

# YOUTHLINE

## **Research Brief:**

*Health-Seeking:  
(Influences on Help-Seeking and Participation  
among young New Zealanders)*

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## What is Health-Seeking Behaviour?

The term “health-seeking behaviour” has been a part of the medical discourse for some time and continues to be used currently as a way to describe a set of behaviours that involve an individual seeking help for some form of physical or psychological health problem (Evans & Norman, 2002).

This definition of health-seeking behaviour is however quite different from the concept of health-seeking behaviour that will be discussed within this report. This report will seek to apply the term “health-seeking behaviour” as a label that includes two distinct sets of behaviours that contribute to youth health. These two behaviours are “help-seeking by young people” and “participation by young people.”

### Defining Health

Before we begin discussing definitions of “help-seeking” and “participation” it is first necessary to discuss exactly what is meant by *health* in the context of this document.

The Government document *Youth Health: A guide to action* (Ministry of Health, 2002), expresses the view that youth health should be approached as a holistic entity, and outlines a number of dimensions for consideration when addressing youth health. These varied dimensions are listed as: emotional and mental health, physical health, cultural and spiritual health, and a connection to family (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

This holistic view of health is recent, and would appear to fit within the New Zealand context, suggesting that there is no need to deviate from it for the purpose of this report. This means that when we discuss help-seeking and participation within this document, we do so with regard to how these affect *all* the dimensions of youth health and not simply the physical and psychological.

### Defining Help-Seeking

The term help-seeking is a commonly used one and while definitions vary, there is general consensus that it involves people (in this case young people) seeking help from sources to address some form of health related problem. This generic definition is however limited and it is necessary to examine the literature in this area in order to construct a more specific definition.

Kelliher (2000) when looking at help-seeking behaviour with regard to youth suicide within New Zealand, defined help-seeking behaviour as an “attempt to cope with physical or emotional problems by enlisting the help or advice of a helping source.” A similar definition is offered by Heights (2001), and Davies, McCrae, Frank, Dochnahl, Pickering, Harrison, Zakrzewski, and Wilson (2000), who both pay particular attention to physical and emotional problems as the cause of help-seeking behaviour.

These definitions while useful are limited to the physical and emotional (possibly because these are easier to measure), which limits their use within the holistic view of health previously mentioned.

By contrast Kuhl, Jarkon-Horlick, and Morrissey (1997), discuss a wider definition suggesting that help-seeking behaviour can be defined as: “seeking help from both professionals and non-professionals for a variety of issues, including academic, social, and medical problems.” While this definition is wider it still does not address the cultural or spiritual dimensions mentioned within the holistic view.

There is general agreement within the literature that help-seeking among young people is derived from both “formal” and “informal” sources (Heights, 2001; Kelliher, 2000; Kuhl et al, 1997). Gould, Munfakh, Lubell, Kleinman, and Parker (2002), also note that help-seeking behaviour may involve both formal and informal sources while focusing again on physical and emotional health within the definition. Help-seeking behaviour can therefore be viewed as occurring within those seeking help from both, formal/professional, and informal/non-professional sources.

It is now necessary to develop a definition of help-seeking that fits with existing literature while addressing the unique New Zealand context, specifically with regard to the holistic view of health previously mentioned. Thus help-seeking behaviour is defined for the purpose of this report as: an attempt by a young person to seek help from either a formal or informal source for a physical, emotional/mental, cultural/spiritual, or family related, health problem.

### **Defining Participation**

In 1993 the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child (UNCROC) was passed overwhelming by the United Nations. Article 12 within UNCROC states that

The child's participation is a right and children therefore are free to express their views or, if they prefer, to not do so. (UNICEF, 2003).

This notion of participation is defined as the opportunity for every child to have their ideas and opinions heard and considered and it also views this as a clear right to which all children are entitled (UNICEF, 1993).

Following UNCROC in 1993 and the acknowledgement of the importance of participation in child and youth development, a large number of very different definitions of participation have sprung up and words like “consultation”, “engagement”, and “interaction”, are often used interchangeably with “participation” within the literature. This interchanging of terms has clouded exactly what participation includes and presently there is no clear agreement on exactly what participation is (O’Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLachlin, 2002).

The New Zealand Youth Development Strategy (2002) follows on from the UNCROC view of participation while extending it a little wider when it refers to a definition of participation that defines it as:

involvement of young people in policy and program development, in having a say about what is done, and being involved in decisions about what is done (Ewen, 1998).

The Youth Development Strategy also includes participation as both a key element and goal:

Youth participation is about involving young people in having a say in developing, evaluating and reviewing decisions that affect them, their family, schools and tertiary institutions, their community and their country (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002)

O'Donoghue, et al (2002) apply a more "action focused" definition of participation as:

a constellation of activities that empower adolescents to take part in and influence decision making that affects their lives and to take action on issues they care about (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLaughlin, 2002)

Following on from this definition, Cervone & Cushman (2002) discuss a more political definition suggesting that participation includes: "civic engagement", "activism", "youth-adult partnerships", "youth governance", "empowerment", and "voice". Both of these definitions suggest that participation is more than "consultation" with young people and involves action by young people with regard to issues they deem as important. This view that young people should not simply be consultants is shared by the United Nations (UNICEF, 2003).

Bartko & Eccles (2003) offer a different view of participation describing it as "activity involvement" by young people. This definition suggests that participation is not simply limited to young people interacting with adults and their organisations. Within this definition participation is also viewed as young people participating in activities that interest them within the community such as sports activities, cultural groups, and church groups. Harrison and Narayan (2003) offer a definition that begins to move in this direction when they describe participation as:

...offering to youth opportunities for meaningful involvement in a social unit, interactions with caring and supportive adults, acceptance by peers, and skills development. (Harrison & Narayan, 2003)

It is now necessary to construct a definition of participation that fits within the holistic view of health previously mentioned. For the purpose of this report participation is defined as: involvement of young people with and within organisations, and activities that improve physical, emotional/mental, cultural/spiritual, or family related, health.

