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**CULT ON THE RISE?  
STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES ON CULT ISSUES IN SECONDARY AND  
NATIONAL HIGH SCHOOLS IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree**

**Of**

**Master of Education**

**By**

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**Hamilton New Zealand**

**2008**

## **ABSTRACT**

In the last five years there has been a dramatic increase in perceived levels of antisocial behaviour amongst students in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea. Certain events have caught the public's attention, such as the burning down of school buildings and reports of Satanic worship. Despite widespread concern, there seems to be little understanding of why such problems are occurring and no systematic studies to estimate the exact extent of such behaviours or their underlying cause.

The main objective of this study was to collect information about the students' perspectives on the nature and extent of these perceived problems. For ethical reasons, and with regard to ease of access to participants within the time frame of the study, data were collected from the first year student teachers at Madang Teachers' College, Papua New Guinea, who had been Secondary/National High school students only a few months previously. As this was an exploratory investigation, and it was not known whether participants would feel more at ease talking one-on-one with the researcher or in groups, two methodologies were used: focus group discussions and individual interviews. The research was conducted over a period of three weeks in June 2007, and involved a total of 21 participants (three focus groups of five, five and six people respectively, and six individual interviewees, one of whom also joined a group).

The main findings to emerge from these discussions were as follows. First, the participants explained their own and other students' behaviour in terms of exploring old and new traditions of school life. Second, although several participants reported knowledge of supernatural practices, many of the group activities described in the discussions were normal activities among peer cliques that provided a sense of belonging and positive support for school achievement. There were no major differences in the stories told by male and female participants, and no obvious differences in the type of information provided under different research conditions.

There was some disagreement among participants as to whether or not school authorities should take strong action to eliminate the possibility of cult practices.

The findings are interpreted with reference to both Western psychological ideas about the nature of adolescence, and to local traditions, practices, and understandings of lifespan development. In particular, the notion of "searching for identity" stands out in these accounts of student behaviour.

This was an exploratory study and not designed to yield results that provide an overall picture of the situation in the Secondary/National High schools of Papua New Guinea. Nevertheless, participants' reports did relate to events experienced in the majority of PNG Secondary and National High schools, and some recommendations are tentatively offered.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to whom I owe thanks. First and foremost, very special and heartfelt thank you to Associate Professor Dr. Monica Payne for her invaluable help, advice and endless support throughout the course of this study up to the very end. Without her this thesis would never be completed.

I would like to extend my special thanks to Vin Glynn for her generous assistance in helping with the language and editing. I would like to thank the Provincial Education Advisor (Mr Chris. Bulu) for allowing me to carry out my study in Madang Province. I would like to thank the Principal of Madang Teachers College for allowing me to use the first year student teachers and the college facilities for collecting my data. Thank you to Mrs Borah Elias for doing the initial arrangement of participants. My big thank you goes to all the first year student teachers who willingly participated in the interviews.

I would like to thank NZAID Scholarship for providing this great opportunity for my children and me to study in New Zealand. We would not be here with out this support. I would also like to thank Bev Price for her administrative assistance and personal support throughout this period of study.

Thank you to Doug Tennent for his encouragement, unlimited help and support and for taking my children and me around to see some of the beautiful scenery in NZ. I would like to thank the following people for taking extra responsibility of looking after my daughters while I was in PNG collecting my data: Martha Enderwick and Marian Panettiere, for checking, taking them out on weekends and making sure all is well; Sue Malcolm for making sure there was an extra fund to help pay for the hostel fees.

I would like to thank my husband Raphael for making me come to NZ that I was able to stay on to study. Finally I would like to thank my three daughters Hazel, Joylyn, and Charlotte for having faith in me and for the patience and love they showed throughout this difficult journey. I dedicate this thesis to my three daughters.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background to the Study**

In Papua New Guinea in 1994 a major reform in education took place, making significant changes to the structure of the education system and to the curriculum. The reforms were intended to encourage students who did very well in the internal and final external examinations at the end of Grade 10 to remain in education to Grades 11 and 12. Upon completion of Grade 12, students that did very well would then be encouraged to go on to universities, and others go to other tertiary institutions. However, it was noted that those achieving least success usually progressed only to casual work or unemployment. This raised concerns about the lack of success of some proportion of school students receiving so much formal education, even some of those who went to tertiary institutions.

