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An analysis of the Rakan Muda youth programme as a crime prevention mechanism in Malaysia

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AN ANALYSIS OF THE RAKAN MUDA YOUTH PROGRAMME AS A CRIME PREVENTION MECHANISM IN MALAYSIA

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Arts (Hons.) in Sociology.

From

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By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis analyses the roles of the Rakan Muda youth programme in Malaysia, and in particular at its role as a crime prevention mechanism. This analysis of the social construction of youth problems is done in the context of rapid industrialisation and urbanisation in Malaysia, with a special focus on the eastern state of Sarawak. The thesis use three sets of data: information from the Ministry of Youth and Sport which administers the scheme, items from both peninsula and Sarawak newspapers, and interviews with thirty members of the Rakan Muda programme in Kuching, Sarawak. Young people are considered by the authorities to be 'at risk' of criminal involvement. Accordingly, their behaviour, especially their leisure activities, are highly publicised by the media, more so when those activities are perceived to contradict the norms and values of Malaysian society. The Rakan Muda programme allows the authorities to interfere in young people's lifestyle while claiming to ensure that the young do not deviate from these norms and values. This thesis examines the mechanisms by which the government does this, and makes some tentative proposals on how young people might read the government's intent.
ABBREVIATIONS

BH  Berita Harian
BP  Borneo Post
GDP Gross Domestic Product
NEP New Economic Policy
NGO Non-Governmental Organisation
NST New Straits Times
OECD Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development
RM  Ringgit Malaysia
RMB Rakan Muda Bridgade
RML Rakan Muda Lifestyle
ST  Sarawak Tribune
TS  The Star
UM  Utusan Malaysia
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CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Although concern over the perceived moral decay of the young generation in Malaysia is not new, the issues currently being discussed are. Those issues reflect a concern with the by-products of modernity resulting from urbanisation and industrialisation, especially violence, social dislocation, experimentation with new sexual mores, new forms of escapism such as “loafing” (lepak in colloquial Bahasa Malaysia) and drug-taking. Government statistics show a rising divorce rate, later marriages, urban drift and a breakdown of the network of social support and services including extended family (Ariffin: 1995, pp. 343-371). Recent reports published by the Ministry of Youth and Sport (1994; 1995; 1996) show an increase in crime committed by the young generation. The media also produces stories depicting the young generation as easily led victims of rapid social and cultural change. All individuals in Malaysia experience the effects of these changes but the young people are seen as the most vulnerable and least equipped to deal with them, tending to suffer a greater risk of deviant involvement.

Within this context, my purpose is to try and examine the youth “problem” as a social phenomenon in Malaysia. I want to focus on the experiences of young people in the nexus of increasing industrialisation (in particular the modern fast-paced lifestyle in Kuching, East Malaysia), the media and the family, and to problematise privileged or mainstream accounts of the youth problem.

To begin with, the apparent increases in crime need to be questioned. In Malaysia the definition of youth is fraught with difficulties, not only because of variations in police
crime statistics but also because there is no uniform definition. Definitions vary not only between departments but also within the Ministry of Youth and Sport itself, as responsibility for defining youth is delegated to a variety of government departments. In Malaysia, young people can: be in part held responsible for crime at the age of 10; be liable to pay full fare on public transport at the age of 12; undertake employment at the age of 15; cease to attend full-time education at 15; vote, be send to adult prison and be entitled to a driving licence at the age of 18 (Department of Statistics: 1993).

According to the Malaysian Federal Police Department (1997), the young generation is made up of males and females aged between 10 and 18 years. However, the major definition of the Ministry of Youth and Sport extends the category to include those aged up to 25 years. Yet when implementing youth programmes, the Ministry extends the category even further to include people aged from 26 to 39 years (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994, p. 2). These inconsistencies help to illustrate that there is no clear age at which young people are seen to emerge from the “problematic” period in the Ministry’s view. Legal definitions of childhood, youth and adulthood have been developed by the different institutions of government for different purposes and at different moments in history. This complication of definitions certainly does not aid a clear definition of “young people”. For example, the police definition is used to check levels of youth crime while other definitions are used for the purpose of policy making, in particular by the Ministry of Youth and Sport when recruiting members for its Rakan Muda programme. For the purpose of this thesis, I have focused on youths aged between 15 and 26. In other words, I adopt one of the major definitions used by the Ministry of Youth and Sport when targeting its policies. This group forms the largest category of young people involved in
Concerns about the youth problem allow the government to intervene in social behaviour. According to Pyvis, generally the goal of government intervention "seems to be, to make use of the young, to control them, to ready them to serve rather than to serve them. The needs of youth are determined by those in power – a coterie of elders, and their aim is apparently to produce a manageable youth population willing and able to do their bidding" (1992: p. 18). Training and education programmes are the key features of Malaysian youth policy, and they rely on a view as being deficient in skills, knowledge and attitudes of moral obligation and discipline (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, pp. 7-9; Yassin: 1995, pp. 3-11). This kind of policy approach builds on the assumption that the causes of youth related social problems lie with the youths themselves. The failure of young people to match social expectations renders them both a curse and an encumbrance. The solution lies in overcoming their deficiencies and making them more amenable to discipline (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, p. 2). Youth policy, in this view, is a form of social control.

Given this, one aim of my study is to explore the way in which the youth question is problematised by state institutions, especially the Ministry of Youth and Sport. In 1994 the Ministry of Youth and Sport introduced the *Rakan Muda* (Youth) programme, aimed primarily at lessening the problems associated with juvenile delinquency. The immediate goal of the programme is to establish services and infrastructure capable of supporting the needs of the young generation. Although still in its infancy, the programme has generated responses from various parties including government
representatives, non-government organisation (NGOs), as well as sections of the public such as academics and business leaders. Underlying their concerns are questions as to whether the programme is an appropriate response to the youth issue *(New Straits Times: 27/2/1997, p. 7; The Star Online: 6/4/1997; New Straits Times: 11/3/1997, p. 13).*

One body of opinion suggests that young people are the victims of today's changing social environment *(Sarawak Tribune Online: 21/4/1997; New Straits Times: 13/2/1997; New Straits Times: 11/3/1997, p. 13)* in which changes occur in social expectations, social relationships, peer influences, media portrayals and other pressures. Mardzuki argues that “young people are exposed to greater social expectations from school and job markets. Some changes in social and peer relationships are reflected in the increase in pre- and extra-marital relationships and social groupings that do not conform to traditional family patterns. Young people also admit greater access to media information and influence’ *(Sarawak Tribune: 25/7/96).*

Malaysia is fast industrialising (Jomo: 1992; Bowie: 1994), a process accompanied by many social changes, sometimes traumatic. Individuals feel the effects of these changes and adjust or react to them more immediately than social institutions and policy makers. When a country undergoes industrialisation, lifestyles change and Malaysia is now experiencing this process where young people are caught in the midst of urban transformation and development *(New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 7).* In this view it is not fair to place blame on the young because they are deemed to be overwhelmed by tremendous social and psychological pressures beyond their control.

In contrast, media images tend to present the young in Malaysia as the purveyors of trouble or as a threat to society because of their intensity in the pursuit of “fun” *(New
the media have identified the phenomenon of lepak, bohsia and bohjan¹ (to be discussed in more detail in chapter 4) which together capture the lifestyle of the young, presenting them as sexually and morally deviant. Constructing them in such images contributes to the creation of a moral panic (Cohen: 1973, p. 69). For this reason, my thesis also involves an analysis of media coverage. This analysis is then counterposed by interviews with young people in Sarawak, the state capital of Kuching in East Malaysia. The interviews are important because often in the process of developing policy on youth problems the voices of the young are given little or no prominence.

1.1 Limits and Contribution of this study

Very little work has been done on youth in Malaysia and youth policy in particular. Spencer and Navaratnam’s (1980) study looks at drug use among youths in secondary school in Malaysia. The study focuses on youthful drug use in relation to self-assertion against a set of beliefs and attitudes about drugs and drug taking. Their findings indicate that the new pattern of drug use by youth has transcended older cultural differences between the Malaysian states and is in turn explained by a more universally familiar set of characteristics in adolescent development. A second study by Jamilah Ariffin (1995) discusses the nature and impact of economic and social change in Malaysia. Her analysis of country and local level statistics indicates that changes have created a widening gap between the values of the traditional culture and the expectations of the younger generation. Ariffin suggested that these circumstances promote anomie as the young struggle to resolve the conflict between their local cultural background and
Western notions of individual success. Although traditional moral values have not been forgotten, the desire to achieve financial success has become primary to many and this reordering of priorities has led to escalating crime rates among the young. Further, she argues that child abuse and other forms of anomie expression have increased as the extended family support system of the past disappears in the new mobile society.

My research is slightly different because it focuses on the social construction of youth problems in the context of the *Rakan Muda* programme as a crime prevention mechanism. Unlike Ariffin, I do not regard statistics of youth crime as self-evident. Rather, I consider them to be one of the mechanisms in the exercise of power, the other being the media imagery. This study also focuses on young people involved in *Rakan Muda* themselves, exploring the way in which they negotiate what government, media and society perceive to be a problem in Malaysia. Since no similar study in the state of Sarawak has been written, this thesis is largely exploratory.

There are thirteen states in Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia consists of eleven states while East Malaysia has two states, Sabah and Sarawak. Most government youth policy originates from the federal government in Kuala Lumpur, on the Peninsula. In context of Malaysia federalism, Sarawak is considered peripheral to the “real” social and political developments taking place in Peninsular Malaysia (King: 1990; Majid Cooke: 1997). In this context, government policy is often formulated to fit the Peninsula’s conditions and simply transferred to Sarawak, despite the differences in social development and historical conditions.
1.2 Industrialisation and social problems

Industrialisation took over as the lead sector in the economy as Malaysia entered the 1980s. This change is having a dramatic social impact. The rapid pace of industrialisation in Malaysia created jobs for both urban dwellers and migrants from the countryside, and was based largely on cheap supplies of an unskilled, poorly educated and submissive workforce, mainly single men and women from rural areas. However it also contributed to social problems in the county because of the pace of change. Even though industrialisation affects almost all individuals in Malaysia, it is young people who tend to experience more pressure.

Associated with industrialisation has been a series of important changes affecting rural-urban migration. Rural migration to urban areas increased in both volume and speed after the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1972. Malay urbanisation proceeded more rapidly that of other ethnic groups, and a significant part of the most recent Malay migration to the main cities has comprised young single persons seeking employment at low wages in unskilled factory jobs. This aspect of Malay migration is liable to produce a social revolution in Malay life, because the returns from such employment are adequate only for a single unmarried life, not for establishing a family, whilst the prospects of advancement and for higher earning power for a large proportion of these low-skilled workers are not good. This plus the removal of young people from the guidance and assistance of the elder people in their village society, and their exposure to unprecedented freedom in personal behaviour, are liable to produce adaptation problems in the new social environment of the cities.
I will now move on to discuss in more detail the literature on these momentous changes taking place in Malaysia, in order to situate more clearly the concerns about youth.

1 Bohsia or Bohjan are colloquial Bahasa Malaysia terms used to label those engaging in pre-marital, extra-marital or multiple sexual relationships. Bohsia refers to females, while Bohjan refers to males.
CHAPTER 2

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Deviance, crime and disorder occur in every society and Malaysia is no exception. Yet most people in Malaysia probably live in an environment that is relatively safe. What accounts, then, for the perception that crime and deviance have gotten worse or even out of hand? This literature review looks at the concept of moral panic and evaluates its usefulness as a mechanism for exercising power in order to effect social control over young people in Malaysia. State publications and media debates about youth problems are examined, and social change in Sarawak is examined within the larger context of economic and political development in Malaysia as a whole.

2.1 Young people and the question of control

Historical evidence seems to indicate that the present era in Malaysia is in many ways less violent and crime-ridden than at other times since independence in 1957. For instance, the May 13th riots in 1969 were characterised by racial conflict and public chaos, and were the culmination of a period in which ethnic tolerance was low and both Chinese and Malays felt unsafe and threatened (Osman-Rani: 1990, p. 204). Conflicts involving ethnic minorities, corruption of prominent political figures and crime involving the young all occurred in the late 19th century and earlier this century (Ariffin: 1995). Yet crime, especially that committed by the young generation, has recently made media headlines, and electoral campaigns often focus on “get tough” policies (New Straits Times: 11/3/1997, p. 13). In this context, the question as to whether crime rates are increasing and why is
important in understanding why youth crime has become an important public issue and to appreciate what ends are served by highlighting it.

Social control has been employed widely by social scientists to refer to almost any system or network of interactions, encounters and relations involving elements of power, authority, coercion or repression (Edward: 1975). Stanley Cohen in *Visions of Social Control* defines social control as: “all those social processes and methods through which society ensures that its members conform to expectations. These normally include internalisation, socialisation, education, peer group pressure, public opinion and the like as well as the operations of specialised formal agencies such as the police, the law and all other state power” (Cohen: 1985, p. 3).

This concept requires looking beyond the young generation itself to the larger picture of the processes involved in the social construction of youth problems and the corresponding questions of power and its exercise. What is taking place regarding youth crime in Malaysia can be explained by using Tame’s (1991) two approaches: Traditional Conservativism and Authoritarian Populism. The Traditional Conservative approach view of crime includes not only that activity which endangers property or the person but morality as well (Tame: 1991). Hence, attacks on certain traditional values and people’s respect for the authorities in Malaysia can generally be viewed as criminal. From this perspective, youth crime is not only a matter of free choice, it is also linked to certain intrinsic aspects of humanity. In particular, people are seen as possessing certain natural urges that go against the more civilised or divine purposes of society. In order to constrain these urges, it is necessary to establish a strong order based upon personal
sacrifice, self-discipline and submission to authorities (Tame: 1991). Order must take supremacy over all else, including justice. In other words, it is a priority to maintain order for peace. Youth crime is said to be caused by the unwillingness of young people to accept discipline, the undermining of traditional loyalties (such as to the patriarchal family) and the pursuit of immediate individual gratification without appropriate hard work (Ministry of Youth and Sports: 1995).

According to this approach, punishment, in terms of preventive coercion, is an essential part of control. This not only follows from personal responsibility for one's actions but also because punishment has an important symbolic impact on society as a whole. That is, punishment has to be seen in terms of its effect on the promotion of moral solidarity through stigmatisation. Strong emphasis is placed upon the importance of morality in the maintenance of social authority. Thus someone who does something deemed to be wrong or harmful must be punished directly and appropriately in order to set the moral standard. This view generally results in anti-libertarian views with respect to pornography, sexual behaviour, drug use and abortion; that is, it favours intervention in areas regarded as victimless crimes. Indeed, the conservative point of view often favours increased state intervention in everyday social life because it is felt that only strong coercive measures will ultimately keep people in line and teach them the discipline they require to live as members of a civilised community.

Authoritarian Populism is also oriented to upholding traditional values as expressed in the norms and sanctions of society. This approach tends to provide a moralistic and punitive approach to issues of crime and criminality (Tame: 1991). This
“get tough” approach has an appeal to people on the basis of “us versus them”. The “us” is always viewed as virtuous, while those labelled as “them” are viewed as parasites, destroying the social body. In terms of youth crime, the essence of populism exaggerates the dangerousness of crime and the foreign or alien nature of the criminal. The criminal is seen to be outside the society - its networks, institutions, communities, mores, values and ways of life. This is a part of essentialism. The treatment of young people by Malaysian authorities in the legal system is an exaggerated version of a more general social control policy to which all young people are subject. Young people tend to be more likely to violate dominant and restrictive standards of morality so the authorities see the right to control their morality.

The rhetoric of populism reduces all crime problems to very simple solutions. Offenders are made entirely responsible for their actions, particularly when their lifestyle is seen as being outside the mainstream institutions of society. Social distancing occurs at the level of rhetoric and policy development. It is a short step from this to encouraging simplistic solutions to the crime problem. If the problem is constructed as being one of “us” against “them” solution is seen to lie in enhanced state power. What Malaysia is experiencing at the moment can be compared to nineteenth century Europe, a period of the consolidation of capitalism and the capitalist mode of production. This was a period that witnessed major technological developments and the entrenchment of mass production (rather than agricultural production or merchant trading) as the dominant form of production and source of profit.
In Malaysia recent decades have seen the concentration of rural migrants into major cities, the creation and expansion of the factory system, the introduction of new production technologies and sources of energy and expanded communication and transport networks. Changes in basic production techniques and relations, and the flow of "cheap labour" into industrial employment has seen the emergence of a new social class - the working class or proletariat.

This can be linked to the early essentialist theory of crime where the new proletariat was seen as almost another species to be examined and controlled, and distanced from elites. Individual traits can be discovered in offenders and these in turn can be measured and classified in some way.

The focus of analysis therefore is on the nature and characteristics of the offender, rather than on the criminal act. Offenders can be scientifically studied and their defects can be diagnosed, classified and ultimately treated or dealt with in some way (Fishbein: 1990; Taylor, Walton and Young: 1973, p. 38). Because deviant behaviour stems from the individual, and is part of their character, the incidence of deviance cannot be assumed to be fully reflected in officially recorded violations of the law. This is because the social or moral consensus in society can be violated without necessarily being detected or processed formally in the criminal justice system.