## **The Focus of This Report**

This brief has been written with the intention of examining help-seeking and participation among young people (those aged 12 – 25) with regard to the factors/influences that encourage such behaviours and factors/influences that act as barriers to such behaviours.

### **Why is it important to understand which factors influence help seeking behaviours?**

While the reasons for wanting to understand help-seeking behaviour among young people (and thus the factors that influence this type of behaviour) might seem obvious, it is necessary to briefly outline them at this juncture.

Ultimately understanding help-seeking behaviours among young people is about understanding the way young people cope with problems/issues/concerns within their daily lives (Kuhl et al, 1997).

Studies internationally have shown that young people generally are underrepresented when it comes to help-seeking, and a number of minority ethnic groups in different countries have even lower levels of help seeking behaviours (Heights, 2001; Kuhl et al, 1997; Rew, Resnick, & Blum, 1997). Some evidence suggests that similar trends exist within New Zealand (Kelliher, 2000).

It is important to identify and attempt to understand influences that may encourage young people to seek help, so that organisations and individuals that work directly with young people (particularly those seeking help), can better manage their services to meet the specific help-seeking needs of young people (Rew et al, 1997).

Of equal if not greater importance is the need to identify and attempt to understand influences that may prevent young people from seeking help. A large number of young people within New Zealand and internationally do not seek help for health-related problems and it is thus necessary to identify and understand influences that may act as barriers to help-seeking behaviour among young people (Kelliher, 2000).

An understanding of the influences that act as barriers to help-seeking among young people allows organisations that work with young people to change their services to meet the specific help-seeking needs of young people, while also identifying influences that allow organisations to target social/economic/ethnic groups who may be less inclined to seek help for various reasons (Kelliher, 2000).

Studies have also shown that the ways young people seek help during adolescence can set a pattern for the way they will seek help throughout the rest of their lives (Rew et al, 1997). This suggests that understanding help-seeking among young people may in fact give us an insight into the help-seeking behaviours of people in general.

## **Why is it important to understand which factors influence participation?**

Participation of young people within organisations, communities, and society as a whole has been acknowledged as a major determinant in improving youth development.

Youth development is triggered when young people fully participate (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002)

We can contribute to young people's healthy development by creating opportunities for them to influence, solve problems, inform, shape, design, and contribute to an activity or idea. (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

The Ministry of Youth Affairs has also noted that participation of young people also improves the community in which they participate.

'Involved' young people build not only their individual capacity but also the community's capacity to respond to change (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

Participation has also been viewed positively within resilience studies which have shown that young people who participate more fully are better equipped to deal with the problems associated with adolescence (Cervone & Cushman, 2002).

Studies have also shown that participation of young people within the decision making processes of organisations, and society as a whole, have positive benefits both for young people and for society generally.

Advocates and researchers of youth development point to the developmental benefits of youth involvement in decision making and public engagement. Youth participation has been linked to greater organizational sustainability and effectiveness, and on a macrolevel, national democratic, social, and economic development. (O'Donoghue, Kirshner, & McLachlin, 2002)

Thus participation of young people can be seen as a desirable goal for individuals, organisations, and society as a whole. As such it is necessary to identify and attempt to understand the influences that encourage or discourage participation among young people (O'Donoghue et al, 2002).

Attempting to understand the influences that encourage young people to participate within activities and groups allows those involved with young people to change their practises to encourage greater youth participation. Attempting to understand the influences that discourage participation allows those who work with young people to address issues and remove barriers that prevent youth participation (Cervone & Cushman, 2002).

## **A Review of the Literature**

Some literature has been produced with regard to both help-seeking and participation and specifically the factors which encourage or act as barriers to these behaviours. However both are still relatively new areas of study (particularly participation) and thus literature that explores the factors that influence these is still very limited.

### **Help-seeking**

One of the most recent pieces of research related to this area was conducted by Kelliher (2000), within New Zealand and involved 100 young people ranging in age from 17-19 completing a survey with regard to help-seeking and suicidal behaviour. Kelliher listed five possible barriers previously suggested by Kuhl et al (1996), and asked the participants to rate these based on whether they felt these would prevent them from seeking help. The five barriers were: lack of knowledge, stigma, perception of therapist, confidentiality, and self-sufficiency.

Participants were also asked about seeking help for physical problems and how this differed from seeking help for emotional problems. Kelliher (2000) found that participants were generally happy to seek help for physical problems naming their GP as the health provider they were most likely to use. This finding is consistent with *Youth health: A guide to action* (Ministry of Health, 2002), which states that GPs are the most commonly accessed health provider for those aged 10-24 within New Zealand.

Of the five possible barriers offered, participants responded to three in particular. A lack of knowledge and information with regard to available resources and services was identified as the main barrier to help-seeking by participants. This lack of knowledge and information includes a lack of knowledge about the processes that take place when a young person seeks help from an organisation. This view of a lack of knowledge being a barrier to help-seeking was particularly prevalent in male participants (Kelliher, 2000).

Stigma was also noted by participants as a major barrier to help-seeking. Participants generally agreed that there is a stigma within society associated with people seeking help for mental health problems, and felt that this might prevent them from seeking help. This view was again particularly strong in male participants.

The third possible barrier that participants identified with was self-sufficiency. The notion of self-sufficiency was identified by Kelliher (2000) as comprising two types of behaviour. The first involves young people not wanting to talk about their problems with people who don't know them personally, preferring instead to keep these to themselves. The second involves young people not being able to see they have a problem and therefore not being willing/able to address it (even when such a problem is pointed out to them by others). Self-sufficiency was considered a barrier to help-seeking by female participants in particular.

Interestingly perception of therapist and confidentiality were not considered by participants to be major barriers to help-seeking. This is particularly interesting in the

case of confidentiality where this result seems to run almost completely contrary to most other literature in this area.

