idea of their career plan and life goals. They felt aimless and bored about life and favored a hedonistic life-style. They saw the only purpose of education and work was to possess money and material things.

"I don't know what I want to do as a career in the long run. Why should I think of that when I can enjoy today ? Don't you think it's a silly question ?"

"Life is boring! The only time I feel alive is when I am with my friends here."

"I think money is the 'thing' in this world. So I work real hard for it." (This young man had three part-time jobs.)

"You (interviewer) must be a university graduate. You must earn a lot. What is the salary for a social worker?"

The young night drifters in this study generally shared different aspects of the subculture presented above. Not much variation was observed among different groups at different spots. Based on an analysis of the data collected, the problems faced by this special at-risk youth group are identified.

Problems of the Young Night Drifters

Although no obvious illegal activities were observed, it was reported that some of the groups of young night drifters had Triad backgrounds. Moreover, it was reported that some boys in a group in one of the spots were inducing girls to engage in prostitution. Also in the same spot, a few occasions of conflict (due to the issues of girls) among different groups of night drifting youngsters who had different Triad affiliations was observed. The conflicts were finally resolved through 'kong so' (gang negotiation). The engagement of some youngsters in trafficking soft drugs and selling faked CDs was also reported.

Based on the data collected, the observed/presented problems of the night drifting teens include:

1. Lack interests/hobbies;
2. Behavioral problems (e.g. vandalizing, assaulting and swearing);
3. Indulgent relationship with opposite sex (e.g. flirting, petting publicly and engaging in casual sex);
4. Negative peer influence/gang association;
5. Engaging in illegal activities (e.g. trafficking drugs, selling faked CDs and inducing girls to prostitution); and
6. Lack ideas on life's purpose.

Causes of Night Drifting of the Young People

With reference to the environmental perspective of deviancy employed for accounting the night drifting behavior of the young people, the present study has identified some significant social and physical environmental factors that have caused these behaviors of the young people.

a. Social Environmental Factors

Three significant social environmental factors, which are believed to have predisposed the young people to 'drift' the night, have been identified.

i. Alienated Relationship among Family Members

As indicated from the findings of the individual interviews, most of the night drifting teens were alienated from their family members. They commonly expressed the view that they seldom communicated with their parents or siblings whom they felt did not understand them. The following are some illustrative comments from the young people concerning their family relationships:

“They (my parents) do not understand me. All they care about is earning money.”

“It is no use to talk to them (parents); they cannot understand you. They will just scold you.”

“Sometime I would wonder if they are my brothers and sisters. We never talk to each other. We just ‘ding gan’ (quarrel).”

“You just don’t want to stay at home. All of us just regard it as a sleeping place. My parents and brothers leave early in the morning and return late at night.”

“We just watch TV together, but we never talk.”

From the above statements, it is easy to realize why the night drifting teens could not feel love and concern from their families. Since they could not feel that their families are caring and understanding, it is understandable why they did not like to stay at home. Hence, they preferred (were predisposed to) 'night drifting'. As Rothman (1991) said:

They seem to be seeking the ultimate parenting, but, because they have been so deprived, nothing can fill the emptiness - they keep running.' (P.29)

ii. Boredom in Ordinary Life

Many young people talked about the lack of excitement in their ordinary life (school and work). To search for excitement was one of the reasons they offered in explanation of their night drifting behavior. Obviously, boredom in their ordinary life was a factor that had predisposed them to engage in nocturnal activities. The following are some of their comments on their ordinary life:

"It's for my mom that I go to school in the day time. I know nothing about what they teach. It's so 'moon' (boring)."

"There is no fun in school. You just got lots of homework to do and that's all."

"Though it's 'moon', you work for money in the day time and wait for the night to come so that you can go out and 'wet' (fool around)."

"I always feel tired and sleepy in the van. It's all routine work. You just carry the boxes of goods up to the factories all the time and there is nothing else."

"There is nothing exciting to do in the day time. I just sleep and wait for the night to 'wet'."

iii. Peer Influence

One of the significant factors influencing the night drifting behavior of the young people identified is the mutual influence of their peers. All the group observation reports mentioned that the young people 'drifted' the night with their peer groups. In fact, the young people interviewed also reported that it was with their peers that they 'drifted' together at night. So, peer influence or attraction is seen as a crucial social factor for the 'night drifting' of the young people.

"I started to come out and play with my classmates two years ago. I find it interesting, so I continue to come out with them."

"All my best friends like to 'tone dang' (play through the night time), I just come out with them."

"We young people like to play 'tone dang'; my friends do it and I do it."

"When all your friends play 'tone dang', you just play with them. It looks chicken if you don't join in."

So, all the factors presented above were seen as having a predisposing effect on the night drifting behavior of the young people. Under these social environmental conditions, the young people were pre-conditioned to engage in 'night drifting'.

b. Physical Environmental Factors

In the present investigation, certain physical environmental factors/ features of the night drifting spots, that have supported (precipitated) the night drifting behavior of the young people, have been identified.

i. Outdoor/Open Area

Most of the popular night drifting spots favored by the young people are outdoor areas in relatively large open spaces. Besides having more space in which to move around, this physical feature has created a sense of freedom among the young people.