Authoritarian populism refers to a process in which crime is depicted in a series of moral panics about law-and-order issues (Hall: 1980; Hall et al.: 1978), where reliance is put on showing offenders to be essentially deviant. The extent and seriousness of youth crime is highlighted but not necessarily backed up by statistical and other research
findings, and this in turn is used to justify harsher penalties and the spread of state authorities into more and more spheres of young people’s everyday life. The rationale behind such intrusion is normally a combination of the protection of private property and the differential treatment that should be meted out to the moral and immoral in society (Hall: 1980).

The broad appeal of authoritarian populism is due in part to the pervasive influence of the print and electronic media in conveying particular types of images of crime in society (Grabosky and Wilson: 1989). The flooding of the media with stories about youth crime has the real and pertinent effects of heightening people’s fear of crime, feeding stereotypes of the typical offender, over-emphasising the extent of extremely violent and serious crimes, and fostering acceptance for policies which promise to get something “done” about the crime problem.

2.2 Moral order and Moral Panic

According to the Ministry of Youth and Sport (1995) the focus on young people as perpetrators of crime provides opportunities for various social action groups to make claims about wider social problems, including changes affecting the nature of the family, the relationship between families and the State, the apparent lack of morality and responsibility among young people, unemployment, concerns about crime and personal safety, the kinds of penalties that should be adopted, and the meaning of citizenship. It is true that some young people commit serious, violent offences with hideous consequences. However, most crimes are those of minor property damage (especially graffiti in public
places), motor vehicle theft and street offences (The Star Online: 6/4/1997, p. 2). An overwhelming focus on the risk of young people's involvement in crime fuels contemporary debates on the efficacy of youth policy and invites suggestions for better prevention. With the aid of news media that keep ratings high by sensationalising crime, and of criminal justice officials who skilfully manipulate crime statistics, the result is a virtually unshakeable public perception that crime is, at the very least, steadily rising and possibly out of control. Social problems among young people are most newsworthy and hardly a day passes without some aspects of them in the media. The upward trend in numbers and the intensity of social problems have long been anticipated from coverage of an upsurge in discipline problems since the late 1980s, especially in violent delinquent acts such as vandalism, assault, extortion and gang fights.

The impression is that youth crime in Malaysia is a serious problem. However, is this really the case or is public perception being moulded by relatively few but highly publicised incidents? Despite the perception that youth crime is out of control, little attempt has been made to examine whether the fears about escalating youth crime are realistic. Cohen defines a moral panic as "a condition, episode, person or group of persons which emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media" (Cohen: 1985, p. 9).

In response to perceived problems, a youth programme called Rakan Muda was established in Malaysia in October 1994. The programme was adopted as a result of the government's concern with statistical evidence (Department of Statistics: 1993) of an increasing rate of crime and delinquency associated with the young generation in Malaysia.
Even though the implementation of the programme will only reach its fourth year in October 1998, the debate about the success or failure of the programme as a preventive measure against crime and delinquency has raised issues with regard to government discourse and media coverage. Individuals from government, NGOs, business leaders, researchers and academics have questioned the integrity of the programme as a social control mechanism.

According to the Ministry of Youth and Sport (1995, pp. 10-12) young people are regarded as a key indicator of the state of the nation itself. They are expected to reflect the economic conditions, shifts in cultural values over sexuality, morality and family life, changes in class relations, concepts of nationhood and occupational structures. Young people are assumed to hold the key to the nation’s future and the treatment and management of youth is expected to provide the solution to problems such as drug abuse, “loafing”, teenage pregnancy and teenage sexual relations (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, pp. 13-15).

Differential reactions to authority and control are largely determined by the experiences of young people in the wider community. As Howard Sercombe points out: “Young people absorb, are co-opted into and generate a whole range of often fragmentary ideologies with which they make sense of their lives. Some of those come from school, some from living with parents, some from the media or the pronouncements of official speakers, some from the grind and pleasures of a specific or shared life as a 15-year-old in the 1990s. Some come from the way that architecture, urban planning, the space we have
to live in, is constructed. Some are imposed, some are inherited, some are invented. All are adapted.” (Sercombe: 1993, p. 35)

Young people are often the subject of interventionist policies implemented by law and order institutions, education and social welfare systems as well as community-based programmes designed for the purpose of crime prevention. Their voices, which are often unheard, provide a disturbing account of powerlessness under various forms of institutionalised social control (Sercombe: 1993, p. 35). Their opinions are based on experiences of social control practices in contacts with the police, educational authorities, in youth programmes or in society at large which are structured to generate well-behaved and acceptable individuals in the community (Sercombe: 1993, p. 35).

Social policy in Malaysia emphasises individual success and power which is often at odds with young people’s relatively powerless position. Giddens (1990) offers useful sociological insights which can assist our understanding of contemporary youth experiences in developing countries. His work charts the nature of recent social changes in late modernity, in particular the weakening of collectivist traditions and the intensification of individual values. The result of these changes is that the individual is increasingly held responsible by the state for his or her own fate. Accountability and achievement are values which are constantly reinforced for young Malaysians by the school system and the media.

For most people, their knowledge concerning crime does not come from direct experience of victimisation, detection of offending by authorities, nor from academic studies or policy documents. Rather, knowledge about deviance or crime by the young
generation is mediated and constructed through stories circulated in news broadcasts and TV shows, the daily tabloids and talk-back commentaries.

These images cover only a limited terrain of possibilities. There are four broad categories in contemporary representations of young people: the “ideal” young person; the young as “threat”; young people as “victim”; and young people as “parasite”. Representation of young people as a threat dominates, however (White: 1990, p. 107). Even though White’s work based on Australian conditions, Malaysian youths are also depicted in the same images (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, pp. 10-15).

There is much research looking at the relationship between the young generation and the media. Stan Cohen’s classic work, *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* on the clashes between the mods and rockers in England during the 1960s showed the power of negative representation in amplifying disorder and bringing about a political crackdown on youth (Cohen: 1973). Media often simplify and label activities of the young generation either as “trouble” or “fun”. News and documentary discourses normally emphasise the ugly troubled side of young lifestyles. Cohen showed that riots on the beach between mods and rockers hardly existed at all until the news media took up the issue. The same process occurs in Malaysia, where newspaper coverage of youths is mostly based on their criminal pursuits. In Malaysia, the ripple effects of the Prime Minister (*New Straits Times*: 5/3/1997, p. 7) mentioning the many social ills affecting the young were almost immediate and led to a considerable amount of moral panic concerning Malaysian youth. For example, “loafing”, *bohsia* and *bohjan* were reported in news media, only representing bad images of young people (*The Star Online*: 6/4/1997, p. 2).
In public social space, especially shopping malls, young people are liable to be seen as a threat. The transformative power of media exaggeration and overstatement should therefore be carefully monitored when dealing with such issues (Walton: 1993). Similarly, Hall and others analysed the creation of the phenomenon of “mugging” and its association with young people, in particular black British youth (Hall et al.: 1978). In Australia researchers have looked at the role of the media in riots at the Bathurst motorcycle races through their amplification of anti-police sentiment and limited portrayal of events (Cunneen et al.: 1989). Others have looked at media representations of bodgies and widgies (Stratton: 1992) and contemporary youth subculture (Walton: 1993). A common theme in all these studies is the way the young generation and their subcultures are portrayed as deviant and criminal, with a corresponding emphasis on sexual behaviour and violence.

Media images of youth crime can have a major impact on public policy depending upon how politicians use and misuse the portrayals. From the point of view of social control, media portrayals of certain types of youth subculture can produce “deviancy amplification” (Cohen: 1973), that is, public labelling of particular groups of young people which then generates further deviant behaviour in the group so labelled.

In an examination of newspaper reporting of young people in Western Australia between 1990 and 1992, Sercombe (1993, pp. 16-17) found that the major issue reported in relation to young people was crime. The study also found that two sources of information (police and courts) dominated the news. Sercombe suggests that the reason lies in the economics of news production and in the news values of the media. The media
are big business, and their representations need to be understood within the context of profitability (what sells) and of discourses about social normality. In terms of production, statements from courts and police are routine, cheap and easy to collect. The close connection between the police and journalists has been commented upon in a number of Australian studies (Grabosky and Wilson: 1989; Cunneen et al.: 1989). Even though there are no Malaysian studies directly on this issue, it can be hypothesised that a similar pattern will be found there, especially when youth problems come into focus.

The high rates of youth crime reported by official statistics and the media shape perceptions of young people who are visible in the public domain. Media coverage of apparent crime waves involving young people creates a particular kind of social awareness, not only of the alleged offences, but of the kinds of young people most likely to commit these offences. Invariably the focus of such media stories is on street crimes (loitering, street fights, illegal motor racing, motor vehicle theft, etc.) and the main message conveyed is of danger and the vulnerability of young people or the general public to this kind of crime.

A consequence of this perceived threat posed by young people who are hanging around shopping centres or in the streets is increased state intervention in the affairs of young people as a matter of course. This intervention into their lives combines with difficulties of economic hardship, low self-esteem, few social resources and general boredom associated with exclusion from the spheres of production and consumption to make an explosive mix of desperation and anger. Young people can thus be caught up in the web of no money, no job, no future and no power.
The exclusion of young people from the traditional means of income and social status in the sphere of production (Cunneen et al.: 1989) has also altered their position in the sphere of consumption. It is in this sphere of activity that young people are most prevalent as offenders and are most likely to be identified as threats to existing economic policy and institutions. The availability of paid work and disposable income leads led to the construction of leisure activities that often target young people. As Stratton points out, “with the advent of an increasingly consumption-oriented society independence came to be measured more and more as a function of possible expenditure. This relates directly to the rise of institutionalised and commercialised leisure activities” (1992, p. 163). The position of young people as consumers also carries with it the tacit acceptance by shopkeepers, business people and state officials of a new role for young people in society. But if young people do not have the means or opportunity to play this role, yet still desire to fulfil it, the resulting dilemma can lead to social tension.

Morality, or deviance ascription, enters into media constructions in two ways: (a) the subject-matter may be unambiguously moral, that is, the person or behaviour being discussed is either already widely praised and admired or condemned; or (b) methods of presentation (vocabulary used, interpretation of the event, and the content in which it is placed) cause almost any item of news to raise questions of morality (whether of a positive or negative kind).

Among the codes and conventions which give form and structure to mass media accounts of the life of young people are those which reduce difference to simple evil. The media’s force is all too often apparent in that it appears to speak from a supposedly
neutral position, while in fact its attraction and simplicity rest upon the crudest of propositions. Jock Young (1971) has argued that the media are often in an unstated reliance on the nemesis effect: that somehow any breach of norms, especially drug taking or youthful deviance, will lead inevitably to a bad end. From the media’s point of view the image of youth is very selective, they are either saints or sinners. For the most part, the young generation is only visible to society via the media when it poses a problem, when it is trouble (Sercombe: 1993).

In Malaysia, the media portrayal of youth follows this pattern, and youths are represented as wild and troubled. Youths are often blamed for generating the social decay of the country. The most common images of youths in media are “ignoring the wrath of God, killing, raping and bullying others, taking and selling drugs, prostituting, vandalising property, indulging in ‘mind less Western-inspired activities’ and where possible, lounging around without a care in the world” (New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6). Besides increasing the sale of newspapers, such negative images provoke broad social concerns about the seriousness of the youth problem (New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6).

2.3 The focus on intervention

Social problems and their consequences for young people are causes for major concern in government intervention and public discussion. Yet we often find young people’s problems ascribed to a lack of particular personal attributes. There is a disturbing silence about the changes that have fundamentally altered Malaysia’s social and economic structures and which have created a broad range of social problems for young people
The inadequacies and failings of the political and bureaucratic systems are rarely discussed in public.

Not surprisingly, the individual as the focus for intervention produces pathological interpretations of crime, resistance and other behaviours coming to the attention of social control agents (Ariffin: 1995, p. 344). Reasons for such behaviour are typically expressed in terms of poor self-esteem, inadequate problem-solving or decision-making skills, and being the victims of sexual or other forms of abuse. If the incidence of youth crime increases, this can be attributed to "problem youth" and a whole series of "respectable fears have been dealt with in this way" (Pearson: 1983, p. 229).

The focus on the individual as the problem distracts from any consideration of structural causes. For example, it can be argued that social settings may precipitate deviant and criminal behaviour. Such settings can include group interaction in peer groups and family relations, social institutions that fundamentally shape the relative power and vulnerability of young people (such as the economy, education system and the labour market), and structural orders of gender, social class and ethnicity (Coventry, Muncies and Walters: 1992).

Ariffin claims that inequality, disadvantage and the powerlessness of young Malaysians are created by structural forces, such as the rapid developments in industrialisation and urbanisation which have created major changes in the institution of the family and wealth distribution in urban areas in Malaysia (Ariffin: 1995). According to this view, many of those caught up in state intervention programmes are in fact victims of an injustice compounded by discretionary practices which tend to victimise young people.
Consequently, there are those who think that the practices of police, welfare, education and community agencies that rely on coercion and the continued exclusion of young people through processes of criminalisation will not address the problems faced by young Malaysians (New Straits Times: 6/3/1997, p. 13).

The search for other solutions continues. At the forefront of an alternative are arguments regarding social justice, stressing that social development policies should be based on the needs of young people. Changing society’s institutions and practices that generate injustice and inequality is seen as a way of producing a socially just society. These kinds of interventions are expected to provide the means for enabling young people to assume roles as fully integrated, financially secure and democratic participants in society (Coventry: 1994).

Young people themselves are in a particularly disadvantaged position in terms of having their own opinions or views on matters heard in the media. They have neither official legitimacy, nor the institutional means of making their views known.

Finally, we need to consider how representations of young people coincide with their position as a law-and-order problem within electoral politics. Virtually all political parties in Malaysia now have law-and-order issues as a central component of their electoral campaign. In most elections, the extent of youth crime and appropriate responses to it have been used as an electoral issue. Often states in Malaysia have attempted to outdo one another in order to be seen as the most punitive (New Straits Times: 25/2/1997, p. 7).
Youth crime in Malaysia is closely related to government’s need to control the lives of young people. Moral panics over youth crime can be argued to arise from distorted evidence that is highlighted by the media. The goal of the Rakan Muda programme is to reduce youth crime. However, it can also function as a government control mechanism to intervene in the lives of young people in Malaysia, and moral panic provides the rationale for this.

The data in this study aims to cover each of the following areas: how does the Rakan Muda programme interpret youth crime and claim to help young people stay clear of criminal activities? How does the media support or strengthen the government position by depicting young people as the problem rather than as victims of crime? and how do the operations of the Rakan Muda programme appear to young people involved in it?

2.4 Malaysian Development and Social Change

Since the early 1960s, Malaysia has recorded economic growth rates that have consistently outperformed the average for all middle- and lower-middle-income countries. Over the twenty-five years ending in 1980, real GDP increased at an average annual rate of 7.4 per cent; in the decade 1980-90, the average was 5.2 per cent; and for the five years, 1987-91, 8.3 per cent (World Bank: 1992, pp 23, 220-21).

Accompanying this growth has been a rapid change in the structure of the Malaysian economy: agricultural commodities and minerals (mainly rubber and tin) have declined in relative importance, being replaced by industrial goods (particularly electrical goods and electronic manufactures) which accounted for an estimated 64 per cent of
exports in 1991 (Malaysia: 1991b: xv, 7-9). Malaysia’s liberal policy towards foreign investment has contributed to this growth in industrialisation. To attract foreign investment, tariff protection was increased for infant industries, tax concessions were offered to encourage labour intensity and the use of domestic raw materials, location was in accordance with government priorities and there were long-term goals for increasing efficiency (Fisk and Osman-Rani: 1982, pp. 261-263). The increase of foreign investment meant new demands for wage labourers. As a result, many new jobs became available for Malaysians, especially for young men and women.

A significant characteristic of this process was the pace of technological change. When technology came sporadically and spread slowly, human beings and their social institutions had time to respond and adapt. When the pace of technological change increased beyond the capacity of human beings and their institutions to easily absorb and adapt, then the likelihood of social disruption increased. The changes brought by modern industrialisation differed from earlier changes in that the process was a conscious and deliberate adoption and encouragement of change, and an attempt to increase its speed (Briggs: 1983: p. 188).

What is now being seen in Malaysia, as in other developing countries, is the same kind of disruptive social change as occurred in the industrialisation of current Organisation of Economic Corporation and Development (OECD) societies. Industrial technology has fundamentally changed the patterns and ways of life in the OECD. Early industrialisation was based largely on cheap supplies of poorly educated and unskilled workers. The structural social change that followed from rapid application of new technology generated
factories and towns, uprooted village life and set masses of people adrift in a new, modern world. The impact of technology on industry and employment was central to the social changes of nineteenth century Europe and America, affecting where and how people lived. Mass production demanded a work force concentrated in town and cities (Fisk: 1982, pp. 7-9).

In Malaysia, the impact of industrialisation can be seen in the important changes affecting the rural/urban dichotomy. Urbanisation rapidly increased during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Peninsular Malaysia. In the Peninsula, the urban population increased from 2.5 million in 1970 to an estimated 4.1 million in 1980 (Fisk and Osman-Rani: 1982, p. 10). This is a very large increase but perhaps even more important is the ethnic and age composition of this population. Ethnic Malay urbanisation in the 1970s proceeded more rapidly in Peninsular Malaysia than for other ethnic groups and a significant proportion of recent Malay migration to the main cities has comprised young single people seeking employment at low wages in unskilled factory jobs. Wages from such employment are adequate for single unmarried life but not for establishing urban families, whilst the prospects for advancement and for higher earning power for a large number of those lower skilled workers are not immediately encouraging. The new structure of work in labour intensive industries demands single, unskilled, poorly educated and submissive workers, preferably female employees (Hing: 1985a, pp. 153-155).