Kelliher (2000) also asked participants about the sorts of things that would help them to seek help for problems from an organisation or service. Those interviewed came up with five main areas for improvement. These were: making services easier to access, starting education about services at a younger age, advertising to increase awareness of services, use of telephone help lines, those who are there to help having relevant qualities and experiences (Kelliher, 2000). A number of these suggestions have been raised in other literature in this area also.

Kelliher (2000) also observed that participants with a strong informal help-seeking network seem more likely to engage in formal help-seeking when required. Kelliher notes that an informal help-seeking network could potentially act as a barrier to formal help-seeking with some young people potentially deciding to consult this network about a problem without proceeding to formal help-seeking. This suggests that the absence or presence of an informal help-seeking network may affect formal help-seeking behaviours. The implication here is that those without an informal help-seeking network may in fact be less likely to engage in formal help-seeking behaviour.

In the largest and most recent study of New Zealand's youth and their health generally the Adolescent Health Research Group (2003) surveyed approximately 4% of New Zealand's secondary school population on a number of youth related issues. The survey included questions about seeking help for health related problems and found that more than three quarters of respondents said that their family GP was the person they went to for health care. The survey also asked participants what barriers would prevent them from seeking help for a health related problem. The barriers suggested were: not wanting to make a fuss, can't be bothered, too expensive, don't feel comfortable with the person, too scared, worried it won't be kept private (confidentiality).

Crown Public Health (1997) conducted research into youth mental health promotion by interviewing 57 young people under the age of 25, along with 88 adults who work with young people in a variety of organisations. When asked about help-seeking the young people suggested that they would be likely to consult a GP ahead of any other health professional. A lack of knowledge of services available to young people was seen as a major barrier to help-seeking and may partially explain why GPs are the only professionals commonly accessed by these young people as part of formal help-seeking.

The adults consulted for the study noted the major stigma that exists with regard to mental health within New Zealand. They suggested that this stigma could be divided up into two areas: stigma against people with mental illness, and stigma against institutions that deal with people with mental illness.

The authors also noted that young people within the survey were more likely to engage in informal help-seeking with friends rather than consulting a formal help-seeking source. They also point out that while a lack of knowledge may be a barrier to formal help-seeking, those living in rural areas are likely to have trouble accessing



any form of formal help (potentially including a guidance counsellor), due to geographic isolation (Crown Public Health, 1997).

Matheson (2001) conducted an informal survey of 82 people in Auckland to explore attitudes towards youth help services in the region. Participants cited confidentiality as the biggest consideration when accessing a youth organisation. The subject of advertising came up frequently as being important with participants not only stating that awareness of services is important, but also that advertised services were considered more credible.

Heights (2001) surveyed 1415 school-aged adolescents in Israel with regard to their background, achievement, risk-taking behaviours, use of drugs and alcohol, attitudes, suicidality, and body image. Younger adolescents (12-14 years) stated that they were more likely to get help from their parents if they had a problem, while older participants (16-18 years) were more likely to consult their friends about a problem. Those in the middle age range (14-16 years) were those most likely not to seek help from anyone. This finding illustrates the effect that age and stage of development can have on help-seeking among young people (Heights, 2001).

Heights (2001) notes that previous research in this area internationally has shown that young people are more likely to seek help from informal sources such as friends and family rather than formal sources. Heights also points out that some research has suggested that young people with severe problems may actually be less likely to seek help than those with lesser problems.

While questions about barriers to help-seeking were not asked within this survey Heights (2001) suggests a number of possibilities. One potential barrier is a lack of information among adolescents both in identifying problems and knowing where to go to seek help for them. Heights also notes that a lack of confidentiality, or a feeling of shame or embarrassment about seeking help may also act as barriers to help-seeking. Heights observes with interest that the number of participants within the research who said they would seek help from a school counsellor was very small.

Rew et al (1997), investigated help-seeking behaviours among Hispanic females in the US. They surveyed 693 women between 12-20 years of age from five different ethnic backgrounds and compared the results. Rew et al. found that all groups were more likely to seek help from informal sources. Language difficulty was cited as a potential barrier, however they acknowledge that more research is needed in this area.

The two main barriers to help-seeking among those surveyed by Rew et al (1997) generally, were a lack of information about services, and embarrassment about seeking help. Participants were generally happy to seek help for physical/contraceptive related issues with Hispanic females least likely to access these services. Hispanic females with the greatest mental health problems were also those least likely to seek help from formal or informal sources for this.

The Ministries of Health and Youth Affairs (2002) have produced a document entitled *Youth Health: A guide to action*, which outlines government policies and initiatives with regard to youth and health. The document notes that “traditional health service

providers are under-utilised by people aged 10-24 years” (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002).

The document quotes studies of young people with regard to possible barriers to help-seeking behaviour within New Zealand. Potential barriers listed within the document include:

- cost of services
- embarrassment or not wanting to make a fuss
- a perceived lack of confidentiality
- lack of appropriate services for mental health, drug, and alcohol problems
- lack of knowledge of services (particularly sexuality related)
- lack of Maori, Pacific Islands, and Asian staff
- lack of information about services
- ideas about communication between young people and adults
- waiting times
- physical location of services

This document makes a few observations of particular interest to those seeking to encourage help-seeking, particularly formal help seeking. *Youth Health: A guide to action* mentions that young people state “resoundingly” that they prefer health services that are targeted at youth in particular. This is consistent with a second observation made in the document, this being that health systems are more likely to be effective when young people are active participants in their design and development. Another point of interest within this document is the suggestion that young people within New Zealand may be high users of internet health information sites, however more research is needed within this area before this can be proven conclusively within New Zealand.

Gould et al (2002), conducted a study of 519 13-17 year olds in the US with regard to their use of the internet as a help-seeking source. Results of the study showed that as many young people used the internet to look for help as used school counsellors or other professional mental health services. The most interesting result to come from this study was that there was almost no difference between rates of help-seeking among males and females. The authors noted that the internet may cross the “gender divide” when it comes to help-seeking and may prove to be a useful tool for targeting an increase in help-seeking among boys in particular.