As some night drifting teens had said:

“You can run around and do what you want here.”

“We feel more free to chat at this place.”

“There is no place where you can stay for so long and do what you want to do without having to pay anything.”

“Here, you can talk, laugh, sing and dance as you wish. You are free to do what comes to your mind.”

ii. Lack of Adequate Surveillance/Supervision

The field observation reports also pointed out that lack of adequate surveillance, formal or informal, was also a common element in the night drifting spots of the young people. As these spots are situated outside residential areas, community surveillance (surveillance by residents) as a kind of informal supervision is obviously absent. As reported, although at times there were some pedestrians passing by the spots, they just ignored the groups of young people and hurried on their way.

Furthermore, formal surveillance/supervision is also inadequate. As observed by the

research assistants and reported by the young people interviewed, the spots were rarely patrolled by the police at night. Field observation of the spots by the researcher himself also confirmed this situation. One of the selected spots for the present study was a 24-hour fast food shop which was rather busy even at night time. The employees were occupied in taking orders and delivering food and drinks. They did not have the time, or in fact the will, to pay attention to the groups of young people inside the store. So, with this inadequate formal and informal surveillance/supervision, the young people were really free to do what they wanted in these places.

iii. Facilitating the Gathering of Young People

This actually is the product of the former two factors. It is easy to see that in outdoor places which are spacious and where young people can feel free to do what they want, coupled with the lack of formal and informal surveillance/supervision, gathering of young people is undoubtedly facilitated. Some night drifting young people interviewed had said:

“We cannot find any place like this one where we can gather” (Their group size was around 15.)

“You can hardly find an outdoor place like this where you will not be ‘kicked’ (busted) by the ‘inclined hat’ (police)”

“Can you suggest any place where we can freely group together like this one ?”

So it is believed that the above-mentioned three factors had a precipitating effect that facilitated the night drifting behavior of the young people.

With reference to the theoretical perspective employed, the night drifting behavior of the young people is believed to be the result of the interplay between the identified social environmental factors (i.e. alienated family relationship, boredom in life and peer influence) and the identified physical environmental factors (i.e. outdoor/open area, lack of adequate surveillance/supervision and facilitation of young people to gather).

Service Needs of ‘Night Drifting Teens’

From analysing the information of the group observation reports and individual interview records, the service needs of the night drifting young people can generally be classified into the group level (more pertaining to the group’s need) and individual level (more pertaining to individual need). Youth policy makers and service providers should carefully consider the situation and the identified needs of the young night drifters so that adequate policies and services can be planned and offered to them in order to assist these young people to solve their problems and have their needs satisfied.

a. Group Level: In the group level, their service needs basically include two aspects:

(1) provision of suitable and supervised places for recreation and (2) reducing undesirable peer/Triad influence.

b. Individual Level: For the individual level, their service needs include: (1)

developing interest/hobbies; (2) guidance on behavioral problems; (3) guidance on

heterosexual relationships; (4) guidance on developing healthy family relationships; (5) needs of love, care and concern and (6) searching for meaning of life.

The above aspects are the identified service needs, for groups and individuals, of the young night drifters in Hong Kong. They have good reference value for concerned policy makers to plan relevant policies and service providers to provide appropriate services for satisfying the needs of this special at-risk youth group.

Services for ‘Night Drifting Teens’

In order to satisfy the service needs of the night drifting teens and assist their healthy development, appropriate services and intervention have to be developed.

i. Overnight Outreach Service

Outreach social work service, which is currently a kind of youth services in Hong Kong (similar to detached youth work), employs teams of professionally trained social workers to reach-out to the at-risk youth at public and entertainment places (e.g. street corners, parks, football fields, video game centers, billiard rooms) in different districts where these young people are known to frequent. Through contacting these young people and establishing a trusting relationship with them, their problems are identified. Then guidance and counseling are provided to them individually or in groups. However, at the present time, this service is only operated during the day-time. With the recognition of the existence of the ‘night drifting teens’ together with their service needs, it is suggested that in districts where the ‘night

drifting' phenomenon of the young people is prevalent, a night operation mode of the outreach service (that is integrating the Youth Mobile Team service mode in the outreach team) should be considered. This could serve both a preventive and a developmental function for assisting the development of these night drifting young people.

ii. Mobile Youth Activity Centers

In response to the nocturnal activity pattern of these young people, some mobile youth activity centers can be established. These centers should be operated in spots where the night drifting teens are known to frequent. Obviously, they have to adopt a night-time operation mode when the night drifting teens become active. A mini-van could best serve as the mobile center. The centers are means of contact with the night drifting young people. Through the contacts, youth workers of the centers can perform various roles such as information/resource provider, activity organizer and counselor. In order to increase the attraction of these centers to the young people, they should be equipped with more trendy program means/tools (e.g. roller-blades and electrical racing cars). The operational mode of a mobile youth activity center can combine with the overnight outreach service so that the intervention process of the youth workers with the young night drifters can be enhanced.