There is a large proportion of female workers in the manufacturing sector especially in electronics, textiles and clothing (Hing: 1984; 1985a; 1985b). Most of the workers are below 25 years old and have lower secondary or less education. With the
relatively high rate of increase in electronics and textile production, the number of female workers has increased substantially. From the mid-1980s to the 1990s, a substantial portion of the new unskilled factory workers were Malays from rural areas, and as a result there were labour shortages in many of their home areas (Halim: 1983, pp. 133-134).

The decline of agriculture in the 1980s, as cities expanded with the growth of factory production and mechanisation, accelerated rural-urban migration. Rural families were fragmented by this migration and inter-generational conflicts increased as young people entered factory work. Many young people who moved into the cities stayed, finding longer term work in expanding industries (New Straits Times: 13/2/1997, p. 7).

Ariffin (1981) points out that manufacturing has been one of the fastest growing sectors in the Peninsular Malaysian economy. Utilising data from the 1976 labour survey she shows that between 1957 and 1976 the employment in the manufacturing sector grew dramatically by more than 320%. Most significant has been the increase in the female labour force which saw the proportion in the manufacturing sector grow from 17% in 1957 to 41% in 1976.

In the context of Malaysian political economy this is a revolution of major consequence, and is particularly well illustrated by the case of Penang state. Prior to 1969 Penang's economic survival had rested largely on its free port status and a variety of small processing activities for rubber and tin. With the loss of free port status in that year the State Government developed a bold policy of encouraging industrial activity in the State, which led to the establishment of serviced industrial estates offering various kinds of tax incentives and tariff protection for both import-substitution industry and the export of
manufactured goods. This policy has been remarkably successful (Penang Development Corporation: 1980). The manufacturing sector’s share of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from 21.0 per cent in 1971 to 37.2 per cent in 1980. This industrial growth fuelled a considerable increase in per capita GDP which in 1971 was RM 1,035 but by 1980 had grown to RM 2,357. In addition, employment in the State’s manufacturing sector grew from 16 per cent in 1970 to 29.0 per cent in 1980. Much of the organisational basis for this growth was provided by the Penang Corporation as the principle development agency of the State Government.

This growth was largely located in two types of industrial estates. In 1982 the first type of industrial estates which were not Free Trade Zones employed 16,346 workers (30% of the workforce), of whom 6,982 (42%) were females. The major types of industry in these areas were food processing, chemical fertilisers, metal products and rubber-based industries. Malays made up some 41% of the labour force in these industries (Penang Development Corporation: 1982).

The second type of industrial estates were the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) of which are in Penang State located at Prai, Prai Wraft and Bayan Lepas. In 1982, Bayan Lepas was by far the largest of these zones with 38 of the 50 factories employing 30,215 of 38,434 workers. In the FTZs there is a higher proportion of Malays (46%). The two major types of goods produced in these zones are electronics and textiles (Penang Development Corporation: 1982).

Factories in these zones are foreign owned and belong to international companies producing electronic circuitry in Japan and the USA, which are then sent to Penang for
assembly and testing before being utilised in computers, video games and other forms of electronic gadgetry.

Kamal Salih (1982) gives important information on the characteristics of the labour force employed in these factories. Some 83 per cent are between the ages of 16 and 27, with 38 per cent in the age group between 20 and 23. The education levels are low, with over 70 per cent only having completed three years of (lower) secondary schooling. There is a high rural migrant component among these workers, with over 46 per cent coming from nearby states.

Health surveys suggest that there is much greater incidence of intestinal and chest illness among the workers in the factories than in the general population (Salih: 1982). This is generally associated with the effects of fluctuating time shifts and air conditioning. There are also said to be some problems of social adjustment among female workers who are predominantly rural Malays.

Ariffin (1992) examines factors that contribute to women’s participation in the work force. She argues that there were three factors that led to the increase: (i) an increased level of education for some women, changing their attitudes to work and improving their employment prospects; (ii) rapid increase in demand for labour and increased costs of living combine to attract other women, especially those from rural areas; and (iii) the NEP, which sought to favour Malays by affirmative action quotas, cannot reach its targets if only male workers are employed. Thus, job opportunities for women in industry have increased more rapidly than for men, but in low waged job with long hours, repetitive work and no upward mobility.
Ariffin also focuses on social problems faced by young people resulting from industrialisation and urbanisation. Among the more obvious social changes are those affecting the institution of the family, reflected in the statistics of rising divorce rates, later marriages, deferred and smaller families, single-parents and “blended” families, in the increase in pre- and extra-marital relationships and in social groupings which do not conform to traditional family patterns (Ariffin: 1995: p. 348).

For young people and families, rapid change can bring tensions as tradition and stability are eroded, and the consequent pressures can be bewildering and frightening. There is no longer the security of long established customs and values nor any certainty of future directions. The network of social support and services on which individuals have long depended has itself been changing and has in many respects become more impersonal and less adequate (Ariffin: 1995). The support and concern provided by small and relatively stable communities and by the extended family have either disappeared or are diminishing.

Industrialisation and urbanisation also have effects on infrastructure (Ariffin: 1995). Even though there are many facilities such as shopping malls, movie theatres, entertainment complexes and other public facilities, there are not many places for youth to meet (such as community centres and sport arenas). There are not enough facilities available for youth to converge and work out excess energy. One question that arises from this dearth of facilities is why youth should be penalised for hanging around shopping malls when there are not enough places available for them to engage in lawful leisure activities.
The increase of female, and particularly Malay female, participation in manufacturing is a reflection of the role of government incentives and the expansion of multinational industry. Another factor that should be emphasised is the operation of the NEP. One part of that policy has been the enforcement of rules for new industries, which ensure greater participation of Malays in the national economy. Most industrialisation policy has been designed to implement the New Economic Policy (NEP) by using Malay or Malay/Bumiputra quotas for government employment, for education, and in the private sector (Means: 1991, pp. 24-26). The NEP also involved a great increase in the formation of quasi-public bodies and government agencies that were charged with providing special assistance programme for Malays. Even though Malays were thus given a special position in industrialisation policy and development, the government appears to have accepted no responsibility for the resulting problems accompanying this rapid change.

While the majority of factories do recruit in urban areas there is also increasing evidence that they recruit in rural areas and have greatly speeded up the rate and volume of single Malay female emigration to urban areas (Hing: 1985, pp. 153-154; Ariffin: 1992, p. 45). These labour-intensive industries prefer rural labour because it is easily attracted by higher wages in manufacturing but is also seen as being more flexible and less confrontational. Secondly, they prefer female labour because women are paid lower wages than men and because females are said to be more adept at intricate assembly operations. They also prefer female workers because they can be easily dismissed and learn skills more rapidly.
The manufacturing sector is still likely to be the fastest growing sector throughout the 1990s. Given this, the role of training programmes such as *Rakan Muda*, which involve the development of skills, technical knowledge and entrepreneurship, is likely to be further enhanced. The *Rakan Muda* programme is part of numerous government initiatives to train and prepare young men and women for the labour market. Even though young people can gain other skills and knowledge from activities run by *Rakan Muda*, the learning environment expects them to be submissive, loyal and disciplined individuals. These qualities in individuals are very important when they enter job market, especially if the jobs are in factory work where submissive, loyal and disciplined workers are clearly preferred.

### 2.5 Sarawak development and social change

Sarawak is still a relatively frontier area. About 40 per cent of Malaysia’s forests are in Sarawak (Higgins: 1982, p. 180) and are expected to remain important sources of employment and income. Mining, including offshore oil and gas, is on the verge of rapid development. Development planning in Sarawak is largely a matter of land use planning and is mostly based on forest resources. Current development focuses on forest industries, opening up new land for agriculture, and continued exploration and production in the mining and energy sectors. There are also industries closely related to the primary sector, such as processing forest products and producing fertilisers.

Sarawak is relatively behind in terms of economic development when compared to the Peninsula, with "low levels of industrialisation, urbanisation, infrastructure and public
services with high levels of poverty and the dominance of the smallholding sectors in rural areas" (King: 1990, p. 116). The major manufacturing industries in Sarawak are wood products and food. This concentration is due to a number of factors: insufficient concentrated urban demand, low availability of tertiary industries, small numbers of trained and trainable labour and lower levels of finance and agglomeration or "industry-attracts-industry" economies (Osman-Rani: 1982, p. 273).

The Malaysia Agreement of 1963 allows Sarawak control over education, land and immigration (so that even Peninsular Malaysians enter Sarawak under strict control) (Majid Cooke: 1997; King: 1990). However, development funds are controlled by the federal government. For a long time, Sarawak did not benefit from the fast paced development in the Peninsula. While Sarawak is now catching up, local developments are mostly centred in urban areas. According to King (1990: p. 116) "there has been some development in Sarawak but in general, it has been localised and urban-centred and has resulted in the emergence of large economic and political inequalities; to put it simply, what one now has in Sarawak are the affluent urban alongside the rural poor".

The industrialisation and urbanisation now taking place in Sarawak have produced the same problems faced by the Peninsula. In order to find a solution to these problems, government policy in the Peninsula is often adopted in Sarawak regardless of the differences in social development and historical conditions between the two regions. There is often the assumption that the problems of young Malays in the Peninsula are also those of young Malay Sarawakians.
A clear impact of development is the urban drift to the capital, Kuching (New Straits Times: 13/2/1997, p. 7). However, there are some important differences between Sarawak and the Peninsula. Unlike Peninsular Malaysia, there is a tendency in Sarawak to underplay ethnic divisions. Ethnic composition in the state is much more complex than on the Peninsula, where the main division is between Malays and non-Malays. In Sarawak there are three broad categories which are internally sub-divided. First, the Malay-Muslim category comprises Malays, Kedayan and a significant grouping of influential Muslim Melanau. These together comprise less than 30 per cent of the estimated total population of about 1.8 million in 1992 (Department of Statistics Malaysia: 1992). Secondly, there is the category of non-Muslim natives, popularly known as the Dayak, made up mainly of Iban (Sea Dayak) along with substantial numbers of Bidayuh (Land Dayak) and a host of smaller groupings including Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit and Penan. The Dayak comprise almost half of Sarawak's population, with the Iban alone consisting of over 30 per cent of the total population and Bidayuh approximately 9 per cent. Thirdly, there are the non-natives who comprise over 30 per cent of the state’s population. The overwhelming majority of these are Chinese, with small numbers of Indians and Eurasians. Given the fact that Malays are not the majority in Kuching, there is less Malay influence in lifestyle, culture, religion, belief and other social relationships. Thus, the Malays in Sarawak are only one of several ethnic groups coming to terms with industrialisation and the changing structure of Malaysian social life.

I now turn to look at how I sought to investigate and analyse the issues raised in this chapter, by describing the methodology of my research.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Government Publications

This thesis relies on three different data sets. The first is a review of materials on the Rakan Muda programme published by the Ministry of Youth and Sport between 1994 and 1996. These materials include policy papers, documents and reports, handouts, inter-office memoranda, conference or seminar papers and written speeches given by the Minister of Youth and Sport. The materials were published through both phases of the Rakan Muda programme. The first phase started from the establishment of the programme in 1994 until December 1995, while the second phase began on 1 February 1996 and is ongoing (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1996). The review of the government materials on Rakan Muda is important for understanding the exercise of power, and the parameters in which both government control and the contestation over the public morality of young people have been fought.

Rakan Muda has two major programmes (ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995): Rakan Muda Lifestyle (RML) and Rakan Muda Brigade (RMB). RML is sub-divided into nine activities: self-defence or martial arts, recreation, environmental caring activities, sports, physical fitness, trade and apprenticeships, community welfare, cultural activities and invention. These activities emphasise the development of individual motivation, initiative and skills in order to heighten the self-esteem of participants as well as increase their self-reliance and assuredness. Typically, considerable emphasis is placed on "interpersonal growth" and development. Each participant is expected to develop good communication skills with others and gain skills from various activities
offered by the programme. The values of individual endeavour, teamwork and
participation are viewed by the programme planners and practitioners as the qualities
required by young people to engage in active, co-operative and meaningful life in society.
Thus, directly or indirectly, these activities are expected to shape young attitudes and
values in specific ways (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995).

RMB focuses on different aspects of individual development, and has several
components (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, 1996). The first concentrates on
national fitness and services that aim to "better citizenship". National fitness is
interpreted to mean the physical fitness and military preparedness of "soldier citizens" in
the even or war. The other components include leadership and skills training, especially
in business and entreprenuership. For the purpose of my thesis, I will focus more on the
RML because it has been more important in terms of implementation and participation,
and is now the only remaining programme.

The role of the Rakan Muda in the life of the young generation has generated
interest from some sections of the public, including academics (The Star Online:
have raised questions about: (a) the effectiveness of youth policy in moulding the future
of the young generation; (b) whether the programme is simply a mean of controlling a
category of the young people who are relatively powerless but who are deemed
administratively manageable; (c) whether the programme has made a substantial
contribution to finding solutions to the perceived social and cultural problems of the
young or has merely assuaged the problem so that the government can concentrate on the
special needs of the elite and capitalists. All of these issues have been canvassed in debates covered by the media.

3.2 Media Analysis

The second data set is therefore made up of newspaper coverage of “the youth problem”. The evaluation of this data does not involve content analysis but rather an investigation of the rhetoric expressed by different groups, especially government representatives, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and influential members of the public such as academics and business elites. The newspaper analysis is based on four Malaysian newspapers, the Berita Harian, the New Straits Times, the Sarawak Tribune and the Borneo Post. The analysis focuses on the creation of moral panic in relation to youth crime, how young people are labeled as deviant and the amplification of youth crime.

In Malaysia, even though newspapers are in private hands, their ownership is closely affiliated with major political parties (Idid: 1989, p. 50). New Straits Times, Utusan Malaysia, Berita Harian, Nanyang Siang Pau and Shin Min Daily News are owned by investment arms of the ruling party, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). Meanwhile The Star is owned by the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and Tamil Nesan by the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC), both in the governing coalition. Similarly, the dominant government parties in Sarawak and Sabah also gained effective ownership and control of all the principal daily newspapers. However, the press in these two states is less strictly controlled (Crouch: 1996, p.87). Newspapers owned by different political groups are used to further particular political interests especially during
election campaigns. In Sarawak, the *Sarawak Tribune* and *Borneo Post* are owned by *Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu* (United Bumiputera Heritage Party). The fact that “the press was largely owned by groups associated with the government meant that news and the commentary unfavourable to the government were rare and the activities of opposition parties and government critics were normally presented in an unfavourable light. But this did not mean that only a single point of view was expressed: although uniformly pro-government, newspapers often represented different factions and interests” (Crouch: 1996, pp. 86-7).

As in all countries, there are legal constraints on the print media. For example, the Printing Presses and Publication Act (PPAPA) 1984 is designed to “regulate the use of printing presses and the printing, importing, production, reproduction, publishing and distribution of publications and for matters connected therewith” (Idid: 1989, p.47). This Act regulates what might be acceptable and or not for publication and under this Act publishers cannot operate without a license. This act was based on “the assumption that the mass media must be organised and utilised as an instruments of leadership to achieve national development goals and the ideals of the *Rukunegara* while avoiding any divisive public controversies or inflaming communal passions over the sensitive issues” (Means: 1991, p. 138). The government did not exercise direct ownership. By a wide array of legal penalties and through party ownership of much of the media, however, the assumption was quite clear that all public media would be required to exercise restraint and self-censorship.

There are 35 daily newspapers in Malaysia, 20 of which are published in Mandarin, eight in English, three in Malay, three in *Tamil* and one in *Malayalam*. In
terms of sales, the combined circulation of the *Utusan Malaysia* and the *Berita Harian* (the two biggest Malays language dailies) is about equal the total circulation of all the Chinese newspapers, and they surpassed the combined circulation of the eight English language dailies (Idid: 1989, p. 45).

In Malaysia there are four daily papers distributed nation-wide, namely the *Berita Harian*, the *Utusan Malaysia*, the *New Straits Times* and *The Star*. For the purpose of my research, I will concentrate on two of these major national newspapers: the *New Straits Times* and the *Berita Harian*. The *New Straits Times* is subjected to more control than the *Berita Harian*. As an English language daily, it serves a wider readership, especially of the business community. The readership is made up of all ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, Indians, Native groups from Sarawak and Sabah and others (Idid: 1989, p. 42). Even though both newspapers are owned by UMNO, they sometimes take different stands on particular issues, especially at times of factional conflict within the party (Crouch: 1996, p. 87). Thus, it is useful to evaluate how these Malay-controlled newspapers represent and cover the youth issues.

The *New Straits Times* and the *Berita Harian* are useful for an overall picture of the origins, planning and implementation of youth policy Malaysia wide. However these newspapers originate in Peninsular Malaysia, so they tend to under-emphasise, or at best deal in a very perfunctory way, with Sarawak issues. For this reason I also cover two local English language newspapers published in Sarawak. These are the *Sarawak Tribune* and the *Borneo Post*. Focusing on these local newspapers in a way to get an insight into media coverage of the youth problem in Sarawak. Broader representation of newspaper coverage would have been possible in larger and lengthier research, but my
research can usefully be seen as providing ways to approach other print media in Malaysia.