Kuhl et al (1996) summarised some of the international literature with regard to help-seeking and outlined some of the general findings that have come out of this research. They note that females are more likely to seek help than males in all areas (though the internet is not considered within their discussion). They suggest a number of potential barriers to help-seeking including: confidentiality, defining a problem as ‘too personal’, perception that no service can help, and a desire to handle the problem alone. The authors note that there is still a general lack of credible research internationally with regard to factors that influence help-seeking behaviour.

Having reviewed the literature with regard to factors that influence help-seeking among young people, a number of themes emerge for further discussion.

### *Stigma*

Almost all the research mentioned previously notes a stigma around mental health, mental illness, and by association help-seeking (Crown Public Health, 1997; Heights, 2001; Kelliher, 2000). The role that stigma plays in preventing young people from seeking help has been noted within New Zealand with the *New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy* (1998) stating as one of its objectives (NGO objective three) the need to reduce the stigma associated with mental illness as this is a barrier to young people seeking help.

### *Lack of knowledge/information*

The idea of a lack of knowledge or information acting as a barrier to help-seeking among young people was discussed within almost all of the literature reviewed (Heights, 2001; Kelliher, 2000; Matheson, 2001; Rew et al, 1997). This idea was discussed in slightly different ways by each author, however these can be divided generally into three types of knowledge/information that was lacking.

The first is a lack of knowledge/information about health generally (usually mental health) preventing young people from being able to identify a problem if they or one of their friends was experiencing one. The second is a lack of knowledge/information about available services that young people can turn to in times of need. The third is a lack of knowledge/information with regard to how different services that work with young people operate, in essence young people not knowing what to expect when approaching a helping agency.

Some of the literature in this area has suggested that increased advertising and publicity by agencies that work with young people may help to increase the numbers of young people using such services (Crown Public Health, 1997; Matheson, 2001). While this may be true, it would seem advisable that any such advertising should be carefully researched and targeted at young people in order to be effective.

### *Confidentiality*

The importance of confidentiality has been well established within both previous and current literature (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003; Heights, 2001; Kuhl et al, 1996; Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Within the literature reviewed here, a lack of confidentiality is generally viewed as a major barrier to help-seeking with one notable exception (Kelliher, 2000). A high level of confidentiality is viewed as encouraging help-seeking among young people (Gould et al, 2002).

### *Self-sufficiency*

This idea that young people sometimes prefer to keep problems to themselves rather than taking them to others for help can be found in different forms within the literature (Kelliher, 2000; Kuhl et al, 1996). It is unclear from the literature available exactly how much of a barrier self-sufficiency is for young people with a number of barriers including self-sufficiency being clearly linked in some way.

### *Perception of helping agencies*

There is a smattering of information within the literature to suggest that perception of helping agencies may in fact act as a barrier to help-seeking behaviour (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003; Kelliher, 2002; Kuhl, et al, 1996). This may include young people believing that an agency is unable to help *them* with a particular problem, or believing that an agency only deals with people who have problems more serious than those they are facing. Because perception of agency links closely with knowledge/information of services it is difficult to establish from the literature exactly how much of a barrier these types of attitudes and perceptions may be.

### *The internet*

There is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest that the internet is a popular source for help-seeking among youth within New Zealand (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). However very little research has been conducted in this area both locally and internationally, and there is subsequently a significant research gap to be filled in this area.

### *Other influencing factors*

A number of other factors that may encourage or discourage help-seeking are mentioned within different pieces of literature. These include: cost of services, location of services, adult-youth relationships, link between formal and informal help-seeking, and education (Crown Public Health, 1997; Heights, 2001; Kuhl, et al, 2002; Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Research with regard to some of these may be useful in reducing barriers to help-seeking while increasing the behaviour itself.

## **Participation**

Literature with regard to participation among young people generally is very vague (O'Donoghue et al, 2002) and there is a very real lack of literature when it comes to considering the factors that encourage participation and those that act as a barrier to it.

Two of the most recent pieces of literature related to this area are the summary/consultation documents produced by the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2001) when developing the *Youth Development Strategy* (2002).

The first of these two documents titled: *Summary analysis of responses from agencies and adults on the Consultation Document: Supporting the positive development of young people* (2001), involved discussions with adults from a wide range of youth related organisations within New Zealand. When participants were asked to identify some of the major barriers that they felt prevent participation among young people in New Zealand several factors were suggested. Those receiving most agreement included: tokenism, cultural barriers, and poor facilitation.

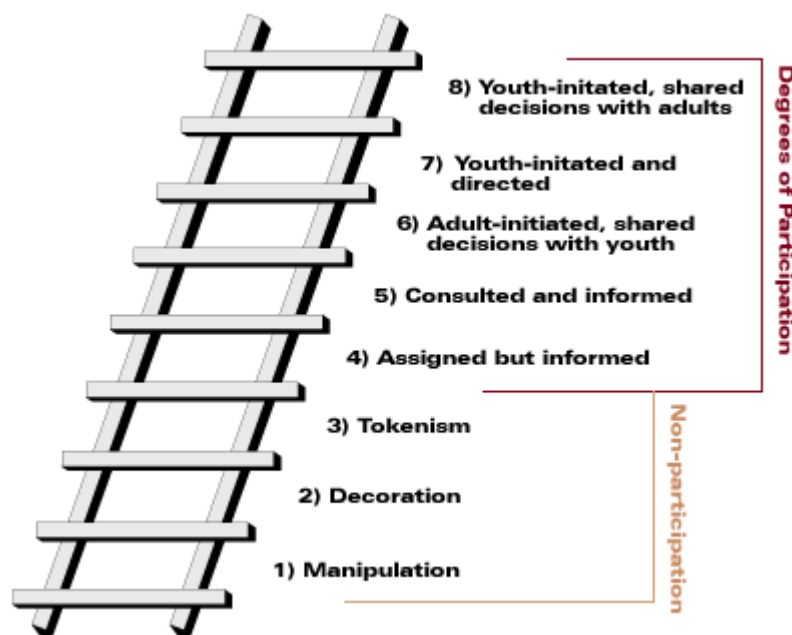
The adult participants were then asked to identify some ways that participation among young people in New Zealand could be encouraged. Ideas that emerged from this included: making participation exciting and interesting, changing formal practices within organisations, making participation fun with food and rewards, and adults providing support to young participants with transport, training, and mentoring.