This has brought out a growing concern over the last few years about the problem behaviors of students in National High schools, Secondary schools and even some tertiary institutions throughout the country. This behavior is not anything these institutions encourage but is a common phenomenon that emerged out of many factors. In learning environments where there is less adult control than in traditional PNG society there is concern about young people affiliating in groups to develop new cultures and behaviours.

Developing these groups has not always been considered problematic and they were encouraged in the early 70s and 80s. For instance students were encouraged to put up traditional dances in provincial groups during schools cultural day following the idea to promote cultural practices in schools so that the younger generation would not forget their cultural heritage in the face of this changing world. Furthermore it is a way of promoting Papua New Guinea ways as stipulated in one of the five basic principles of the constitution (Matane, 1986).

However, the "generation cult" that we now hear of in Papua New Guinea schools is no longer the type of group activity that has been practiced in the past and comes in many different definitions, many of which incur adult disapproval. In recent years there has been a lot of talk about supernatural practices spoiling the image of the schools. For example, in March 2004 the online *Papua New Guinea Gossip Newsletter* reported that there had been much discussion of school cults, with the East New Britain Education Advisor commenting that various cult movements were probably entrenched in all National High schools. The Newsletter also relayed reports that Grade 11 students at Kerevat National High school were being forced by Grade 12 students to join the generation cult, and that a cult involving Satanic worship had been exposed at Sogeri National High school ("School cults in Papua New Guinea", 2004). In fact there is fear that students do not promote traditions but are developing new cults, and engage in behaviours at school that they would not do at home. Of particular concern to authorities is that many of the country's top students are involved.

As a member of staff at Madang Teachers College (MTC) in Madang Province, Papua New Guinea, there are a number of reasons that urged me to do this study. Firstly, I was encouraged by a particular experience at the College. I was in charge of female student teachers at MTC when I witnessed an incident among a group of female student teachers. The leader of the group was in her final year of study so the group was engaged in a ceremony of appointing a new leader when they were reported to me, so I went in to see what was happening. Two other lecturers that were in charge of Tertiary Students Fellowship went to the dormitory and prayed for them but the group went crazy and broke the louvers. The Group leader used the broken pieces of louvers to cut herself so she could bleed as an offering to the person they were worshipping. The securities couldn't stop them either. The Group leader then ran out of the dormitory into the open space where other lecturers and male students came and helped stopped the Group leader from doing any further damage. I was later informed by other students that such practices are brought in from Secondary and National High schools, and which they referred to as *cult*. Secondly many people especially parents and other adults have always talked about cult in Secondary and National High schools. I had often wondered why such things are

happening in our schools and thought may be it will be a good idea to find out more about this problem.

What interests me is (i) the belief that such practices are very popular in National High schools and Secondary schools in the country, and (ii) that it seems that when some students continue on to tertiary institutions they go with those practices. These young people I work with at MTC are training to become teachers, who would be future leaders and role models to the future generation. Therefore I would ask what attitude they will take as teachers when they go back to work in schools and encounter students who engage in these behaviours.

### **The Purpose of the Research**

The purpose of conducting this study was to investigate the perspectives of students on the possible supernatural practices in schools in Papua New Guinea. This study will focus on first year student teachers at Madang Teachers College who have just completed grade 12 in various Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea. Cult in these schools has been an ongoing issue, and I would like to do this study to find out more about the student teachers' attitudes and perceptions on it.

Many adults think negatively about cults in schools; however I believe that many are not too sure of what is really happening in regard to this issue. For this reason, I would like to interview students who have just completed Secondary and National High schools to gain more insights into possible positive and negative aspects of cult practices. It is hoped that findings from this study will provide useful information for parents, teachers, and other adults worrying about adolescents in schools in the country. It will also make student teachers aware of parents' expectations from them when they are teachers and how they would respond to parents and other people in the community.