The analysis of newspaper coverage was confined to the period after the 1995 election so that it would not be influenced by stories constructed with that election in mind. The period selected is between January 1996 and June 1997. Some stories presented in this period require linkage to press stories previous to 1996, and occasionally reference is made to issues from 1994 and 1995. The purpose of concentrating on the newspaper coverage in 1996-1997 is to see the reactions of various groups to the issues involved in the *Rakan Muda* program once it had been reasonably well established.

It became clear during the data gathering process that newspapers have become an important arena for discussing the perceived social and cultural problems of the young generation. It became equally clear that newspapers have become a mean for discussing solutions and searching for a consensus on the perceived problems associated with the young generation in Malaysia. Newspapers thus have become the mediators for the public. Indeed it is now a practice in most newspapers in Malaysia to invite the public to debate issues related to youth problems and their solution. Occasionally, young people themselves are involved in these debates. For example, in letters to the editor columns, individuals are encouraged to write about their opinions on youth issues and sometimes the editor will set certain topics for the public to debate.

Four main aspects of the role of the newspapers will be explored: (a) which voices are given an airing in the newspapers and to what extent young people are given a voice about their problems; (b) what are the major social problems perceived to be associated with the young generation; (c) what kinds of debates in newspapers are given priority by
the government in response to youth problems and why; and (d) in what way are the debates linked to the functioning of Rakan Muda as a government programme?

3.3 Opinions of Rakan Muda participations

The third body of data comprises interviews with 30 young people in Kuching, the capital city of Sarawak. Kuching’s development is still in its infancy compared to Kuala Lumpur, where rapid development has taken place over a longer period of time. In Kuching young people are less pressured by rapid development than in Kuala Lumpur. However, Sarawak as a whole and Kuching in particular are experiencing newly found wealth especially from timber (Majid-Cooke: 1997). Material wealth and the technological sophistication have posed new challenges to the people there, especially to the young generation (Sarawak Tribune Online: 21/4/1997).

There are two reasons for the focus on ethnic Malay youth. First, although I am the result of a union between an ethnic Chinese man a malay woman, I have been brought up to be culturally Malay. The focus on Malay youth therefore makes capital of my cultural background, prior knowledge of Malay society and the attendant ease of entry into Malay youth groups. Without prior knowledge or links within Malay society, and given the limited time available, access to “problem” youths in other ethnic groups could not have been easily made. Second, the Rakan Muda programme was adopted in response to perceived problems resulting from changes taking place in Peninsular Malaysia, especially among Malay communities there. Because of Malay political dominance, Malay problems are often given priority in the formulation of social policy. However, as discussed in the literature review, Malays in Sarawak have a different
history from those of the Peninsula (King: 1988), and there is a tendency to underplay ethnic divisions in the political sphere. Kuching therefore is a good place to study how opinion is constructed in a location when Malay dominance is not take for granted, to see whether national programmes are appropriate to local problems. Finally, there has no such research carried out in Sarawak. Hopefully my contribution will act as a spur to greater interest, at a stage in development when Sarawak might well still be able to avoid the problems of the Peninsula.

The interview sample is made up of thirty young people, fifteen men and fifteen women. Of these, 26 respondents are Rakan Muda members while four are non-members. There were introduced or made known to me by relatives and friends who are members and staff of the Rakan Muda programme. The sample is therefore exploratory rather than representative.

Individual interviews were used. Many interviews were conducted in the homes of my respondents, generally in the family living areas where other members relaxed or watched television. I was very much regarded as a guest of the house and it was therefore not considered polite for the host to leave me on my own. As the interviewing went on, it usually became apparent that only the interviewee was needed and other people could go on performing their household functions as usual. However, some parents or family members were curious and liked to know what sorts of questions were being asked. Humorous interjections often took place and sometimes I could sense that I was entertaining a group of people (family members and friends) who were curious and keen to know the nature of my investigation. Views and comments made by other family members have contributed to enrich the data because they helped to jog my respondents'
memories of past and key events in their lives. A semi-structured interview schedule was used. There were certain standard questions, asked but respondents were encouraged to respond freely, rather than make choices from a range of alternative responses. The question (see Appendix) can be categorised as follows: (1) demographic characteristics, namely sex, age, educational level, place of residence (town or village), employment and family socio-economic status; (2) family background such as parents’ employment, marital status, house type and number of family members; and (3) participants’ experiences and opinions on youth problems and their solutions.

In asking about participants and their family backgrounds, I hoped to see whether links could be made with participants’ perceptions of youth problems. Some of the issues explored were: (i) was there a relationship between youth crime and family background; (ii) did male and female youths have different opinions on crime; and (iii) was there different treatment of male and female problem youths by their family and the programme?

Questions 11 to 20 invited participants to discuss or raise opinions on what the government, media and elders in society perceived as youth problems or crime in the context of modern industrialisation in Malaysia. These questions allowed participants to talk about the social construction of youth problems and to investigate whether their own perspective differed from privileged views and for what reasons they might be different. Question 11 in particular asked participants to highlight their experiences in dealing with the Rakan Muda programme and their observations on the way it functioned.

Each interviewee was asked the same questions concerning his or her perception of the young generation and its problems in modern Malaysia. Interviews ranged from
one and a half to two hours and were conducted in an informal manner. Tape recording was not used as it was objected to by my respondents. Notes at interviews were written up in detail as soon as possible after the interview. Nineteen of the 30 interviews were conducted in the interviewees’ homes, five were conducted at Kentucky Fried Chicken outlets (a popular place for young people to be seen) and six interviews were conducted at my home. The questionnaires were in standard Malay. The interviewing was mostly conducted in Malay, using local dialect only when I detected any problem in speaking standard Malay.

Finally, one possible reason for my being welcomed in most homes was that parents very much welcomed my study. They hoped that it would highlight the problems their children were facing and that changes would take place to help protect their children against the social and cultural problems reported by officials.

The interview data were first examined separately to identify opinions in support of or against Rakan Muda as a crime prevention mechanism. Then each question was listed and grouped according to two issues: (i) whether Rakan Muda is geared towards reducing the level of youth crime; and (ii) how Rakan Muda sought to develop attitudes in youth that would encourage them to stay clear from criminal involvement. Since time constraints on my research meant that the sample was not a statistically representative one, the results aimed only to seek the opinions of members within Rakan Muda and should not be seen as applying to the youth population at large.

The purpose of these interviews was to try and elicit information from members, to see what “insiders” have to say about the operations of Rakan Muda programmes and whether these programmes gave them a sense of participation and helped then in facing
and solving their problems. I have assumed that these people were admitted to the programme because they were perceived as “problem” youth.

The three data sets allowed an understanding of the total of the broad processes which have shaped debates over youth problems in Malaysia, and how those debates have become institutionalised. The data allowed an exploration of the ways in which formal politico-legal institutions of the state, the corporate organisations of the media and the social relations of young people in the context of a modernising industrial nation were related and influenced the generation of moral panic about the youth crime issue.

Both government and newspaper materials were subject to review analysis. The government data was used to look at Rakan Muda programmes and how the authorities perceived and reacted to young people’s problems through the implementation of these programmes. Focus is placed on the elements of social control highlighted in Chapter 2. The newspaper analysis covered not only authorities’ opinions but also those of private organisations, the general public and young people and concentrates on the ways in which moral panic is created about the activities of young people. The third data set specifically targets young people involved in the Rakan Muda programme. The intention is to gather insider feedback about Rakan Muda programmes and how and whether these programmes can help members to stay clear of crime. More broadly the data looks at the dilemmas faced by young people in the context of industrialisation in Malaysia. Through these three data sets I have attempted to articulate the dynamics of the construction of the debates about the youth problem in Malaysia, with a particular focus on youth crime.

However, I have also indicated the limitations in this study. There is clearly a need for more comprehensive surveys of Malays youths outside the Rakan Muda
programme, as well as scope for comparative material from other ethnic groups. My thesis should therefore be seen as opening an area for research where far too little has yet been done. I now turn to look at the government construction of the “youth problem” and its response.

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1 Rhetoric is conventionally defined as the study of persuasion. Aristotle defined rhetoric as: “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion. This is not the function of any other art. Every other art can instruct or persuade about its own particular subject-matter; for instance, medicine about what is healthy and unhealthy... But rhetoric we look upon as the power of observing the means of persuasion on almost any subject presented to us”. (McKeon, 1941, p. 1329)
4.0 The *Rakan Muda* crime prevention programme for the young “at risk” generation: between care and control

As discussed in the introductory chapter, *Rakan Muda* had two component programmes, the *Rakan Muda* Lifestyle (RML) and the *Rakan Muda* Brigade (RMB). The focus of this chapter is mainly on the crime prevention component of the RML, although a brief account of RMB is also provided in order to clarify the relationship between the two. I begin by locating the programme within emergent crime prevention arguments, suggesting that they are part of a broader shift in how youth crime is constructed and addressed in Malaysia. The key feature of these changes is the resurgence of the “emphasis on individual responsibility over governmental action” (Weir: 1993, p. 93) and greater involvement of community agencies and groups (NGOs, social services, academics, business leaders) in programme implementation. I argue that the different programme components contain problematic assumptions about youth crime and young people’s behaviour. Furthermore, despite the scale of the programmes in terms of both funding and participation, very little analysis of their effectiveness has been undertaken (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1996).

Finally, I argue that there is some cause for concern about the operation of the programmes and the assumptions they make. They contain some features which are innovative, perhaps worthwhile, and which can be considered complementary to other services currently on offer for young people in Malaysia. But the question is whether this characterisation generally holds true or whether there are other aspects of the programmes
which might be negative as they search for a means to help young people turn away from “at risk” behaviour.

4.1 The Ideology of Crime Prevention

In his seminal work, *Visions of Social Control*, Stanley Cohen wrote of a benevolent creeping process, based on incremental eligibility, that expands the property of the criminal justice system to welfare and treatment agencies. He argued that:

The ideology of early intervention and treatment and the use of psychological or social work selection criteria, allows diversion to be incorporated into wider preventive strategies. Legal definitions and due process give way to low visibility, “discretionary decision-making” by administrative or professional agencies. The drift is to work with parts of the population not previously reached, variously defined as young people “in trouble”, “at risk” or in “legal jeopardy”, “pre-delinquents” or “potential delinquents”. (Cohen: 1985, p. 33)

Cohen’s argument can be applied to the proliferation of crime prevention policies and programmes in Malaysia (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994, 1995 and 1996). It is a process which potentially undermines the principle of diversionary strategies (reduction of labelling, stigma and a lessened focus on individual treatment), instead allowing for earlier intervention, extension into new populations and the creation of new agencies.

Crime prevention is not a new thing in Malaysia. Sutton (1994: pp. 216-219) in his article “Community Crime Prevention: A National Perspective” summarised the three categories of crime prevention: situational, social and developmental. Situational prevention is a focus on changing physical environments in order to increase the efforts and risks or reduce the rewards for crime (Clarke: 1992). Usually this type of prevention is designed for specific problems. The most common methods are target hardening, target removal and taking away the means for crime by increasing surveillance.
Meanwhile the social prevention covers all attempts to reduce offending by changing the patterns of behaviours, the values and the self-discipline of groups seen as most likely to be drawn into crime. Usually it required town and municipal committees to develop co-ordinated plans to ensure that young people in danger of being pushed to the margins of society became involved in employment, education, vocational training, cultural and recreational activities.

Developmental prevention concentrates on providing voluntary support and assistance to families having children exposed to a high risk of crime involvement. Such prevention includes “early family intervention programmes”.

Looking at the government data and policies on this issue, it is clear that Malaysia adopted the social prevention perspective especially when dealing with young people. In order to prevent young people from getting involved in or exposed to crime and deviance activities, authorities in Malaysia outlined and implemented many youth programmes designed directly for this purpose. Among the many programmes is the *Rakan Muda* programme where young people are expected to join a range of activities. The intention is to provide young people with as many activities as possible so that they have less time for leisure pursuits. *Rakan Muda* programme offers activities focused on knowledge and skills either in employment, education, vocational training, cultural and recreational activities.

*Rakan Muda* can clearly be seen as part of Cohen’s “creeping process”. Young people who are considered to be “at risk” by government are encouraged to participate in *Rakan Muda* programmes. Participants are in turn generally perceived by Ministry and programme supervisors as people in need of treatment or early intervention. The spread
of this form of community correction is so pervasive as to make most young people a potential target of intervention and treatment.

The second concern of this chapter is the response of young people to these new forms of treatment and control, and the ways in which they negotiate their way through their inclusion in the “at-risk-in-need-of-treatment” category. My argument is that such development needs to be firmly located within a broad socio-political context. In Malaysia, particular attention needs to be given to developments in youth programmes and the definition of “youth”. *Rakan Muda* uses two crime prevention strategies: a push towards community policing and community crime prevention on the one hand, and a focus on private and public inter-agency co-operation on the other. Community policing represents the co-operation between members of a certain community whereas private and public inter-agency co-operation deals with links between private agencies, government representatives and the public. Each of these emergent trends suggests that the debates over welfare versus justice models for juvenile justice have been superseded by a process of simultaneous broadening of welfare concerns and promulgation of the ideology of the justice model. Young people are seen as being in need of guidance and assistance (the welfare aspect), whilst at the same time offending is seen to be the result of calculated decisions by rational actors (the justice aspect) (Naffine and Wundersitz: 1994). Young people in Malaysia experience this ambivalence in the treatment they receive from authorities and society more widely. They are not only treated as subordinate to adults and in need of direct adult supervision, but at the same time they are held to be personally responsible for their deviant misconduct. Government intervention depicts them as a problem rather than as victims, in turn justifying the authorities intervening and controlling
their actions when they are perceived to be outside adult supervision. The argument for intervention and control is that young people in Malaysia are in need of protection from themselves, peer groups, devious adults and various temptations of modern social and urban life (Ariffin: 1995).

*Rakan Muda* had the specific aim of bringing older people and youths together in the belief that this would have a positive impact on reducing youth crime. Furthermore, by involving not only Ministry representatives but society in general, the programme is seen to meet wider demands for community crime prevention, where the community must work in concert with the government and law and order agencies to control and prevent crime, working “together against crime” (*New Straits Times*: 27/2/1997, p. 1).

The participation of agencies outside government in crime prevention characterises the broader shift in social policy in which young people are subject to ever increasing intervention and control. As part of the dual concern for economic efficiency and enhanced co-ordinated responses, the multi-agency approach has been signalled as the means towards new and improved service delivery. The government seeks to coordinate differential participation by various groups in society into an integral network. For example, the police and youth leaders played an increasingly important role in schools by attempting to educate students about the meaning and merits of good citizenship.

The Ministry for its part organised *Rakan Muda* councils and regional committees. Representatives come from both state branches of the Ministry of Youth and Sport and panels appointed by the Prime Minister. All committees meet periodically to identify ways in which the local community can play a part in crime prevention, with a focus on keeping young people out of crime. This new type of broad intervention seeks to enlist every
community resource in a proactive and co-ordinated effort to contain and prevent crime, giving particular attention to improving the relationship between older people and youth.

Concern about the nature of the relationship between law and order agencies and young people is connected to broader perceptions of youth deviance. In an overview of police practice in Australia, Steven Jones and Kenneth Polk have argued that the policing of young people is a major contributor to social disorder; that young people are becoming increasingly lawless or problematic because of drug-taking and a lack of respect for authority; and that young people are particularly vulnerable to sexual and physical abuse (James and Polk: 1989). Chandra Muzaffar (New Straits Times: 27/2/1997, p. 8), Harun Hassim (New Straits Times: 6/3/1997) and Yuen-Li (The Star Online: 6/4/97) argue that in Malaysia young people are treated as if they are the root of all social disorders. They question the mainstream treatment of young people, especially when authorities place too much emphasis on control strategies, such as the need to set a curfew time. At the same time as authorities blame youths for the increased incidence of drug addiction in the country, they fail to explain why this increase has occurred despite severe penalties applied to drug offenders. They also argue that the issues of lepak, bohsia, sexual and physical abuse and abandonment of babies are not entirely youth problems. Thus, for such issues to be dealt with effectively, much data has to be gathered and greater research done. This is true, but even if the police, welfare departments, the probation office and voluntary organisations provide more statistics and related information, we still lack data that represent the views of young people themselves.

The government’s intense preoccupation with youth and social order might have ideological appeal but is difficult to support factually. The government’s perception that
youths are a serious threat to social order is largely driven by media discourse. Yet on the government's own statistics, young people are generally under-represented in serious violent crimes and are more likely to commit property crimes such as burglary, theft and stealing motor vehicles. White (1990) argues that the relationship between law and order agencies and young people is often characterised to a high degree by confrontation and contestation over what constitutes troublesome behaviour, particularly in public spaces, and I would argue that this also applies to young people in Malaysia. For example, loafing among youths in Malaysia is perceived to be a serious problem by authorities while some young people do not see this as a problem at all. Young people argue that authorities always see them as a threat to society and almost every move they make is questioned or checked, in case it might lead to trouble. This breakdown in communication then leads to conflict between young people and the authorities. In order to improve this relationship, it is important for the authorities to understand and give young people a chance to share their views and experiences. The specific goals of programmes such as Rakan Muda must therefore be considered in the light of this broader agenda of youth policy in Malaysia and its relation to law and order in particular.