The second of the documents is titled *Summary Analysis of responses from secondary school-aged young people on the Consultation Documents: Supporting the Positive Development of Young people* (2001), and involved receiving ideas and feedback from 1200 young people throughout New Zealand. Those giving feedback saw tokenism as the main barrier to participation by young people.

Participants within the process were also asked what could be done to encourage greater participation by young people within New Zealand. Suggestions included: using incentives, advertising opportunities for participation, use the internet, have a clear end goal for participation, use young leaders, and participation must actually make a difference. The young people who gave feedback in this document viewed both sport and cultural activities as forms of participation.

Both of these two documents state very clearly that there is a need for research into what the “real” barriers to youth participation are, and what motivates young people to participate (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001).

Hart (1992) developed a ‘ladder of participation’ to illustrate the different levels of participation that can take place between adults and youth within organisations and society as a whole.



(Hart, 1992)

Hart (1992) sees a distinction between effective participation and participation that is ‘participation’ in perception/name only. This ladder represents the view that adults could potentially be the biggest barrier or encourager to meaningful youth participation.

O’Donoghue et al (2002) review some of the existing literature around youth participation generally. They observe that there is a general lack of research in the area of participation generally and note that a number of studies that have been conducted with regard to what factors encourage young people to participate, have not transferred over well to different countries. This suggests that some factors influencing participation are country/culture-specific.

O'Donoghue et al (2002) view tokenism as the biggest established barrier to participation internationally and they state a belief that adults (even those with good intentions) may be the biggest barrier to true participation. They suggest that adults who work with young people need to be willing "to be changed" and that youth need training and support from adults to increase meaningful participation.

O'Donoghue et al (2002) also raise an interesting question with regard to participation. They suggest that a focus is needed within this area as to *who* participates and why. This question is interesting because other literature has suggested that minority groups tend to be underrepresented in participation generally (Cervone & Cushman, 2002).

Pate, Trost, Levin, and Dowda, (2000) found exactly this trend when they researched participation in sports activities by school students in the US. They surveyed 14221 high school students with regard to levels of sports participation. Ultimately they found that overall levels of sports participation were high, however African-American and Hispanic students rated much lower than their white counterparts. Obviously this study has limited applicability given that it focuses solely on sport, however it does illustrate part of an interesting pattern of under participation by minorities.

Cervone and Cushman (2002) researched the role of participation within the classroom and interviewed a number of students in some depth. They found that students who were not the same ethnicity as the teacher may be left out or isolated during certain classroom activities and events. This suggests a link to cultural/ethnic difference as a barrier to participation. Cervone and Cushman also suggest that while there is discussion about increasing participation, a lot of adults within schools and outside them secretly believe that they know best.

Sherman (2002) discusses the idea of participation on a macro-political level with regard to the US specifically. Sherman observes that more organisations that are "youth-led" are needed in the US and suggest that adults need to allow youth to lead themselves while providing support and assistance to youth as needed. Dworkin, Larson, and Hansen (2003) studied the process of positive development in young people as the result of participation in activities and suggest that adults need to help youth "teach themselves" and become agents of their own development.

The need for increased quality participation by young people has been recognised by a number of government and non-government organisations in recent times. The South Australian Government has released a publication entitled *Youth Participation Handbook for Organisations* (2003), which outlines influences that encourage participation by young people and make it more enjoyable. These include: allowing young people to address real issues, and ensuring that different beliefs and cultures are included and respected. The handbook also states that participation among young people can be hindered by disability and differences in culture and ethnicity.

A number of government documents within New Zealand have recognised the need for participation by youth (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). The document *New Zealand's Agenda For Children* (2002) identifies increasing the participation of children within New Zealand as an "action area" and discusses the need for children

to have “ownership” over their development. This document also notes that young people’s views on adults and adult attitudes could be a major barrier to participation.

The agenda also emphasises the need to improve participation by minority groups within New Zealand reflecting the findings of other international research in this area. The authors note participation by Maori, Pacific, and other ethnic minority groups needs to be increased as these groups may face unique barriers related to culture and ethnicity. The authors also note that children with disabilities also face unique barriers to participation that need to be addressed.

It is clear that the literature with regard to factors that influence participation by young people is very limited, however it is possible to identify some emerging themes within the literature.

#### *Degree of participation*

Literature reviewed would seem to suggest that different degrees of participation could either act as barriers to participation (such as tokenism) or actually encourage participation (Hart, 1992).

Tokenism is cited as a major barrier to young peoples’ participation within literature from New Zealand (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001) and internationally (Dworkin et al, 2003; O’Donoghue et al, 2002; Sherman, 2002). Hart (1992) rates this level of ‘participation’ at the non-participation end of his ladder suggesting that in fact tokenism isn’t actually participation at all.

By contrast, opportunities for young people to initiate, lead, and engage in meaningful participation, are viewed within the literature as great encouragers of meaningful/increased participation (Dworkin et al, 2003; Sherman, 2002). This is reflected within literature produced by government departments locally (Ministry of Social Services, 2002) and overseas (South Australia Office for Youth, 2003), which emphasises the importance of meaningful involvement by young people in effective participation.

#### *Culture/Ethnicity*

The role that culture and ethnicity play as barriers/encouragers to participation for different groups has been recognised both internationally (Cervone & Cushman, 2002; O’Donoghue et al, 2002) and locally (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001; Ministry of Social Services, 2002). Minority groups and youth “at risk” have been recognised internationally as being underrepresented within statistics related to participation (O’Donoghue et al, 2002).