### **Research Questions**

This study is designed to investigate the following aspects of cult in Secondary and National High schools:

- (i) Personal knowledge and experience of the Secondary or National High schools they recently attended.
- (ii) Students' more general beliefs and opinions about cult practices in these schools.
- (iii) Students' views of the appropriate role of teachers, school administrators and the education authorities in monitoring and/or taking action regarding cult practices.

### **Significance of the Research**

It is anticipated that the results of the study will possibly provide some information for parents and other adults on areas that could be looked at to help students in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea. It could also act as an eye opener for teachers and other staff in these schools. This could also encourage the Department of Education in Papua New Guinea in formulating means and ways of helping or safeguarding the students. These results could also be used as supplementary information for the Department of Education geared towards implementation of the 2005-2014 national education plans.

### **The Format of the Report**

The present study begins with first chapter outlining the overview and the purpose of this study. The next chapter presents the related literature, which discusses the possible exploration of possible supernatural practices in Papua New Guinea Secondary and National High schools, and some ideas about the development of adolescence and adolescents' social relationships comparing the Western and the non-Western societies. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and Chapter 4 presents the findings. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the results in relation to the existing literature along with the implications of these findings for future research and practices.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter presents a discussion of the literature on the study of adolescence, as it can be relevant for an investigation of supernatural ideas and practices in this age group. It is divided into two main sections. The first section discusses ideas about adolescence that have come from Western psychology and some aspects of the lives of Western adolescents today in the 21st century. Due to historical colonization and the global dominance of Western ideas today, this information can be very important in our understanding of adolescents' lives in non-Western societies also. The second section will discuss aspects of adolescence in some non-Western cultures, including Papua New Guinea. It will conclude with a focus on the impact of the increasing importance of secondary education and the topic of the present study—the perceived problem of supernatural practices in Papua New Guinea schools.

#### Section One: The Western Story of Adolescence

##### Changing Psychological Stories of Adolescence

###### *Granville Stanley Hall: "Storm and Stress"*

Western developmental psychology began about 120 years ago, and Granville Stanley Hall (1844-1924) is considered the founder of the scientific study of adolescence. Hall's ideas were based on Charles Darwin's theory of evolution that described adolescence as "a period so turbulent that it resembled the era in which humans evolved from savages into civilized beings", and by the view of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, that the adolescent years are a period of "biologically based universal developmental disturbance" (Berk, 2007, p. 362). Hall's view of adolescence was therefore focused on the internal changes of puberty, a time of rapid overall body growth and the maturation of sexual characteristics that marks the

beginning of adolescence, in which boys are usually two to three years slower than girls (Santrock, 2007; Shaffer, 2002). As a result of these physical changes, which are controlled by hormones, Hall assumed adolescence would also be a time of emotional instability. In this way he promoted the very influential idea that adolescence is a time of "storm and stress".

The biological transitions of puberty are obviously similar for adolescents in all cultures. They involve physical growth, hormonal changes and sexual maturity, and also cognitive changes in the individual's ability to reason and plan, and integrate and understand information. However, there is more controversy regarding the process of emotional maturation. In Western societies there is still widespread belief in Hall's notion of "storm and stress", and according to Thomas (2005, p. 315), "the passing of childhood and the arrival of adolescence provides opportunities for becoming mature, but such maturing is not automatic". On the other hand, many later writers do not think of adolescence as an inevitably stressful and turbulent period. They note that most early research was focused on adolescents and families who were experiencing problems. When psychologists began large-scale studies of "normal" populations, they found that most adolescents did not suffer from serious emotional tensions as a result of biological change. Furthermore, researchers in other disciplines who visited non-Western cultures had for a long time reported that the physical changes of puberty were not always associated with mood swings and emotional stress. In her famous book *Coming of Age in Samoa* (1928/1961), the American anthropologist Margaret Mead had challenged the views of Hall and Freud, and argued that any experience of emotional turmoil in adolescence was mainly due to social and environmental factors rather than internal biological factors.