4.2 Rakan Muda: RML and RMB

Funded in 1994 by the government, Rakan Muda was established largely at the urging of the Ministry of Youth and Sport, which was responding to the alarming rate of youth crimes reported by police statistic and the media. Its study of young people in 1995 led to a belief that many were experiencing emotional problems and that drug use and drug dealing were particular problems among the young. For example, the statistics for new
drug addicts in the Malaysia showed annual increases and the same applied to repeat offenders despite severe penalties (Anti Drug Unit: 1993). Committee representatives from every state in Malaysia were brought together to discuss ways of addressing these issues, and a programme developed in consultation with the Ministry of Youth and Sport. 

*Rakan Muda* aimed to address the perceived related issues of drug abuse, family breakdown, sexual assault and “at risk” lifestyles. Since then, the organisation has expanded and developed into a national enterprise involving dozens of staff and thousands of youth participants. Over the past three years, an estimated 1,207,352 young people have taken part in the programmes across Malaysia (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1997).

*Rakan Muda* programmes are managed and administered by the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the philosophy and techniques used in both programmes are the same, with the most obvious difference being the limited number of participants in RMB, which deals only with nationality, individuality and citizenship. My research focuses predominantly on RML, which mainly targets young people’s lifestyle.

RML shares the same broad objectives and strategies as RMB but was designed to assist young people who were having difficulties coping with the pressures of modern life and young people who were on a path leading to crime. It sought to help young people face emotional issues associated with family breakdown, drug abuse, sexual assault, sexual relationships, self-esteem and other social problems. RML sought to do this in a pro-active way by giving participants the opportunity to develop self-reliance, trust, responsibility, self-discipline and relationship skills (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995).
RML combines recreational activities with trust-building exercises, focused group discussions, teamwork to build self-esteem and confidence and to help young people deal with personal and social problems that they experience in their lives.

The programme facilitators, notably representatives from the Ministry of Youth and Sport or Rakan Muda staff, consistently claim the crime prevention potential of these programmes and their ability to “touch lives”. They argued programme activities will prepare and equip young people to face challenges in their lives (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995). However, increasingly a majority of academics and sections of the public have exhibited sceptical and negative attitudes towards Rakan Muda programmes (see New Straits Times: 27/2/1997, p. 7; New Straits Times: 6/3/1997, p. 13 and New Straits Times: 11/3/1997, p. 13). In their view, the various interactive activities have failed to break down the barriers between older people and youths in their daily lives, meaning that some young people would simply revert back to their old ways shortly after leaving the programmes (New Straits Times: 27/2/1997, p. 7).

Rakan Muda emphasises the importance of having young people play a role in the operation of the programmes, so young people are divided into youth leaders, trainee youth leaders and general participants. Youth leaders are people who have been identified by programme facilitators as having the capacity and desire to perform a leadership function. Criteria for being a youth leader are that participants should be aged between 18 and 25 years and in good physical and mental health. The leaders should also have no current drug or alcohol-related problems nor a history of violence (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995). Once identified, they are then offered a trainee leadership programme and
at times perform some of the tasks of leaders at general programmes prior to becoming a fully-fledged leader.

There are several purposes to this hierarchy. Most importantly the youth leaders perform a number of key functions in the programmes, from conducting roll calls at the beginning of each activity through to facilitating group activities. Even something as minor as ensuring an orderly time schedule for each programme activity is seen as part of this process of devolving responsibility. *Rakan Muda* organisers are aware of the need to involve young people in organising and administering the programmes, so as to lessen the appearance of adult control. This can also allow a vitality in the programme and generate a feeling among young participants of relative autonomy and freedom.

There are, however, limits to such autonomy since many of the organisers running the programmes are concerned to create a degree of uniformity in all *Rakan Muda* programmes that they run across the country. Some organisers exert a degree of influence greater than their formal role might indicate, so the emphasis on empowering young people has to some extent been countered by the continual intrusion of organisers into the processes of decision-making and organisation.

This can also be a problem with some of the youth leaders and trainee leaders themselves, so it would be misleading to view the disciplinary regime of the programmes simply as a reflection of the unequal relationship between submissive youth and powerful adults. Rather the programmes provide an environment of contestation involving mixed and competing goals and processes.

Although young people identify factors such as violence, sexual abuse and a lack of general parental care as contributing to their problems, this does not necessarily lead to
a questioning by authorities of how they live. Attempts were made by the authorities to construct actions of responsibility that placed central importance on young people identifying the need to change their own ways. It is clear from this action that the authorities tended to assume young people were the problem rather than victims. Certainly the accounts of young people themselves suggest that while the regime in the programmes encourages them to consider their often troubled lives, it is left up to themselves to change their behaviour.

The programmes utilise a number of group techniques. Recreation, discipline, relaxation, cultural activities, physical fitness and focus group workshops are presented in various forms throughout the duration of each programme. Participation in all programme activities is open to both RML and RMB members and the “team work” concept, reiterated throughout the programme, is central. By focussing on specific relevant issues such as drug abuse, sexual practices and teen pregnancy, the programmes allow young people to openly discuss and share personal experiences and opinions with the entire group.

The supporting literature for Rakan Muda suggests that several benefits emanate from the programmes (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1996). For the young people who participate, there is an expectation that they will improve their self-esteem, increase independence, have positive informed views of the need for education and training, and potentially develop better relations with society, government, and law and order agencies. However, what is not clear from the literature is whether the young people really have much of a say in constructing the way they live, or whether they simply choose to think and react according to what they see is desired and accepted by the authorities.
4.3 Promoting enhanced community participation in crime prevention

The government also takes on the responsibility of managing the cultural and social environments of young people through the Ministry of Youth and Sport. *Rakan Muda* is one of many such programmes since issues to do with young people came into focus in the late 1980s as a result of the economic downturn at that time, the first major economic setback in Malaysia’s industrialisation process. When the pace of industrialisation failed to match the rate of urbanisation, the government saw the need to address the problems associated with rural migrants (mainly Malay youths) who became young urban dwellers.

In the debates that have ensued since 1994, two major questions have been raised. The first is whether the adoption and implementation of the *Rakan Muda* programme is effective in moulding the future of young people in preparing them for new job markets and the social expectations of industrial society. The second is whether the programme simply targets youths who have little or no power to resist, letting those in power determine how they should live and behave.

According to the *Rakan Muda* reports, one of the major problems that affects young people in Malaysia is not having enough to do in their leisure time. The 1994 report (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994) stated that being directionless, these young people tend to hang around public places such as shopping complexes and that this new trend has become a major problem for crime and justice policy in Malaysia. Government and non-government organisations have expressed their own special interests and concerns about this problem, both at the discourse and policy levels. There is, of course, nothing wrong with the government or other social groups being concerned with the youth
problem. However, if the perceived reason for these young people hanging out is their being directionless and having nothing to do, to what extent is this problem generated by the government or community groups not providing enough facilities and activities for them? It can also be questioned whether hanging around a shopping centre is a problem at all, unless violence or property damage is involved. There is no strong evidence provided by the Ministry to support the view that hanging out leads young people to become criminals.

The government thinks that the social and cultural problems of young people have to be tackled from different avenues and perspectives (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994). The major problems outlined by the Ministry of Youth and Sport cover a very wide range, as do the strategies that the Ministry thinks can prevent these problems from becoming worse.

Drug use is a central problem. Statistics on drug abuse show an increasing trend (Figure 1). Approximately 76,760 drug addicts were known from 1990 to 1993 alone, comprising 16,956 cases in 1990, 19,055 cases in 1991, 20,236 cases in 1992 and 24,023 cases in 1993. Figure 1 shows the same increases for both new users and repeat offenders, despite the government’s tough laws against drug use.
Yet despite this increasing trend in drug addiction, few attempts have been made or studies done to determine whether drug problems are particularly a youth problem, and if so, what can be done in order to overcome this problem. The central question is why, despite severe penalties, drug addiction is still on the increase. Why was there also an increase in repeat cases? The increases could also imply that it is easy to obtain drugs, and the persistence of repeat offenders raises questions about the effectiveness of drug punishments and rehabilitation programmes in the country.

Second, young people aged between 15 and 39 are found to be involved in major offences such as homicide or attempted homicide, armed robbery (either individually or in gangs), rape and physical assault. Figure 2 shows this trend.
Young people were involved in 46 cases of homicide or attempted homicide, 150 cases of robbery, 111 cases of rape and 468 cases of physical assault from 1990 to 1993. The problem with this statistic is the classification of "youth". If the age group is reduced to those between 15 and 21 the trend could appear to be very different. Why are individuals aged 26 to 39 still being classified as young people when in all other regards they are considered to be adults? Is this simply government manipulation of data to excuse its control and intervention in the lives of young people? If so, fears about perceived escalating youth crime are not realistic. If the government wants to focus on young people, it needs to explain how it defines the "youth" category.

Third, the Ministry argued that among primary and secondary school students in 1993 there were 172,615 (4.1% of the total of 4,207,381 students) with discipline problems (Table 3.1, below).
Table 1: Classification of deviant acts committed by students in 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of deviant behaviours</th>
<th>Primary School</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Secondary School</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Crime</td>
<td>11,522</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>15,543</td>
<td>1.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence acts</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>3,172</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tidiness</td>
<td>3,157</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>15,025</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuality</td>
<td>3,484</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>17,379</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Irrespectable</td>
<td>8,410</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>21,713</td>
<td>1.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vandalism</td>
<td>2,392</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>2,299</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dishonest</td>
<td>825</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>1,781</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truant</td>
<td>8,490</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>45,336</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2,797</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>7,952</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>42,415</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>130,200</td>
<td>8.68</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 1993

This statistic hides a very big difference between primary and secondary pupils, and seeks to disguise the difference in criminal involvement them. A study by the Ministry of Education in 1992 (Ministry of Education: 1993) found that there are about 155,998 major discipline cases due to student misbehaviour per year. 23,613 of these resulted from family background such as broken marriage, neglective or abusive parents. 7,081 cases were caused by the learning environment (such as a school curriculum that is too demanding) and peer pressure (students influenced by friends to try smoking, take drugs or become involved in gang fights).

These figures fail to distinguish in their classifications of discipline problems between a broad range of behaviours such as delinquency, erotic misconduct, dishonesty or untidiness. The classifications are not clear. Can untidiness, dishonesty or even erotic misbehaviour be considered on a par with property damage or assault? This failure to make clear distinctions in behaviour aids the “benevolent creeping process” identified by
Cohen (1985) because it blurs the lines between minor and serious offences and makes youth problems appear far worse than they actually are.

Fourth, a report of the Ministry of National and Community Development (1993) found that there were 711 cases of rape in 1992. More than half (55.6%) of the victims were youths under the age of 16. In 1993, 465 victims (55.9% of 879 cases) were youths under the age of 16. This report however, only informed us about the victims of rape. There was no indication of who the offenders were, so it is not clear if most, or any, of the offenders were young people. What is clear is that youths are the victims. Are the perpetrators of this crime mostly adults? We cannot say, and therefore cannot fully appreciate the nature of this being a youth problem as opposed to a more general issue of crime. Before the government constructs this problem as a youth problem, it is essential to gather more convincing data on offenders.

Fifth, the Ministry recognises a religious problem which is focused on Muslim youths. The recently widespread teachings of new Islamic groups in Malaysia with different and often extreme beliefs do attract many young people seeking new identities or security in the fast changes of modern life. Young Muslims are the most vulnerable, especially if they come from a weak religious background where parents do not bother to teach their children or practise the teachings of religion themselves. According to the Department of Islamic Teaching (1993), the extreme movements, actions and beliefs of the new fundamentalist groups deviate from the true teaching of Islam, so the religious establishment sees this as a threat to the new generation of young Muslims. The false teachings of new groups might cause conflict not only among Muslims themselves but also between them and non-Muslims in Malaysia’s multi-religious society. But it is not clear to
what extent such false teachings are connected to youth problems. In Malaysia, freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Constitution. What is clear is that the teachings labelled as false threaten the mainstream position because they represent the views of groups that oppose government policies. Thus in order not to lose potential supporters of the government to newly emerging groups, their religious conduct is classified as deviant and young people involved in them as having problems requiring government intervention.

Sixth, transvestite (pondan), gay, lesbian and both bohjan and bohsia (see Chapter 1, n. 1) activities become a concern because they are seen by the government as contradicting the values and norms of Malaysian society. The Ministry therefore sees a need to pay serious attention to them. For example, in Kuala Lumpur gay groups who have been classified by the Ministry as professionals from elite backgrounds practice homosexuality and bisexuality (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995: p. 15). Government officers and public representatives see this as a threat to society because if no immediate action or prevention is taken, it will put youths at great risk, especially when various sexually transmitted diseases are threatening the well-being of Malaysian society. Gays have a high risk of being affected by HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. Transvestites also face the same risk. A study done by the Department of Social Welfare in 1989 (Department of Social Welfare: 1993) reported that in Kuala Lumpur alone there were approximately 6,000 transvestites. Department said that these people are usually involved in prostitution or illegal marriage with a same sex partner, and are said to have a high risk of getting HIV and AIDS resulted from unsafe sexual practices. The other groups which are considered at risk are bohjan and bohsia, people with multiple sexual partners who are sexually active before marriage. Their lifestyle is classified as a “free
sex” lifestyle where they often change sexual partners. Due to their tendency of avoiding safe sex and of having multiple partners, these people have a greater risk of being affected by dangerous sexually transmitted diseases such as herpes, HIV and AIDS. The Ministry suggests that all of these groups’ lifestyles threaten not only themselves but also the wellbeing of the Malaysian population. Their lifestyle may retard the development of the country especially when they are seen as the generation to mould and build the future of Malaysia.

Even though the problem of sexual deviance is concerned with the statistical incidence of specific sexual practices, it is more closely involved with policing the boundary lines of the heterosexual norm. Bohsia, bohjan, transvestite and homosexual groups have been classified as sexually deviant. A moral panic of epidemic proportions resonated throughout Malaysia, the popular media and amongst health care professionals and policy-makers around AIDS and HIV (New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6). Much of this panic focused on sexual practices and sexualities, especially those of young people, gay men and women, all of whom were represented in different ways as promiscuous and sexually deviant. The panic around AIDS and HIV was a panic over deviant sexualities in which “perverted” youth formed an automatic constituency for adult concern through the sexualised construction of young people (New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6). In practice Malaysians, in particular Malay Muslims, are prohibited from any sexual misconduct before marriage. Youths thus, receive more attention and stigmatisation because of their unmarried status, which can place them under adult supervision and responsibility. They are considered to lack a sense of judgement, especially when their sexual practices can risk the danger of sexually transmitted diseases. Clearly the explanation for the intervention in
the sexual practices of young Malay people is based on Islamic principles, but this ignores the needs of other youths from different ethnic backgrounds. While the law on sexual misconduct is very strict, sex education is very limited in Malaysia, especially for the young. In fact sex education is still a taboo subject for most Malaysians and sex is not a topic to be discussed in public. In most cases it is hardly even discussed at home.

Seventh, the Ministry is concerned about the incidence of abandoned babies. There were about 18 cases of abandoned babies in 1988. In 1993 the number of cases had increased to 56. Of these, 35 involved Malays, 16 Indians and 4 Chinese. All were associated with young people. The core of the panic about abandoned babies is related to premarital heterosexuality, especially amongst young working-class women who work in factories in urban areas. This can be seen in fears over teenage pregnancy which is usually represented as a consequence of uncontrolled youthful sexuality. Young women have provided the chief focus for the authorities’ anxiety partly because they have the babies (and abandon them) and at the same time threaten the patriarchal control of female sexuality and fertility. Why have some young people abandoned their babies? In Malaysia the marriage law and many in society do not allow single unmarried women to have children. The law thus left them with too little alternative. A single young woman with an unwanted pregnancy may find it is hard to face both the law and society. As a result, she might choose to abandon her baby instead of caring for it. Malaysian society is still very conservative with regard to this matter, but logically the abandoning of babies cannot be solved unless single parents are recognised by the law and society in Malaysia.

Eighth, between 1st - 14th February 1994, researchers from seven Malaysian universities conducted a study of young people found loitering in public places in major
cities throughout Malaysia. The report, entitled "The Loafing Behaviour Among Teenagers" (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994) was based on a survey in Peninsular Malaysia of 6,110 young people between 12 and 25 years of age. One of the main findings in this report was that on average, young people spend approximately 16.3 hours per week hanging out in public places, or about 847.6 hours per year. Loafing is prevalent among all ethnic groups but is more widespread among Malay youths, who loaf 16.8 hours a week compared to 14.7 hours by Chinese and 12.8 hours by Indians. Loafing is a problem in almost all major urban areas in the Peninsula. As age increased, unstructured free time increased from 14.4 hours to 18.8 hours. Respondents who had low performance in school or work had the most free time (26.3 hours per week).

The report shows that those young people with the most free time had less inspiration and motivation in life, were deemed to be selfish and less sensitive to others' well-being, were less motivated to work hard or improve their condition and had very little idea of how to spend their free time. Those who spent most time in public places came from a poor socio-economic background, with about 58% of the respondents coming from families with an income of 700 Malaysian Ringgit or less a month. Those with the most unstructured free time were more interested in the various types of entertainment available in the market. Hanging out (lepak) in public places is viewed by the authorities as a worrying trend among young people in all the major cities in Malaysia as these young people had very poor skills in how to improve their self-image and their social and economic well-being. One reason for government concern is of the lost of potential workers in the process of industrialisation. If young people choose to loaf rather than to prepare themselves for the job market, then the government's Vision 2020 goal cannot be
achieved. Another reason is due to the hectic and packed urbanisation in all major cities in Malaysia that ignores the needs of youths. While the pace of urbanisation is very past, the infrastructures provided are still insufficient. Recreational centres for youths are still scarce and this is demonstrated by the lepak phenomenon among youths in Malaysia because they are left with few alternative locations to spend their time.