Within New Zealand those working with young people have recognised that Maori, Pacific, and ethnic minority youth, are also less likely to engage in various types of participation (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001) and are more likely to be prevented from participating by cultural/ethnic barriers (Ministry of Social Services, 2002). Little research exists with regard to who participates within New Zealand and there is a definite need for research to investigate specific cultural barriers to participation that exist within New Zealand and the degree to which “at risk” youth actually participate within activities, organisations, and the community.

### *The role of adults*

It is obvious to anyone who has examined participation as a subject area that adults play a crucial role in encouraging or discouraging participation. At one extreme this may involve adults being completely in control of an organisation or activity with young people only attending or consulting (tokenism). At the other extreme this may simply involve adults stepping back and leaving youth participation entirely up to youth. Literature within this area advises that neither of these extremes is desirable in encouraging youth participation (Cervone & Cushman, 2002; Dworkin et al, 2003; Hart, 1992).

The literature in this area suggests that the most effective medium between these two extremes can be found when young people are allowed to lead and drive their own participation and development with adults providing training, guidance, and support as necessary (Dworkin et al, 2003; Sherman, 2002). Naturally the amount of support given by adults versus the amount of leadership by youth depends to some extent on the age and abilities of the young people involved (Hart, 1992). There is no substantial literature within New Zealand that currently examines how organisations within this country balance meaningful youth participation with the need for adult intervention and support. This would make for a potentially interesting study.

### *Meaningful participation*

A good quantity of literature that discusses participation by young people, particularly within organisations, emphasises the need for participation to have a “meaning” or “purpose” that makes it worth while (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001; Sherman, 2002; South Australia Office for Youth, 2003). In essence young people need to feel that through participating within an organisation their ideas and opinions will be genuinely heard and considered and not simply ignored in favour of adult opinions and ideas (Ministry of Social Services, 2002). The extent to which young people’s ideas and opinions are heard is likely to effect whether the process/participation involved acts as an encourager or barrier to participation generally.

### *Other encouragers*

The literature within this area (particularly from New Zealand) contains a raft of suggestions of factors or ideas that might encourage youth participation. These include such things as: use of food as a motivator, changing practices within organisations that work with young people, making participation exciting and interesting, using young leaders, using the internet, and advertising participation opportunities for young people (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001). A number of these ideas would appear to show promise however greater research is needed in order to determine the effectiveness of such factors/ideas in increasing participation.



## **The Current State of Help-Seeking and Participation Within New Zealand**

Establishing the extent to which young people within New Zealand seek help for health related problems or participate within organisations and activities is difficult. The age group discussed within this document (12-25) is an extremely broad one that includes “children” at Intermediate Schools, “adolescents” at High Schools, “young adults” in transition from school to Tertiary Institutions or the workforce, and “adults” who may be studying, working, or unemployed.

No statistics exist within New Zealand that identify rates of help-seeking behaviours for this entire age group. Those studies that do examine help-seeking among youth within New Zealand do so based on narrower age samples and often only refer to help-seeking indirectly. Similarly there are no statistics within New Zealand that identify rates of participation specifically among young people within the 12-25 age group (with the exception of sports participation).

However it is possible to examine existing statistics to extrapolate a view of young people and their help-seeking and participation behaviours within New Zealand.

### **Help-seeking**

Young people in New Zealand have lower levels of healthcare service utilisation than any other age group (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Statistics from the Youth 2000 study conducted by the Adolescent Health Research Group (2003) indicate that young people within New Zealand also face a number of specific health related problems that include: risky driving behaviours, drug use, sexual health issues, mental health problems, and violence.

#### *Informal help-seeking support*

Of the students surveyed for Youth 2000 (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003), more than 90% reported having at least one parent who cares about them a lot. Most students surveyed reported having at least 4 friends at school and “hanging out with friends” came out as the main reason students enjoy being at school. It is possible that these statistics describe a slightly more positive picture of school-age youth than is actually the case. This is because youth who are less connected and performing less well at school are more likely to drop out and are therefore underrepresented in these statistics (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003).

Data from Statistics New Zealand (1996) shows that while most young New Zealanders (12-25) live at home with family, a significant (and slowly increasing number) do not. In terms of ethnicity, Asian youth are most likely to live away from family followed by European (pakeha) youth with Pacific youth least likely to live away from family (Statistics New Zealand, 1996).

When participants in the Youth 2000 study were asked whom they could talk to about a problem, more females (89.4%) than males (72.8%) could identify a close friend they could talk to if they had a problem. Similarly more females (60.6%) than males (55.8%) were able to identify an adult who is not in their family that they could talk to if they had a problem (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). This suggests that

females are more likely to have an informal help-seeking network and may be more likely to seek help as a result. This reflects results from other studies related to help-seeking within New Zealand (Kelliher, 2000; Ministry of Health, Ministry of Maori Development & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 1998).

These statistics are significant because the first (and often only) step in young people's help-seeking involves talking to friends and family about problems or issues (Kelliher, 2000). Also research suggests that youth who are unable to access informal help-seeking networks may also be less likely to engage in formal help-seeking processes as a result (Kuhl et al, 1996).

#### *Formal help-seeking support*

For those surveyed for Youth 2000, the family General Practitioner was the health professional they were most likely to see about a problem (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Other government information backs up this trend for young people generally (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Almost 50% of all participants in Youth 2000 indicated that they had not accessed a health service (despite knowing they needed to) because of a range of perceived barriers (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003).

#### *Seeking help*

Of those students surveyed for Youth 2000, 75.2% of male students and 65.6% of female students reported being under little or no stress. Female students were more likely to report being "up and down emotionally" (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Among those who were surveyed aged 15 years, 13.6% of female students and 6.2% of male students reported having attempted to kill themselves in the past 12 months. Also, 33% of female students and 20.2% of male students reported having had suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months.