By the late 20th century, therefore, many Western psychologists were paying more attention to socioemotional issues associated with adolescents' independence, going against parents and wanting to spend more time with peers and friends. When adolescents have conflicts with authorities such as parents and teachers they may get involved in risky behaviours that are dangerous and could harm themselves or others. Therefore psychologists have developed a more integrated framework to identify the influences on adolescent behaviours; for example Buchanan, Eccles, and Becker (1992, cited in Rodgers & Bard, 2003, p. 8) noted that

Historically, most of the changes in mood and behavior were presumed to be negative and to be the result of biological factors, particularly of hormones.... More recently, psychologists have questioned both the prevalence of such negative changes and their hypothesized biological roots.... Emphasis has shifted to contextual (i.e., family, school, peer group) and psychological (i.e., self-esteem, gender role orientation) factors.

Some writers also encouraged more emphasis on positive aspects of adolescents' experience. For example, Conger and Petersen (1984, cited in Heaven, 2001, p. 4) shared these sentiments:

While many adolescents face occasional periods of uncertainty and self-doubt, of loneliness and sadness, of anxiety and concern for the future, they are also likely to experience joy, excitement, curiosity, a sense of adventure, and a feeling of competence in mastering new challenges.

Nevertheless, there is also recognition that in most modern societies adolescents have to adjust to a rapidly changing environment that can be difficult, stressful, turbulent and unpredictable (Berger, 2000).

### *Changes in the Timing of Puberty*

Since many people in Western societies still hold the view that young people going through puberty will be moody and easily upset, there is much concern about reports that the age of puberty is continuing to decline.

In Hall's time, puberty began at a later period and children started work earlier, so that both occurred at about the same time. It is evident that changes of puberty amongst Western adolescents tend to be consistently earlier in most countries in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, where most boys and girls arrived at puberty at or between the ages of ten to twelve, which was two years earlier than a century ago (Brown & Larson, 2002). Studies suggest that better nutrition, better and more advanced health care and other social services are reasons for the earlier maturity, and for young people also developing taller and heavier (Santrock, 2007; Shaffer, 2002).

Recent studies in the United States have caused some alarm about the continuing decline of onset of puberty in girls. Statistics in the U.S. suggest that children mature physically probably a year earlier than in European countries, with menarche now taking place on average at about the age of twelve and a half, rather than a century ago when it occurred at about fourteen years or more. Reports also suggest an increasing number of girls in the United States are arriving at puberty at the ages of eight and nine years (Herman-Giddens, Kaplowitz, & Wasserman, 2004, cited in Santrock 2007).

Despite these chronological changes, however, the research has shown great consistency with regard to the psychological adjustment of early, average, and late developers. Adolescents who experienced puberty early, or at about the same time as most of their peers, perceived more positive experiences and have successful relationship with their friends and peers than the late maturing peers, although this relationship generally seems to be stronger for boys than for girls.

Findings from several recent studies suggest that early maturing boys are relaxed, independent, and self-confident and are seen as more physically attractive and also more popular with their peers in social settings (Berk, 2007; Santrock, 2007). Some factors contributing to the more mixed experiences of early maturing girls are that these girls may have difficulties socialising with girls of their same age group and be perceived by them as "boy crazy". When these early maturing girls start dating they may have relationship with boys who are older than them and would take part in drinking, smoking, sex and involving in other adult activities at an early age. This may cause problems with schoolwork, and negative reactions from worried parents and teachers (Berger, 2000; Berk, 2007; Santrock, 2007; Shaffer, 2002).

### ***Erik Erikson: "Identity Crisis"***

Another major aspect of the Western psychological story of adolescence came from the writings of Erik Erikson (1902-1994). Erikson studied with Sigmund Freud and was influenced by his ideas. However, his own theory of personality development was produced after World War Two in a very different social environment. He acknowledged Freud's theory of psychosexual stages, and the role of biology in



determining development, but thought he must reject Freud's idea that a person's basic personality is mainly established by experiences in the first five years of life. Erikson proposed that personality development continues throughout the lifespan, and that the impact of early experience can be changed by later experiences. He also suggested that the individual has a very important part to play in the construction of his or her own personality, and that adolescence is the key period for achieving a sense of "identity", or commitment to a particular way of living (Santrock, 2007).