According to the report, unstructured free time does not provide these young people with a healthy lifestyle, but makes it easy for them to get involved in deviant behaviours such as using pornographic materials (40% of respondents), sex before marriage (18% of respondents), stealing (16% of respondents), smoking cigarettes (70% of respondents) and drinking alcohol (25% of respondents).

The report concluded that the central problem was a form of escapism from feelings of social failure, the pressure of modern life and the boredom in everyday lives, especially for youths from working class families. Youths are idle because they have no definite goals in life and are attracted to places such as shopping centres and video arcades. This can be the paradoxical effect of capitalism whereby youths are targeted as consumers and at the same time become potential threat to business outlets. They are also keen on entertainment and trendy goods (under influence from the media and urban lifestyles), and reading entertainment magazines. The lack enthusiasm and opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills to built a career.

The report also suggests four long-term strategies to overcome the problem. They are: (i) an information strategy to change and mould the loafers’ thinking, highlighting the use of positive role models and religious teaching; (ii) appropriate activities to realise the loafers’ potential, using youth clubs and organisations to express intellectual creativity in
writing and business so as to upgrade their socio-economic standard; (iii) accessible facilities to provide more information on activities run by community centres; and (iv) a social intervention plan to control media and advertising so that they produce only positive materials and role models to encourage a positive identity for teenagers. But why do these youths loaf? Clearly one explanation is that they realise the system will never offer them anything better than the drudgery of factory work. The lack of motivation and initiative in these youths can be explained by the absence of promise, promotion or incentives in the work place. This issue then becomes a concern for the authorities because they see this attitude threatening the march to industrialisation in Malaysia if young people decide not to participate in the workforce. The concern is most serious in industrial factories where there are insufficient local workers and a pressure to import foreign workers because only foreign workers are willing to work in a bad environment on very low wages. If modernity and industrialisation are faster than young people can cope with, it is not surprising that some will opt not to participate because they feel left behind.

The above listing of problems and proposed solutions raises many issues and questions that are important in the construction of the youth problem. Perhaps the most pressing question is whether these social problems are especially a youth problem, or apply to all levels of age groups in society. If we look at the perpetrators of incest, child abuse, the spread of HIV and other social ills, it would seem that these are also the problems of adults (The Star Online: 6/4/1997). Why then is there such great focus on youth as being the root of all the problems and the major target for preventive actions? Is it because youths in Malaysian society are powerless to protest? Certainly, young people in Malaysia have little opportunity to express their difficulties and frustrations because the
authorities and the media are looking for scapegoats without seeking to understand the young themselves.

If the thrust of the *Rakan Muda* policy is geared towards getting young people off the street, clear from bad influences, and to preserve society’s norms and values, young people will find it hard to cope especially as the old set of values that have guided Malaysians is under challenge from modernity, and there is no clear replacement. What the older generation practised 50 years ago cannot be sustained in the face of industrialisation, urbanisation and the influences of global mass media. Society cannot adopt short-term measures and simplistic, mechanical solutions because these only exacerbate the problems. The proposed solutions such as marrying earlier, caning, punitive measures such as closing night-clubs early, giving teachers police powers, making the police more powerful, or sending youth to character formation camps all reflect a conservative mentality, when the demand is for change.

Influenced by the ideals of character formation and leadership outlined in *Vision 2020 Policy*, *Rakan Muda* sought to reinforce the moral, religious and cultural values of young people. From the late 1980’s to 1990’s the government became involved in the “rescue” of the young. Youth policy became closely associated with both the “neglected” and the “criminal”, the so-called “at risk” groups. The government sought to form citizens for a modern industrial society and came to assume more responsibilities for preparing the young generation for the world of work, occupations, national fitness and future leadership. This can also be argued as part of the government’s long-term policy to encourage Malaysians, especially young people, to adopt the work ethic. The industrialisation and expansion of the economy outlined by the government’s New
Development Policy (NDP) cannot be sustained without a workforce that willing to work hard in intensive industrial factories. Thus, it becomes a concern for government if "loafers" are unwilling to participate in this workforce (Cornish: 1994, p. 9).

But economic development cannot be achieved solely by adopting a capitalist work ethic. For instance, it is clear in the case of poverty eradication that the government spent huge sums on rural development in the 1960s yet found that the incidence of poverty did not decrease (New Straits Times: 22/2/1997, p. 8). The government then focused on various poverty groups and tackled each group differently, but even this method did not prove to be effective.

Young people had always figured as a target for "national fitness" thinking. National fitness campaigns in principle allowed the government to substitute for parents in relation to young people, and the politics of Rakan Muda arose out of the tensions in the government's idea of it as a paternalistic movement to tackle youth problems (New Straits Times: 6/3/1997, p. 1). The effect is an expansion of the sphere of the government in young people's lives.

Intervention by government can be limited or extensive, symbolic or real. Rakan Muda is an example where the government is clearly proactive. Government councils and regional committees were set up, camps and hostels established, physical education programmes extended, organisers appointed, seminars and conferences funded, central and local facilities provided, and groups of key citizens with interests ranging from play groups to camping mobilised.

It would be a mistake to assume that all of these activities had nothing to do with the way young people themselves were becoming politicised. A newspaper article on
March 3, 1997 in *The Star* called for a more planned approach to undercut the drift of young people. A few days after this report, there was another calling for a revolutionary solution, coinciding with a period of activity by *Rakan Muda*, which sought to let young people express themselves on training, education and other issues (*The Star: 8/3/1997*). The government was responding not only to elite commentators, bureaucrats and intellectuals but to the anticipated power of young people themselves.

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1 Vision 2020 is a policy whereby the government aims to industrialise by the year 2020. This requires a young generation that can lead the country besides becoming skilled workers, and participants in commerce and other sectors of the economy. The young generation is also expected to become more equipped with positive values and a spirit that will fulfil this goal.

(Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994, p. 3)
It is very rare to experience first hand encounters with young people involved in any sort of crime or deviant behaviour. Mostly our knowledge of their behaviour comes from various forms of media-constructed news coverage. News can usefully be considered as "information that is timely, relevant to the concerns of its audience and presented in a form that is easy to grasp" (Bennet: 1983, p. 125). Our lasting impression of the youth crime we have never seen derives from media-supplied stories that seek to arouse feelings in us about the event.

The major focus in this chapter is on the reporting of youth problems in Malaysia in the 1990s. The analysis concentrates on newspapers. Both local and national newspapers were monitored through newspaper clippings.

Findlay et al. (1984) analysed newspaper reports of a series of episodes where police attempted to control disturbances originating out of leisure activities in an Australian case study. They found that reportage in the press concentrated predominantly on what the authorities had to say and that the material was often sensationalised (Findlay et al.: 1984, p. 22). The same view can be applied to youth problems in Malaysia, where the coverage of youth problems has been unbalanced while attempting to appear neutral, and where the authorities (government, police and even the reporters) established through the media a simplistic understanding of youth issues which served government policy.
5.1 Newspapers

Research findings in this section are based on 297 clippings from four separate newspapers (two national and two from Sarawak) collected between January 1996 and June 1997. Only articles directly concerned with youth problems and the *Rakan Muda* programme were used. On any one day a single newspaper might have several articles on these or none at all. While local newspapers covered these issues (*Sarawak Tribune* – 55 articles; *Borneo Post* – 45 articles), most of the articles are from the national newspapers (*New Straits Times* – 100 articles; *Berita Harian* – 97 articles) published in Peninsular Malaysia.

This study is not concerned with content analysis but rhetoric (Chapter 3, p. 38, n. 1) in an effort to reorganise the information into a form where it can be discussed in more general terms. Qualitative approaches were not feasible in this study because material was provided in a clipped and reduced form with the page numbers not supplied. Material, however, was aggregated according to both time and the issues under discussion.

I have divided the discussion into three areas. The first deals with arguments that *Rakan Muda* can reduce youth problems. The second focused on opposition to, or sceptical views of, the programme. The third deals with the voices of youth.

Table 5.1 summarised views in the four newspapers either agreeing or disagreeing that *Rakan Muda* acts as a youth crime prevention mechanism. A total of 231 articles agreed that the programme can help overcome youth problems in Malaysia. These views were based on the activities that the programme offers, especially the role of RML in preparing young people as future citizens.
Table 5.1: Does Rakan Muda act as youth crime prevention mechanism?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspapers</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Straits Times</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berita Harian</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarawak Tribune</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Borneo Post</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

231 articles 66 articles

Positive opinions saw Rakan Muda as an answer to youth problems because it is designed to prepare and teach youths how to behave according to acceptable norms and values in society. Also, the training offered by Rakan Muda can prepare youths to meet both work and school expectations (*New Straits Times*: 11/3/1997; *Utusan Malaysia*: 20/7/96, p.7).

The opposing 66 views argue that Rakan Muda fails to answer to youth problems because there are other considerations that should be taken into account. These views argue that youth problems do not entirely result from young people themselves, and points to causes such as family problems, industrialisation and urbanisation, school and the social expectations of young people (*New Straits Times*: 7/3/1997, p.5).

Table 5.2 shows three origins of views in the 297 articles. The first category represents views from public officials such as politicians, police, community leaders, law and order officials and NGO representatives. The second category is the general public, characterised by adults who do not represent any institution or special position in society. Their views are individual concerns about the youth issue. The third category is young people themselves. Most views from this category come from youths who either wrote to editors or were interviewed by news reporters.
Table 5.2 shows that a large majority of officials, a smaller majority of adults (general public) and a slightly smaller majority (62.5%) of young people agreed that the *Rakan Muda* programme provides an answer to youth problems in Malaysia. The difference between the general public and youth was very small (64% and 62.5%), but both were much less positive than official sources. *Rakan Muda* received little discussion in public before its implementation, so the less positive response among youth and the public might be due to this. The media, on the other hand, will tend to propagate positive views on the programme since the media is one of the government arms used to strengthen its policy. Public officials voiced positive attitudes on the programme’s capability to help young people and eradicate youth problems. This is not surprising in a government programme. Obviously, arguments or comments from official sources have a better chance of getting to press compared to powerless groups such as young people, as the media has a great need to find readily available and credible people, whose social role can be easily appreciated, to comment on a major news even.

Table 5.2: Does *Rakan Muda* act as a crime prevention mechanism? (Opinion category)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of comments</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Disagree %</th>
<th>Total Comments</th>
<th>(%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public officials</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>57.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>37.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of opinions in newspapers considered youth to be the problem rather than social victims (Table 5.3). These data exemplify the general portrayal of the youth problem in Malaysia. The majority of comments saying youths were a problem came
from public officials. Most of the general public also considered youth to be a problem. It is interesting to note that the three youths also saw themselves as a problem rather than as victims, but the majority (13 youths) disagreed. One conclusion from this is that it is not impossible for youth to view themselves as a problem, especially when their thinking has been influenced by the majority view. The attitude of such youths can be linked to the information they gather from the media’s publication of views from the public and authorities.

**Table 5.3: Youth as problem/victim (source of comments)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of comments</th>
<th>Youth as problem</th>
<th>Youth as victim</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public officials</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General public</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The media often have biased interests in their coverage of the youth problem. Their creation of the fearsome (folk devil) image of young people helps to manufacture a negative impression of youth, accompanied by negative pictorial images. It is rare for the media to report on the decency of youths. On the whole the press has less interest in the welfare of youth than in the problems they pose. This press-created climate has supported an increase in the powers of those in authority (politician, policy makers, implementors and police), enhanced public control mechanisms and variations to laws concerning youth leisure activities and lifestyle (*The Star Online*: 6/4/1997). Government and media have aroused public anger with their claims that youth crime is increasing, thereby raising panic amongst ordinary people. Since available data comes from limited sources, people react to the simplistic linkage of rising figures on divorce, abortion, single parenthood, physical abuse and declining family size with increasing youth crime, and easily get the impression that the society is about to collapse. Media
coverage of young people’s uses of leisure and their supposed delinquency or deviance have appeared in different social and political contexts across Malaysia in the 1990s. Sometimes the focus is on the activities of specific youth subcultural groups (e.g. *bohsia*, *bohjan*, loafers); sometimes on leisure activities which are associated with specific subcultures (e.g. drug abuse, *lepak*, sexual practices). The context is always crucial here: such panics are never entirely random events and they frequently reflect crises or contradictions in wider structural relations (Cohen: 1985).

The moral panic over the youth problem arises in part from official concerns over young people’s activities outside direct adult supervision by parents, teachers or employers. Such anxieties are reflected by the media. Officials view these young people from the perspective of an outraged but respectable elite and crime becomes increasingly associated with the activities of urban working class young people. The latter are represented as in need of protection from themselves, each other, unscrupulous adults and the various temptations of urban life (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995). Young working-class women have been constructed as one source of such temptation, as well as being seen as particularly at risk of involvement in criminal activities, and therefore as also in need of protection (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995).

The major functions of newspapers are to supply opinions, analysis and descriptive information. Most newspapers rely on spokespersons’ points of view rather than those of youths. This is well demonstrated in Table 5.2 (page 77) where the voices public officials (57%) were given serious consideration compared to those of youths (5.5%). Since almost all newspapers were owned by groups associated with the government, it is not surprising that the news and commentary were mostly based on
public officials that favoured the government’s position. The fact that the press is controlled by groups linked to the government means that critics of contradictory opinions were rare.

5.2 Reactions to the youth problem

The immediate impression from newspaper coverage was that their interest in youth problems was in line with authority opinions. It can be argued that newspaper production requirements force the use of a story format around law-and-order issue, and this may help to explain why coverage in many instances is superficial and prone to the sensational (Walton: 1993). In some instances, newspapers will exaggerate coverage and modify the story. For example, the coverage of youths hanging out with friends of the opposite sex is often associated with immoral sexual activities even if they were only discussing school work or simply relaxing. To create interest in these activities, they have to be linked with a negative image such as immoral sexual activity. This exaggeration and modification of images attracts readers’ attention, increasing the demand for newspapers.

New coverage can follow a three-phase pattern, as explained by Wren-Lewis (1981). The first phase is the lead-in revelatory stage where the representation of youth problems draws on news values such as character, scale, immediacy and actuality which make a forceful impact and place the events firmly in a law-and-order framework. Wren-Lewis notes that the media speak with one voice in this respect. The interpretative stage presents the views of “privileged selections of speakers” (1981: pp. 15-33). Here politicians, police and community leaders define and contextualise the discourse firmly
within an established agenda. In my research, data from newspapers show heavy emphasis on public officials’ views compared with any other category. The voices of important and powerful authorities such as politicians and police officers are valuable assets for news reporters because their views have a greater and almost immediate impact on society. For example, after Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir mentioned many of the social problems affecting young people, the effects were instantaneous and led to a moral panic in the media over youth behaviour. This is equally true when the newspaper coverage portrays young people and their images more as a danger to society, especially when these young people spend too much of their time in leisure activities (New Straits Times: 17/6/1994, p. 19).

The third and final stage Wren-Lewis calls “closure” where the coverage moves to a discussion of prevention, implying a knowledge of causality. At this stage the narrative is closed, with no space for alternative readings. The debate, such as it has been, is essentially over an official view that prevails through an assumed consensus, meaning that alternative views are ignored or delegitimised. Youth problems in Malaysian newspapers were seen as concerns for prevention and solution. Media coverage focused on prevention and the coverage showed agreement with the majority consensus that treated youths as a social problem. Contrary views form youths had little impact, if at all. Their voices remained largely silent. Youths had little opportunity to express the difficulties and frustrations they faced through newspapers because their positions were of less interest to the media. In my sample, there were only 16 views representing youth compared to 150 of public officials and 111 of the general publics (Table 5.2: p. 77).
Media coverage of major social problems is done hastily and in a way that accentuates fear. Some examples are the coverage that shows juvenile crimes on the increase and the rising number of cases of drug addiction for young people under the age of 18 (*New Straits Times*: 22/2/1997, p. 9). The stories move through an introduction, a climax and a resolution. Deadlines and production requirements put pressure on reporters to produce stories that are quickly understandable to a mass audience. A large quantity of information is available but news has to be constructed from key or important details that meet the criteria or newsworthiness – including being dramatic and of human interest (Chibnall: 1977; Cohen and Young 1973). As a result, very little effort is made to represent the complex issues that youths encounter in their lives.