iii. Increase Police Patrol

It has been found that police patrol on the popular night drifting spots of the young people might not be enough. Their patrolling of the spots was found to be reactive. Increase police patrol on these locations is necessary. Although this action will not

tackle the heart of the causes of young night drifters, it has a preventive function for the unruly behaviors of the young people in these locations.

iv. Collaboration between Police and Youth Workers

Furthermore, closer collaboration between police and youth workers at district level should be promoted. Due to their work context, police on the beat and the frontline youth workers are knowledgeable to the dynamics and movement of the young people in the districts, closer communication between the two professions should be promoted. This can help each profession to better understand the situation of the young people in the districts. With this knowledge, better planning and taking of appropriate intervention to the young people, especially the night drifting teens, can be carried out by both professions. In fact, developing joint effort between police and youth workers to handle the problem of young night drifters should be attempted. It has been pointed out that co-operation between police and social workers is useful in tackling the problem of juvenile delinquency (Lee, 1994).

Epilogue

The present study has discovered that the young night drifters are a special at-risk youth group who are different from the homeless or runaway youth. Although they still live in the families, they are socially alienated and psychologically detached from the families. They have a unique set of subculture and service needs. It is hoped that appropriate services can be provided to them so that their healthy personal and social development can be facilitated.

Notes

- (1) The Youth Mobile Team (YMT) Service is a two-year pilot social work service project that the government has launched in order to provide on-the-spot counseling and crisis intervention services to the young night drifters (YNDs). There are two YMTs operated by two non-governmental organizations through subvention. They are responsible for service provision in different districts of the territory. Each team is composed of five trained social workers. Each team is also provided with two private cars for its operation. They operate each day from 23:00 till 07:00 the other day. Crisis intervention, counseling as well as service transferrals and referrals are the main service methods of the YMTs.
- (2) This was a qualitative study funded by the Direct Grant for Research of the Social Science and Education Panel of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.
- (3) Detached youth work is a kind of youth work methods in which the youth workers adopt an outreach approach to make contact with and deliver services to street youth who use to hang around in public premises (such as street corners and parks) individually or in groups and are assessed to have service needs.
- (4) Since there is no information on the population size of the target, probability sampling was impossible. Under this limitation, the research methods employed are believed to be the most appropriate ones.

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(Appendix 1)

“TEENS OF THE NIGHT” (Observation Guidelines)

(1) Date (Day)

(2) Time

(3) RA

(4) Spot

(5) Specific location

(6) Description of the spot

=====

(7) Group code

(8) Observation session

(9) Group size

(10) Group composition: M _____ Age range (estimated) _____ to _____

F _____ Age range (estimated) _____ to _____

(11) Appearance (e.g. hair-style, clothing) of the youngsters

(12) Observed relationship among the youngsters

(13) Behavior/Activities of the Group in the spot

(14) Language used: Ordinary (____%) Foul (____%) Triad (____%)

- (15) Content of their conversation
- (16) Triad affiliation: Yes/No/Unknown
- (17) Reactions of the people passing-by
- (18) Reactions of the youngsters on others' reactions
- (19) Intervention of law-enforcement agent(s) (?)
- (20) Other observed events/dynamics

(21) RA's Assessment

- 1. Presenting/Observed problems of the Group
- 2. Social background (family, schooling, triad, etc.) of the youngsters :
- 3. Other observation

RA: _____

Recording date: _____

(Appendix 2)

“TEENS OF THE NIGHT” (Interviewing Schedule)

I. Personal Particulars

- Sex
- Age
- Educational level
- Place/District of residence

II. ‘Night Drifting’ Situation

- Frequency (No./week, month)
- Runaways?
- Reasons for engaging in night drifting
- For how long (in this spot)
- With whom?
- Usual activities
- Night drifting history (since when, with whom, where, doing what, why?)
- Perceptions of night drifting behaviors (e.g. positives/negatives)

III. Family Situation

- Family members
- Parents’ marital status

- No. of siblings
- Relationship with and among family members
- Atmosphere in family
- How family members see his/her 'night drifting' behavior

IV. Schooling

- Attending school/dropout
- Highest level of education
- Relationship with teachers
- Relationship with schoolmates
- Academic performance
- Conduct
- Experience in school
- Perceptions of schooling

V. Employment

- Employed/unemployed
- Present job/employment history
- Purpose/meaning of work

VI. Peers

- Having close friends/peer groups?
- Who are they?
- Definition of good friends
- Relationship with close peer groups
- Usual activities with close peer groups

VII. Leisure

- Interests
- Recreation
- Use of spare time

VIII. Others

- Perceptions of adults (e.g. teachers, parents, boss)
- Perceptions of law-enforcement agents (e.g. police, probation officers)
- Meaning/values/purposes of life
- Life goals