Statistics indicate that young people experience suicide and self-inflicted injuries at a much higher rate than the rest of the population with males experiencing a much higher suicide mortality rate than females (Ministry of Health, 1996).

When participants in Youth 2000 were asked about actually seeking help, 5.3% of male students and 7% of female students said they had not talked to someone in their family about how things are going at school. (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). While this is not a clear indicator of help-seeking, it does suggest these students are less likely to have an informal help-seeking network that involves their family. When students were asked about reporting depressive symptoms that are serious and in need of professional assistance, only 18.3% of females were willing to report such symptoms and only 9% of males were willing to report such symptoms.

## **Participation**

#### *Sports participation*

When students surveyed for Youth 2000 were asked which things they enjoyed most about school, the second most popular option (after socialising) was sport. Males in particular stated this was a favourite reason for attending school (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Statistics from SPARC (2002) indicate that young New Zealanders are generally active in sport and physical activity with 94% of 5-17 year

olds and 68% of adults (those over 18) participating regularly in some form of sport or physical activity. The most inactive young people are those aged 16-17 years (47%) with girls in this group being particularly inactive (54%).

Statistics suggest that young males are more active in sport and physical activity than females (reflecting the Youth 2000 result) while also suggesting that rates of participation in sports and physical activities overall may be declining (SPARC, 2002). Maori and European youth (5-17) are most likely to participate in sport or physical activity (71% and 70% respectively). More than two thirds of boys (67%) and girls (70%) are involved in sport or physical activity during school hours, while approximately a third of young people play sport for a club (SPARC, 2002).

Of those interviewed for Youth 2000, 70.4% of males and 57.3% of females reported having participated in strenuous exercise in the last week (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003). Statistics from the Ministry of Youth Affairs (2003) suggest that young people (12-24) spend an average of 7.5 hours per week on physical activity. It is clear from all of these statistics that participation in sport and exercise is a major part of most young people's lives within New Zealand.

In reviewing literature with regard to participation of young people within New Zealand, McLaren (2002) noted that most activities organised by adults within New Zealand in which young people participate, involve sport.

#### *Other leisure participation*

Statistics drawn from Youth 2000 showed that 47.7% of males and 72.3% of females surveyed participate in some form of artistic leisure activity (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003).

Statistics from a time use survey of 8500 New Zealanders conducted in 1998-1999 by Statistics New Zealand, show that youth (12-24) spend the least amount of time of any age group participating in cultural, religious, or civic activities, at an average of 5 minutes per day or 31 hours per year (Statistics New Zealand, 2000). This figure has been shown to gradually increase with age.

Statistics from this survey also indicate that young people (12-24) along with the elderly, are most likely to do some form of unpaid work outside of the home (Statistics New Zealand, 2000). Very little substantial data exists with regard to the amount of time that young people spend in cultural groups and performing arts groups. What little data does exist suggests that those 12-24 spend more time on these than other age groups (Statistics New Zealand, 2000).

#### *Organisational participation*

Very little overall data exists with regard to levels of youth participation within organisations within New Zealand. It is possible to obtain information from individual agencies that work with young people about the numbers of young people that participate within their organisations. However it is very difficult to obtain information about exactly *which* young people are participating within organisations and whether this participation is actually meaningful or whether such involvement is limited to consultation/tokenism.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people are more likely to participate within voluntary organisations than most other age groups however more research to establish this as a social fact would be useful. It has been suggested that those who participate within such organisations in New Zealand, while coming from different cultures and classes, tend to have common plans for higher education, obtaining higher grades, and an intrinsic desire to learn (McLaren, 2002).

*Lack of participation*

International and local studies alike suggest that most young people live in communities where opportunities for some form of participation exist. However this is not universal and evidence (mostly anecdotal) suggests that a significant number of young people within New Zealand live in communities where opportunities to participate either don't exist, or are not known. When students surveyed for Youth 2000 were asked what there was for them to do within their neighbourhood, 15% reported that there was nothing for them to do.

## **Potential Research Areas:**

Having looked at the literature with regard to factors influencing help-seeking and participation, along with help-seeking and participation data that exists within New Zealand, it is now possible to outline a number of areas for potential future research within New Zealand. Research into any one of these topics or even involving more than one is likely to be valuable, and directly applicable to the New Zealand context.

### **Help-seeking**

#### **To what extent do “at risk” youth engage in help-seeking within New Zealand?**

Some research (Heights, 2001) has suggested that young people who are at greatest “risk” during the adolescent years in particular, (including those with the greatest health-related problems), may in fact be less likely to seek help. Research in this area may shed some more light on exactly who is engaging in help-seeking behaviour within New Zealand and (perhaps more importantly), who is not.

#### **How much of a barrier is language in preventing help-seeking among young people?**

There has been some suggestion that differences in language may play a role in preventing formal help-seeking among some groups (Rew et al, 1997). It is unclear from literature within New Zealand, whether or not language acts as such a barrier here. Research in this area would serve to confirm or dispel the suggestion that differences in language may prevent some young people in New Zealand from seeking help.

#### **To what extent does a lack of knowledge prevent young people within New Zealand from seeking-help when they have a problem?**

#### **What are the most effective ways to communicate knowledge and information about helping services to young people within New Zealand?**

Almost all the research conducted within New Zealand with regard to help-seeking has identified a lack of knowledge or information as a barrier to help-seeking among young people (Crown Public Health, 1997; Kelliher, 2000; Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001). Additional research in this area would serve to confirm current findings, (with regard to lack of information being a barrier), while potentially identifying new and effective ways of transmitting more information to young people with regard to help-seeking.

#### **How much of a barrier is “self-sufficiency” in preventing young people in New Zealand from seeking help?**

Kelliher (2000) found that ‘self-sufficiency’ may be a major barrier to help-seeking among young people within New Zealand. Further research in this area would allow some exploration of exactly what self-sufficiency is, an indication of the extent to which ‘self-sufficiency’ acts as a barrier to help seeking in New Zealand, and some suggestions as to what causes self-sufficiency and how these causes could be addressed.