5.3 Newspapers Headlines

Editorial decisions about the importance of news impact on the contents of billboards, headlines and photos. Headlines are designed to attract people's attention to articles in newspapers. Although much thought may go into decisions about size, typeface, page and location on the page, special skills are reserved for the choice of words contained in headlines. Headlines about youth problems in my sample can be seen as falling into four major categories:

1. Behaviours that might ruin the order and peace of society.
   - ECSTASY, NEGATIVE VALUES THAT SHOULD BE AVOIDED
   - HALF OF THE ABANDONED BABIES COULD NOT BE SAVED
   - CO-OPERATION VITAL IN FIGHT TO CURB DRUG ABUSES, SOCIAL ILLS
   - ALARMING RISE IN CRIME RATE AMONG JUVENILES
   - LOAFING AMONG YOUTHS, A SERIOUS PROBLEM, SAYS STUDY
   - JUVENILES CRIMES ON THE INCREASE
2. Actions to overcome the youth problem.
   - RISDA LAUNCHES VISION 2020 YOUTH FUND
   - PEOPLE TOLD TO HELP ERADICATE SOCIAL ILLS
   - MINISTRY TO HELP FIND SOLUTIONS
   - PARENTING COURSE MAY BE MANDATORY
   - YOUTH ORGANISATION (PEMUDA) HELPS OVERCOME SOCIAL PROBLEMS
   - PM CALLS FOR UNIFORM SET OF VALUES
   - PM: STOP POLITICISING YOUTH PROBLEMS AND HELP TACKLE THEM

3. Official references to political figures.
   - RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION IMPORTANT FOR YOUTHS, SAYS YAP
   - DR. WONG: MANY CHALLENGES YOUNGER GENERATIONS HAVE TO FACE

4. Use of statistics.
   - 7,444 JUVENILE CASES INVOLVED STUDENTS
   - ONLY 40 PER CENT YOUTH ORGANISATION STILL ACTIVE
   - 13,486 NEW ADDICTS IDENTIFIED LAST YEAR

To look at the full range of headlines here is impossible. However, the use of stronger control measures was called for in many headlines. Edwards (1975) referred to the key role that headlines, photographs and captions can play in bringing distortion and bias to stories. From a study of articles headed with references to “drug”, Bell (1982) noted that, because of frequent coverage, the effect of such references may be the amplification of vague and threatening connotations that terms of this sort can develop when linked to criminality. Instead of a providing broader picture about drugs (such as the abuse of nicotine and alcohol) newsworthiness limited the public’s concern in this area to narcotics associated with crime.

Dramatic headlines point to the plots and themes of articles, are devised to attract attention, and in many instances suggest an editorial stance. Certainly the idea of youth
problems touches on many social concerns that the press monitors – youth violence, confrontation with authority, drugs, gang fighting, illegal motor racing and so on. These are the problems that attract public attention and are easily sensationalised. The impact of this type of coverage leads to immediate calls for prevention and solution. One of the examples links youths’ problem to the role of the family. In response, the National Unity and Social Development Ministry proposed that a parenting course be mandatory for those concerned (New Straits Times: 3/3/1997, p. 6). Another example sought to penalise youths for going to entertainment outlets and to instruct these outlets to stop their operations earlier than before (The Star Online: 6/4/1997).

5.4 The account of youth problems is officially shaped

The depiction of the youth problem and related issues presented to the public was thus highly restricted and constructed from the ideological vantage points of authority. Davis and Walton (1983) argue that in news constructions the “official account” of an even is predominantly selected. My data from newspapers supported this argument with official accounts representing 88% of views agreeing with government policy. The news claims to be presented from a neutral and objective stance, but this fiction is based on the notion that the presented material relies on what the reporter observed, what the microphone recorded and what the camera saw. It seems more likely, as Bennet comments “that the professional practices embodying journalism norms of independence and objectivity also create conditions that systematically favour the reporting of narrow, official perspective” (1983, p. 76). This is an important issue because the press accounts
of the youth problem that predominate and inform people’s outlook comes to be regarded as the true and objective account of the problem.

Secondly, newspapers have to publish on a daily basis. In gathering news, reporters are faced with the problem reporters develop a “round structure” which Baker (1980: p. 162) describes as a “format within which news organisations can routinise the process of handling the unexpected”. That is, news gatherers institutionalise a network of contacts in organisations such as courts, police, trade unions, parliaments and the like that allow them to gain rapid access to events which may be unfolding in their “rounds”. This gives them access to authorities’ comments but also leads to an increased reliance on what authority figures have to say. Baker is on the view that the repeated use of authority figures increases their “news value” to a level where their presence and comments are regarded as news in its own right, and the evidence in my research tends to support this view.

I have noted above that the views of youth have generally been poorly represented. In an attempt to redress this imbalance, I now proceed to explore some of the views of young people directly involved in the *Rakan Muda* programme.
The young generation in Malaysia is said to act in opposition to the dominant beliefs, attitudes and practices of the majority of the population, and this is seen as a form of resistance to the values of society (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995, pp. 3-13). The lives and interests of the young people, however, including their friendships and relationships have been shown to develop as a part of complex social changes and are not necessarily associated with or related to any conscious desire to oppose the dominant values of society (Ariffin: 1995; New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6; New Straits Times: 7/3/1997, p. 6; New Straits Times: 27/2/1997, p. 8).

Young people seek solutions to problems that concern them in their immediate world. Their access to knowledge, power and their opportunity to develop life skills will influence how they perceive themselves, their world and its problems, and the solutions that are available to them. As a person's knowledge about their options for self-development expands, so their perceptions of the world are cast in a different light.

What leads young people, particularly those who have experienced social, economic and educational disadvantage, to see greater possibilities for themselves in the world? What will help young people solve their problems in productive and socially useful ways?

The areas of concern identified by Rakan Muda deal with young people and their potential involvement in crime. I have therefore focused on how Rakan Muda functions as a crime prevention mechanism. This chapter is based on the experiences and opinions
related by 30 young people who participated in interviews in Sarawak. They give their views on possible solutions to the social problems associated with them, on issues of empowerment and on the capacity and creativity of individuals to exercise power over their own lives.

The interviews were intentionally semi-structured, with participants freely encouraged to set their own agenda for discussion, and all respondents talked spontaneously about the issues of youth crime and Rakan Muda. The small sample size and deliberate subjectivity of the interview style mean that these stories cannot be relied upon to provide firm conclusions or applications regarding the problems of young people in Malaysia generally. Since almost all participants (26 out of 30) are members of Rakan Muda, their opinions become a good source of feedback on whether this programme really helps them in dealing with everyday expectations and hardships. It is hoped that their stories will be of particular value to those working in welfare field, both in direct services and policy-making.

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the Ministry of Youth and Sport (1994) sees those individuals aged 15 to 39 as the target of the Rakan Muda programme. However, I chose those aged between 15 and 26 as my respondents because they are seen by the Ministry to have a greater risk of crime and deviance involvement besides being characterised as the resourceful generation in the Vision 2020 goals.

As noted in Chapter 1, no similar research on youth has been done in Malaysia, not in relation to the youth groups in Sarawak. My thesis then can be treated as a pilot study for more extensive research. The closest study done by government only relates to "the loafing behaviour among teenagers" (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1994). And this
differs from my thesis because I am looking at the role of the *Rakan Muda* programme as a general crime prevention mechanism rather than looking at specific sub-group activities.

6.1 *Rakan Muda* and social control versus the powerless young generation

The interviews were conducted in Kuching, the capital of Sarawak in East Malaysia. Among the respondents, fifteen were male and fifteen were female. They were introduced or made known to me by my relatives and friends who were members and staff of *Rakan Muda* programmes. Four respondents (three females and one male) were not members of *Rakan Muda*. In the interviews, participants were asked to comment on both the positive and negative aspects of *Rakan Muda* programmes. One of the questions that I asked concerned the role of *Rakan Muda* as a government programme which attempts to mould young people to modern industrial values. The government believes that its *Vision 2020* goal cannot be achieved unless Malaysians, especially young people, re-organise their culture to fit the government’s capitalist ends. As expected, these young *Rakan Muda* members held these views:

(i) *Rakan Muda* trains members to become good citizens, teaching members not only to be responsible for themselves but also others;

(ii) *Rakan Muda* teaches members to obey the law and preserve order. Members are trained not only to discipline themselves but also how to differentiate what is right and wrong;

(iii) *Rakan Muda* helped members in dealing with social relations and expectations. Some respondents recalled their behaviour before joining the programme where they used to rush into doing things without really having a thought for the consequences. They recounted a pass where they often reacted unreasonably and irrationally, which risked getting them in trouble with others. Now they realised that it is important to act with thought. The four non-members also held these views;
(iv) *Rakan Muda* can operate as a crime prevention mechanism and was very useful in helping young people to protect themselves from getting involved in deviant behaviour or crime. Some of them considered the programme was a good government initiative to lessen the crime associated with young people; and

(v) *Rakan Muda* taught them skills and knowledge about which they had learnt very little before, such as character formation, job skills, training and social expectations.

I would argue that the above views indicate that attitudes, knowledge, and skills more than anything else are what young people find helpful in sorting out their lives. Family, school and peers do play important roles in young people’s lives but these influences come from outside *Rakan Muda*. The views also highlight the crucial role that young people thought *Rakan Muda* played in helping to protect them from the dangers of involvement in crime and delinquency and in educating them how to achieve a satisfying life.

Government intervention to control the behaviour of young people and punishment in terms of preventive coercion is seen by the authorities as an essential part of this control. However this also means that participants in a programme like *Rakan Muda* might be pressured to behave according to society’s values. Opinions from the 30 young people show that they are unaware of the programme’s role as a social control mechanism. The majority of respondents believed that they have little power to resist or voice their frustrations about society, but they seem to agree on what is expected from them so that they will be accepted by society. This is not to say that they do not have an urge to rebel, rather that they have been pressured to follow what society expects from them. That is to follow the norms and values make available by society. The majority
who do resist (such as those who *lepak*) found that they were stigmatised but felt that they had done nothing wrong. Some respondents explained:

We don’t do unlawful things like stealing or harassing people but we *lepak*, we do it just to relax. Usually we just window-shop because we don’t have enough money to buy all the things we see.

(Respondent 5)

The interviews focused on personal experiences of official perceptions of youth and the social problems associated with them. Some of the thoughts and experiences that these youths had about their lives, *Rakan Muda* and its effects show them to be loyal participants in the power game played by the authorities.

Media stories characterise the young generation as subjects for control, and this helps to shape the belief system of these young people as to how society works. Clearly media coverage of youth stressed the importance of young people conforming and obeying social norms and values. Adults in society are depicted as having a responsibility to educate young people with appropriate norms and values. Young people’s image in the media is often that of a subordinate group to adults, which reinforces the responsibility of adults to shape the behaviour of these young people. Most young people given a voice in the media express this view (*New Straits Times*: 1/3/1997, p. 13; *New Straits Times*: 7/3/1997, p. 6; *New Straits Times*, 7/3/1997, p. 7; *New Straits Times*: 3/3/1997, p. 5), and all of my respondents also held this view. They argue it is very wise to follow social norms and values to avoid getting into trouble.

When I asked what they regarded as a serious crime associated with youth in the media, almost all of them agreed drug addiction was the most serious crime, then abandoning babies, theft and illegal motor racing. Like most adults, my respondents also
agreed that media reports suggested an increase in youth crime. They agreed with this view because they believed the media had based its coverage on valid statistics. Their responses show that they believed the media play an important role in transmitting information and they are easily convinced by the news. However, it is not clear why they believe this. A possible explanation is the sources used when the media focuses on youth crime, as this news might seem more convincing when it is coupled with opinions from authorities.

Almost all the respondents agreed with the statement that the young generation today appeared to spend too much of their time "hanging around" (lepak) public places such as shopping malls, movie theatres and recreational parks. The media can amplify (Cohen: 1973; Young: 1971) young people's presence in public places by anticipating the threats posed by their behaviour. There were negative comments from respondents indicating discontent with media images of young people. For example, some participants commented that "loafing" was not a problem before the media took more notice about what the young generation did. However, some comments did provide support for the view that "loafing" in shopping malls disturbs the peace and smoothness of trade in those places. Clearly this view serves the needs of capitalist business. Business people usually see young people loafing around shopping malls as a threat because they feel that loafers might disturb their customers, or cause trouble such as stealing or fighting.

6.2 Young people, families and peers

Many respondents commented on the role of the family in social control:
A comment I would like to make is, people don’t realise how some young people’s parents treat them and how it makes life harder having parents that always disagree with them and pick on them all the time.

(Respondent 5)

I think parents should be better informed on today’s problems so they can advise their children on how to stay clear of crime and choose for themselves (how to be independent and in control of their own lives). The problem youths have is not being able to communicate with their family, especially parents. I am so lucky and have understanding parents. I am not totally “straight” and I used to be involved in trouble and in everything. I guess I am lucky that I have pulled myself out of it and now have discovered there is more to live for. If all youths had more people to talk to then young people today would be far better off and clear from any sort of trouble.

(Respondent 12)

Such comments illustrate an area of young people’s lives which causes much conflict for both young people and their parents alike. Youth is typically a time when relationships with parents are reassessed and re-negotiated as young people move towards independence and adulthood. Families play a crucial role in young people’s lives and the family is acknowledge by these 30 young people to be the social institution that has the most significant influence on their development. Parents act as role models, standard setters and reward granters in cognitive development and self-concept, in identity achievement and sex-role identification. For example, some respondents commented:

Parents should condition and reward their children with love and care. Parents have to understand the needs of their children, especially when they are in their early teens. This is the essential period where children want attention from parents because at this stage they have to fight outside influences (pressure from peers).

(Respondent 17)

Parents have to learn to give and take with their children too. They have to give children a chance to express themselves and be ready when they need
encouragement and motivation. Parents play an important role in socialising their children to be good and responsible adults when they grow up.

(Respondent 18)

Parents are the models for children. A good example usually produces a good breed. Both of my parents are very open minded. I can talk about almost everything. They do not judge me if I have problems or am in trouble. They are there to help.

(Respondent 19)

The physical as well as emotional presences of parents are extremely important during growing up. When I was growing up, I could always count of both my parents, but especially my mum, to be there when I needed them. It made a lot different and shaped my direction in life.

(Respondent 5)

Parents teach society's norms, values and belief. However, the power exercised by members of the family is not always as obvious as the power held by government, capitalists, law enforcement officers and others. One possible reason proposed by my respondents is that parental power is reinforced with love and care. Even though there is no definite conclusion from the interviewees' responses, they do agree that parents are responsible for monitoring their children's behaviour, both inside and outside the home. Children will have less of tendency to deviant or criminal involvement if they get constant reminders from their parents. One respondent in particular suggested that:

Support of the family is crucial to youths and those who do not have strong support from parents are more likely to become involved in undesirable behaviours.

(Respondent 20)

If parents are unable to control their children's behaviour, there is a tendency for youngsters to look for other means to satisfy the loss of parents' attention, and peers can
fulfil this role. Where young people associate with the wrong company and are exposed to bad influences, the government sees the need to interfere through *Rakan Muda*. While members are in care of the programme, the facilitators and supervisors will act as parents to these young people (Ministry of Youth and Sports: 1995). *Rakan Muda* provides them with parental support, especially religious teaching and inculcating social norms and values. Programme facilitators thus seek to act as role models.

Ochiltree (1990) suggests that, generally, young people in Australia take their major values in life from their parents. Most young people in Malaysia also look upon their parents as their primary role models, though there is a trend during the adolescent period towards the increasing importance of peer relationships. Peer groups provide vital intimate feedback to youths at a time of rapid personal and social change and enable them to communicate with others as equal partners. The major function of friends and peers is to provide a base of security and socialisation outside the family. As some respondents commented:

"that relationship with peers or friends allows young people to begin the process of emotional detachment from parents. The separation process takes place over a period of years and doesn't usually mean that youths suddenly reject their parents or their parents' values. Instead, they gradually let go in order to learn how to be emotionally self-supporting individuals".

(Respondent 20)

In most cases, peers play an important role in the life of the young generation. Being with peers, they can be influenced to do not only good behaviour but also deviant behaviour. But my friends who I hang out with are very helpful because they listen to me if I have problems that I cannot share with my parents. You know, young people also have secrets.

(Respondent 4)
The values of parents and peers are both important for young people in the process of achieving independence (Offer and Offer: 1975). Where there is less parental interest or in areas of parental uncertainty young people are likely to turn to the peer group for help and advice (Hunter: 1985), but parental and peer influences are not necessarily contradictory (Kandel and Lesser, 1972). However, parents’ counsel is more often preferred to that of peers in important situations involving values and decision making (Smith: 1976). Comments from participants suggest that they usually respect their parents when dealing with major decisions such as jobs, furthering education and some extent social relationships. Data from newspapers also presents the view that parents play the most crucial part in the life of most young people (New Straits Times: 7/3/1997, p. 6; New Straits Times: 1/3/1997, p. 1).

In Malaysia, it is typical for youths to stay with their parents until they are married. Out of 30 respondents, 27 of them were staying with both parents, 2 respondents were staying with foster parents while one was living with a single mother. Thus, it is not surprising that my respondents value their parents’ opinions when they deal with most decision making, as parents still play an important part in their lives.

Sixteen out of thirty respondents lived in villages situated approximately 100 kilometres from Kuching, while the rest come from Kuching itself. It is common for city residents to be migrants from suburban or rural areas. Even though 14 respondents in my study were born in Kuching, their parents were migrants who stayed in Kuching because of the jobs and economic opportunities that Kuching has to offer. 20 out of 30 respondents were not working while 10 were employed, mostly in service and delivery jobs. The highest wages range from RM900 – RM700 per month for government jobs.
(teacher, nurse and assistant researcher, respectively). The lowest pay is for a nanny, earning about RM300 per month. Other jobs were factory worker (RM600), driver (RM800), self-employed (RM500 – 600) and a blue-collar job (RM600).

Some of my respondents (17) are still studying. Those who are not working are totally dependent on their parents’ support. This is a common characteristic of Malaysian families. It is a responsible of parents to support children who are not married and not working. This is especially the case of female children. Parents have full responsibility for female children, even if they are over 20 of age. Given this common characteristic, it is normal for female to depend more on their parents compared to male children. Generally both gender depend on parents until they are married and started their own family. This parent-child nature of relationship produce greater impact on children decision making. Even children that have moved temporarily (to job place) from parents dwelling consider parents’ opinions are still very important in their lives. They often consult their parents first before making any important decision.

6.3 The young generation: can they change the negative image?

A small number of my respondents argue that they should be given a space in society, either in the policy making process or in sharing information with the news media. Participants argued that they want their views to be heard by authorities when designing policies for them. Clearly from their comments they felt that had little opportunity to express the difficulties and frustrations they face. For example, one respondent argued that:

Young people who spend too much of their time hanging out should not be blamed fully because parents, the government or perhaps every member in society
may in some way or another have contributed to the existence of the problem. Perhaps there are not enough facilities provided to cater to the needs of young people. So it is for authorities in the country to sponsor youth activities and provide more facilities. At least they will know where to go or what to do with their free time if there are facilities available. Maybe there will be no time to gossip and make fun of others when all their time is occupied with structured free time.

All respondents felt that all sections of society had to work together to combat social problems in the country. According to them, such problems are not confined to one group but are rather the concern of all. The potential solution suggested by the respondents is broader discussion and searching for ways to prevent the problem from becoming worse. The participants believe that every member in society, young and old, has to work together to keep society free from crime. Searching for a solution to the problem is the responsibility of all and no one group should blame others if they want to solve the crisis. For example, some respondents claimed that:

Government, police, teachers, parents and young people themselves have to work together to find answer for the problems. It is no time to accuse each other for not playing the right role.

(Respondent 3)

We should stop pointing fingers but realise that social problems are everybody’s responsibility and everyone should be doing something to solve the crisis.

(Respondent 13)

I think parents alone are not to be blamed. Schools, the community and even the government should play their part to overcome social problems.

(Respondent 21)

Deviancy is not an inherent status but something that is conferred by society, by social reaction (Cunneen and White: 1995). Labeling can produce criminal behaviour if those labelled face prejudice from other members of society, because their
disappointment or frustration might then lead to them to commit crime. What is the use of conforming to society’s norms and values if members of society already stigmatise you? According to Becker, the impact of social reaction on certain types of behaviour or particular categories of people is crucial to explaining the criminalisation process:

“Social groups create deviance by making the rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, deviance is not a quality of the act the person commits, but rather of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an ‘offender’. The deviant is one to whom the label has successfully been applied; deviant behaviour is behaviour that people so label". (Becker: 1963, p.9).

Despite weaknesses, the important contribution of labeling theory is that it shows how labeling can construct deviant behaviour. From the interviews, it is clear that social labeling is applied to some groups of young people and actually generates further “deviant” behaviour in the group so labelled. Some respondents recalled such experiences:

I remember some of my friends told me they are being called bohsia only because they talk to boys. But they did nothing, just discussing their school work at one of the shopping centres. One of my girlfriends got angry and said nasty words to those people who called them bohsia earlier. The argument became offensive and at the end they had to leave before security interfered.

(Respondent 12)

Imagine we are labelled as criminal, what we will we do? Besides feeling different and inferior, I personally feel less motivated and frustrated. I might choose to isolate myself from society that I feel is mean and unfair.

(Respondent 19)

Government, society and the media play a share in producing deviants among young people, either through control or through the promotion of moral panic over their behaviour and attitudes.
In Malaysia, there is still limited understanding about the nature of young people's lives, the reason why change is possible for them and how this change can come about. Although the interview sample is very limited, it shows how participants' opinions can open up a basic understanding of the needs of young people. These participants characterised their lives as a process of seeking solutions in circumstances with limited options rather than resisting any concrete authority. There is no conscious intent on their part to strike out at the system, rather to survive within it. Thus, I see the need for the authorities in programmes like *Rakan Muda* to level themselves with young people in order to understand their needs. This goal can be achieved by research and by listening to how young people conceptualise youth crime and their alternatives.

Although the number of participants involved in this study is very limited, their comments shed important light on the ways they think about their own experiences. Government and media perceived them as a serious problems of urban life. They were regarded by the authorities as engaging in rebellious acts (*lepak, bohsia, bohjan* and involvement in fundamentalist Islamic groups) against the norms and values of society and the state. The state's tendency to characterise the actions of young people as a social problem bears little resemblance to the explanations and accounts proffered by young people themselves.

The government and media have to understand the position of young people. The young should be given more chances and space to voice opinions and needs. The introduction of the *Rakan Muda* youth programme by the government, for example, places greater importance on the deeds rather than the needs of young people. This government initiative seems to be concerned primarily with the management and control
of young people's behaviour than with addressing the root of cause of their problems, and young people participating in the programme sense this.

I will now seek to draw together some of the major elements in my research and their implications for the *Rakan Muda* programme.
CHAPTER 7

7.0 Conclusion

In recent years social changes have given young people greater self-determination at steadily younger ages and rapid industrialisation and modernisation mean that current social expectations of youth are problematic. The process of growing up is complicated when the route to adulthood is not clearly marked out. The Department of Statistics (1997) and the Ministry of Youth and Sport in Malaysia (1995) classify those aged 15-39 years as “young people”, a subsection of Malaysian population who are considered by the Ministry to be “at risk”. Those who have reached the age of 16 can marry and apply for driving licence, but they cannot “hang out” in public places with friends of the opposite sex without receiving censure or being questioned by people in authority.

During the growing up process young people are exposed to a larger number of variety of role models, both at home and elsewhere. As society becomes more diverse, the range of social roles and choices available to most youths increase dramatically. Yet the ways in which young people select roles are hard to predict because political and moral values have become more diffuse as industrialisation produces a more pluralistic society. Greater freedom for young people carries more risks and costs for errors in judgement. Dropping out of school, being out of work, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, drug addiction and crime are powerful examples of the price that some young people pay for their extended freedoms. The impact of making “wrong” choices on individuals, their families and the wider society underscores the need for a better understanding of youth development and lifestyles.
Social changes have created new constraints, experiences and opportunities for Malaysian youths, in a context where even well-established social institutions are subject to change. The family unit is one example of how a social institution has been transformed, with an increase in nuclear family and single-parent homes. Changes in social attitudes towards, and expectations for, young people have occurred in many spheres of life.

The *Rakan Muda* programme can be seen as a governmental response to these changes, driven both by a desire to fit young people into the new structure of society and by a fear of the consequences of “wrong” choices.

7.1 Review of findings

This thesis has attempted to look at the *Rakan Muda* programme from a variety of perspectives. No other study has done this, and the limited research time available in my own work has meant that the findings here are necessarily of an exploratory nature. The three perspectives – from government, media and youth – indicates directions in which future research can proceed.

After Chapter’s one brief overview, in Chapter Two I reviewed the literature on youth crime, social control policy and intervention. I also briefly discussed and contrasted development and social changes in Peninsular Malaysia and Sarawak. Government policy in the Peninsular is often adopted in Sarawak regardless of the differences in social and historical conditions. Development in Sarawak on the other hand has produced problems that are urban centered (King: 1990, p. 116), aggravated by the tendency of young people from rural areas to move to major cities. The process of
adaptation to a new urban environment created dilemmas for most of them. Meanwhile, youths who originated from city dwellings were also prone to anti-social behaviour because they could not cope with the rapid social changes that accompanied development. In all situations, young people were more likely to be blamed for their deviant behaviour because they had little power to voice their needs and issues. Chapter Three discussed the methodology that was used in this study. There were three sources of data: government materials on *Rakan Muda*, newspaper clippings' and interviews with 30 young people in Kuching.

This thesis, unlike other similar research in Malaysia, has attempted to provide some understanding of the young generation and how they view their involvement in *Rakan Muda*. Chapter 4 noted that there is a changing focus in young people's leisure pursuits. The interplay of individual factors and social environment directs young people towards particular pursuits in their leisure, and the nature of this is important to understand. Major social changes involve a whole range of personal and social factors – from individual character formation to the role of adults and peers in the formation of cultural and social values, and the effects of the wider society's norms and expectations, including those of government and the mass media.

The Ministry of Youth and Sport (1995) has highlighted the distinction between coercive and voluntary participation in youth programmes. The analysis of government materials suggests (1996) that any programme will have appeal for young people only if a genuinely voluntary status is introduced and controls reduced to minimum. At best, *Rakan Muda* provides young people with a temporary relief from the stresses and strains engendered by structural disadvantage. Many participants will undoubtedly experience
positive outcomes in terms of gaining new friendships and acquiring new skills, and some may indeed learn effective ways of dealing with the grind of everyday life. However, although participants may experience short-term benefits from the *Rakan Muda* programme, there is little or no evidence to suggest that there are any lasting behavioural changes, or that such changes necessarily add anything new to prevent young people from engaging in criminal or delinquent activities.

To assume that short, intense periods of participation in activity-based schemes can fundamentally address issues of structural disadvantage is, of course, absurd, and the proponents of the *Rakan Muda* schemes would be the first to acknowledge this. Equally, however, such initiatives cannot wholly be dismissed since they clearly bring some benefits to participants. However, there is still puzzlement as to why there has been some drastic increase in young people’s involvement in crime and deviant activities. *Rakan Muda*, it seems, provides young people with new skills but does not guarantee they will stay clear of criminal behaviour. In final analysis, then, the liberal intentions of *Rakan Muda* activities are best viewed as an attempt by the government to regulate and control the use of time and space of a growing number of marginalised and alienated young people (Pratt: 1990, pp. 219-42; Polk: 1993). The control of this group of young people aimed to protect the public and business interests, while at the same time encouraging youth to conform to the new demands of capital and industry.

The Fifth Chapter investigates media constructions of youth crime. One significant set of results showed the important contribution of authority voices in the reporting of youth crime by the media. Media images tend to portray young people as purveyors of trouble or as a threat to society. The media plays the role of amplifying
negative images of sexuality and morally deviant young people. The terms “bohsia” and “bohjan” are the results of media construction and the use of dismissive labelling was common: “criminals”, “social ills”, “wasteful youths”. Such labelling had the effect of removing the necessity for any sort of sociological explanation of young people’s activities. According to Hall (1978b) the media’s approach to forms of behaviour such as hooliganism has sat comfortably with a political authoritarianism that has demanded a “toughening attitude” towards all forms of social permissiveness:

“the temptation grows to deal with any problem, first by simplifying its causes, second by stigmatising those involved, third by whipping up public feeling into a panic about it and fourth by stomping down hard on it from above” (1978b, p. 34).

In Malaysia, the phenomena such as lepak, bohsia and bohjan not only caused moral panic but also recommended the authorities to put forward a midnight curfew for teenagers. Even though, this curfew matter was only a proposal, somehow it shows that this is the result of moral panic regarding youth leisure activity. It has also been suggested that night-clubs, bars, karaoke lounges and other places of that nature be limited and discouraged. The stereotyping of deviant youths in the media deepens the fears of Malaysian society about losing the future citizens of the country. It is evident from the media that older people in the country are more concerned with the future than the current welfare of youths. Older people often express their frustrations with young people who lack responsibility, discipline and knowledge. They argue that these deficiencies in young people limit their involvement in Malaysia’s development. Most comments and suggestions in the media viewed youths as the problem rather than as victims of industrialisation and modernisation in Malaysia. The processes of labelling and deviance amplification have helped the media to construct the youth “problem”. The
issue of whose interests and ownership are served by the media is clear from the majority voices it represents. In the latter case, the *New Straits Times* and the *Berita Harian* are both closely associated with United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), Malaysia’s largest and ruling political party. Meanwhile the *Borneo Post* and the *Sarawak Tribune* are controlled by an active veteran politician in Sarawak.

The analysis of media coverage of the youth problem was counterposed by interviews with young people in Kuching, Sarawak (Chapter 6). These interviews were important, because often in policy development and the news-making process, youth voices are given little or no prominence. Results from the interviews showed that young people in the *Rakan Muda* programme tend to support the majority view that youths are the problem rather than being victims in today’s Malaysia. According to the interviewees, they gained not only life skills but also a better understanding of how to behave according to the accepted norms and values in society. Directly or indirectly, all respondents confirmed the majority beliefs that require young people to conform more closely to the law and social order, and saw it as a mistake to resist the system. However, the limited sample cannot be assumed to represent the voices of all youths in Malaysia. Rather, it should be treated as a pilot study for broader and more in-dept research, highlighting the need to see how young people conceptualise their own circumstances and problems.

In relation to families, a research finding was that respondents and their parents have less stormy relationships than might be generally imagined. Parents remain an important influence throughout the respondents’ transition to adulthood, helping them to form their sense of self and shape their future life choices. Where important values,
future plans and attitudes are concerned, these respondents appear to be largely in agreement with their parents. A generation gap in terms of fundamental values seems to be a somewhat erroneous idea, and further research on this might provide new directions for *Rakan Muda* activities. All respondents accept their parents as behavioural models and sought to develop a lifestyle compatible with upbringing and experiences.

In this chapter too, it was clear that the peers of the interviewees often supported traditional parental attitudes and beliefs and looked to work in concert with, rather than in opposition to, adult goals and achievements. Peer influences may become more important for young people whose access to parental influences is impaired. While being an atypical, these youths appeared to understand and select from a broad range of societal values and behaviours.

A strong and consistent finding among all participants was that they have been given too little scope to express the needs and problems in their lives. They believe that they are not totally responsible for their misbehaviour, and argue that a cause of this is the fact that there were not enough facilities available to cater for their needs. From this position, they argued that every member in society has to play a part in solving the youth problem.

For many youths, adult-led organisations are major sources of structured leisure time activities, creating a context for meeting friends and observing adult role models. *Rakan Muda* is one such programme, but its rationale and mode of implementation show there is a need for a more systematic assessment of how it structures youth-adult interactions and mentoring roles. A major limit on this research, and in *Rakan Muda* itself, is the lack of ethnographies of young people's lives that would help us to
understand the ways in which young people use and perceive their leisure and social environments. There is also a need for an anthropological perspective on the meaning and significance of leisure activities for young people in future research. I hope that this thesis, despite its limited scope, offers some insight into how this process might begin.
Appendix

Date: Case no:

**Questionnaire to obtain data on young people opinion on social and cultural problem in Malaysia.**

This questionnaire is confidential; nothing that could identify a respondent, workplace or employer will be used in my report.

01. Sex

02. Age

03. Grade

04. Do you come from a village, small town or large town/city?

05. If young person is employed, please indicate:
   a. length of time in present job (years/months)
   b. nature of duties
   c. name of profession, industry or business
   d. approximate earnings

06. Where is the young person’s permanent home considered to be?

| 1. With natural Mother and Father (married) |   |
| 2. With Mother living alone                  |   |
| 3. With Father living alone                  |   |
| 4. With natural Mother and Stepfather        |   |
| 5. With natural Father and Stepmother        |   |
| 6. With other relative or guardian (specify please) |   |
| 7. With person unrelated to the young person and not legal guardian (specify please) |   |
| 8. Other (specify please)                    |   |
07. Parents’ Employment:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of duties</th>
<th>Industry, profession or business</th>
<th>If part time, please state no. of hours</th>
<th>Length of time employed</th>
<th>Approximate earnings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

08. Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is the parental home:</th>
<th>No. of rooms:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rent (council)</td>
<td>Living</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rent (private)</td>
<td>Bedrooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupied</td>
<td>Kitchen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owner occupied (mortgaged)</td>
<td>Bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Please specify)</td>
<td>Garden</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

09. Is the parental home:

- Terraced
- Detached
- Semi-detached
- Mobile Home
- Other (Please Specify)

10. Siblings of the young person:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. staying in the same home</th>
<th>No. staying somewhere else</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sisters</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brothers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
11. Malaysian government established ‘Rakan Muda’ as a youth program that can help to produce citizen with good moral value and identity. What is your opinion on ‘Rakan Muda’ program as a crime controlling mechanism? Do you think ‘Rakan Muda’ helped young generation from involving themselves in crime and immoral misconduct?

12. In your opinion, what are the most serious social problems associated with today’s young generation? Newspaper coverage stated that social problems of the young are increasing. Do you agree?

13. Loitering in public places is one of the social problems associated with young generation in Malaysia. What is your reaction to this statement? Why?

14. Do you think young generation are influenced by their peers to participate in crime? Do you think ‘loitering’ can influence young generation to get involve in crimes and immoral behaviour? Why?

15. Family upbringing and neglecting are among the factors that can influence young generation to involve in deviant behaviour. Do you think parents are responsible to control their children from involving in immoral behaviour and crime? If Yes, in what way? If No, why not?

16. Social and cultural problems that are said related to young generation can be solved if all parties (government, teachers, police, parents, young people and the public) work together to prevent these problems from happening. What is your opinion?

17. Some people say calling the young generation deviant prompts them to be different. What is your opinion?

18. ‘Bohsia’ and ‘Bohjan’ are used to describe young females and young males who are perceived to practise multiple sex partners. Does this lifestyle worry you and do you know any of them personally? In your opinion, what make them choose this lifestyle?

19. Possible way of tackling social and cultural problems is by bringing young generation together to try and give them the opportunity to voice what they want. Do you agree with this statement and how do you think it will work? Do you think that young generation have been given enough opportunity to voice their opinion on solution for problems affecting their life? Why?

20. Young generation are also responsible for their deviant behaviour. How and in what way are young generation responsible to control themselves from getting involve in crime and delinquency?
Bibliography