**What do young people in New Zealand think of the organisations that are there to help them? To what extent does this attitude act as a barrier/encourager to seeking help from these organisations?**

A number of local and international pieces of literature have suggested that young people's perceptions of helping organisations can be a barrier to help-seeking (Kelliher, 2000; Kuhl et al, 1996). Ideas on exactly what these perceptions are vary. Research in this area would assist in identifying the extent to which perception of organisations prevents young people in New Zealand from seeking help from these organisations. Such research may also reveal some common or dominant perceptions about organisations within New Zealand that could be addressed.

**How much do young New Zealanders use the internet as a source of information/help-seeking? What makes the internet an effective help-seeking tool for young people in New Zealand?**

The presence of literature with regard to how young people use the internet to gather information and seek help is extremely limited (Ministry of Health & Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2002). Local research is needed to establish whether young New Zealanders are using the internet to search for information/help and to what extent this is occurring.

**What influences (specific to Maori and Pacific youth) encourage/prevent young Maori and Pacific youth from seeking help within New Zealand?**

A number of local literature sources suggest that Maori and Pacific youth are underrepresented when it comes to seeking help (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001). It seems likely that there are some specific cultural influences that impact on Maori and Pacific youth when engaging in help-seeking behaviour, however there is very little literature in this area and even less research. Research in this area would serve to identify some influences specific to Maori and Pacific youth that may encourage/prevent them from seeking help.

**To what extent do Asian youth engage in help-seeking behaviours within New Zealand? What influences (specific to Asian youth) encourage/prevent young Asian youth from seeking help within New Zealand?**

Evidence with regard to Asian youth seeking help within New Zealand is essentially non-existent. Asian youth are an increasing group within New Zealand's youth (Statistics New Zealand, 2002), and there is a desperate need to conduct research with regard to how many people within this group are seeking help, and whether there are cultural influences specific to this group that may encourage/prevent them from seeking help.

## **Participation**

**To what extent do young people within New Zealand participate in Government, Non-Government, and community organisations and activities?**

There is very little data within New Zealand with regard to the numbers of young people that participate within organisations and activities. The one exception to this trend is sport where some fairly comprehensive figures are available (SPARC, 2002). Research in this area would provide a useful overview of the extent to which young people across New Zealand are participating within organisations and activities.

**To what extent do young people involved in Government, Non-Government, and community organisations within New Zealand actually participate? How much is this ‘participation’ real participation, and how much is it tokenism/consultation?**

Research in this area would involve looking at different Government, Non-Government, and community organisations within New Zealand, and reviewing how these organisations encourage “real” (Hart, 1992) participation among young people within their organisational processes, structures, and policy development.

**How many Maori and Pacific youth within New Zealand participate in Government, Non-Government, and community organisations and activities?**

**What influences (specific to Maori and Pacific youth) encourage/prevent young Maori and Pacific youth from participating in Government, Non-Government, and community organisations and activities within New Zealand?**

Within New Zealand there has been some recognition by those who work with young people that Maori and Pacific youth are less likely to engage in various types of participation (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001). These people have also suggested that this may be caused by cultural/ethnic barriers to participation. Research in this area would help to establish: whether Maori and Pacific youth are underrepresented when it comes to participation, which activities/organisations Maori and Pacific youth are most likely to be underrepresented in, and identify some possible barriers/encouragers related to culture/ethnicity of Maori and Pacific youth.

**To what extent do Asian youth within New Zealand participate in Government, Non-government, and community organisations and activities?**

**What influences (specific to Asian youth) encourage/prevent young Asian youth from participating in Government, Non-Government, and community organisations and activities within New Zealand?**

Statistics with regard to levels of participation among Asian youth within New Zealand are non-existent. There is a need for research in this area to establish the extent to which Asian youth actually participate within New Zealand. Such research could involve investigating the types of organisations that Asian youth are involved in, and identifying some of the cultural/ethnic influences that may encourage/discourage participation by this diverse group within New Zealand.

**How do different Government, Non-Government, and community organisations around New Zealand balance meaningful youth participation, with the need for adult intervention and support?**

There is some discussion within the literature about “meaningful” youth participation and “true” participation (Hart, 1992). There is a need for research in New Zealand looking specifically at the different organisations that work with young people in this country, and how these organisations cater for the participation and support needs of the young people who work within them.

**How much influence do the actions of adults within organisations influence the level of participation by young people within those organisations?**

Adults are viewed in a growing amount of literature (particularly international literature), as being one of the main barriers to meaningful youth participation

(Dworkin et al, 2003; Sherman, 2002). Studies have suggested that this may be the case within New Zealand (Kelliher, 2000), however research in this area specific to New Zealand would allow more exploration of how adults affect the participation opportunities of young people within organisations and activities within New Zealand. Such research would allow consideration of factors specific to New Zealand culture/society that may not be identified/discussed in international literature.

**To what extent does participation by young people in sports activities within New Zealand encourage positive healthy development?**

It is no secret to anyone in New Zealand that kiwis love their sport. This is supported by research and statistics generally that show high levels of sports participation among young people within New Zealand (SPARC, 2002). There is however a growing body of literature internationally and locally (McLaren, 2002) that suggests that the link between sports participation and healthy development within previous literature may have been overstated. As such there is an opportunity for research within New Zealand specifically looking at the link between sports participation and healthy youth development to establish whether a strong causal relationship between the two exists and what the measurable outcomes are for those young people who participate in sport, and those who don't.

**What are the most effective ways to communication information about participation opportunities to young people within New Zealand?**

As with help-seeking, research into participation among young people within New Zealand has suggested that a lack of information about opportunities may be the greatest barrier to participation (Ministry of Youth Affairs, 2001). Research in this area could explore whether more information about organisations and activities is likely to improve participation among young New Zealanders, and which methods of communication are likely to be more effective in transmitting such information.



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