Erikson noted that in a more technological society more time is taken up by education, and young people have more choices to make regarding their working life. In these circumstances the stage of adolescence becomes an even more marked and conscious period, and becomes a distinct way of life between childhood and adulthood. In his book *Childhood and Society* he defined adolescence "as the age of the final establishment of a dominant positive ego-identity", when the individual has to deal with the confusion caused by asking the question "Who am I?"

What the regressing and growing, rebelling and maturing youths are now primarily concerned with is who and what they are in the eyes of the wider circle of significant people as compared with what they themselves have come to feel they are; and how to connect the dreams, idiosyncrasies, roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational sexual prototypes of the day (Erikson, 1963/1995, p. 277).

Erikson called adolescence the time of an "identity crisis", a period of heightened vulnerability and sensitivity about self that concludes with commitments to occupation and ideology. The aspects of identity may be categorized into three areas as "objective identity", "subjective identity", and "self-identity". Objective identity refers to how other people view an individual's identity. Subjective identity refers to what a person thinks of how other people see him/her as an individual. Self-identity refers to how an individual sees him/herself (Hopkins, 1983). Therefore, adolescence in the mid-20th century was seen as typically a period when young people are very aware of how they are perceived by others but at the same time struggle to become more detached from their parents and attempt to establish an independent identity. Erikson's theory established the idea that this detachment, and other behaviours that challenged the ideas of the older generation, were an important and necessary part of

a person's healthy psychological development. It also proposed the idea of adolescence as a "moratorium" period, a time for the young person to be free of adult responsibilities and to receive support from the older generation for the exploration of different possible "selves".

### ***Changing Time frame for Resolving the Identity Crisis***

By the late 20th century, more young people in Western societies were extending their education to the tertiary level. As a result they were making decisions about careers, marriage and having children at a later age. Therefore what Erikson had called "the identity crisis" was not being resolved until people were in their twenties, and no longer thinking of themselves as "adolescents". Although some psychologists do not see a problem retaining the term "adolescent" for people this age (for example, Santrock [2007] defines adolescence as beginning at approximately 10 to 13 years of age and ending between the ages of about 18 and 22), others have suggested that another developmental stage is now needed between "adolescence" and "adulthood". The most popular has been Jeffrey Arnett's concept of "Emerging adulthood" (Santrock, 2007), which is thought of as ranging from 18 to 25 years of age and a transitional period characterized by *more* experimentation and exploration than adolescence. However, for most young people in many human societies (and for those in the West who go into paid employment straight from school), "Emerging adulthood" is not currently a meaningful developmental stage, and the tasks of "identity achievement" as proposed by Erikson are still seen as an important aspect of the adolescent period.

### **Definitions of Adolescence as a Separate Stage of the Lifespan**

Although children in all cultures have always gone through puberty to reach physical and sexual maturity, this transition has not always been thought of as a separate stage of the lifespan. However, in Western societies individuals began to experience a longer and longer period between the age when they were called a "child", and the age at which they achieved "adult" status. When Granville Stanley Hall published the first psychological text on "adolescence" in 1904 he established the identification of

adolescence as a separate developmental period in the psychological model of the lifespan.

Hall (quoted in Santrock, 2007, p. 6) described adolescence as “the period from 12 to 23 years of age and it is characterized by considerable upheaval”. Writing in the United States at the beginning of the 20th century, Hall was defining adolescence as a period including the changes of puberty plus the years before the average man married and settled down as an adult citizen. Since that time, psychologists have produced various definitions of adolescence, which may emphasise chronological age, internal biological changes, and/or the developmental tasks of the period, and which reflect changes in the expectations that society has for young people at this age. Some examples are as follows.

Puberty continued to be a defining characteristic of many attempts to split adolescence into separate sub-stages. For example Berk, (2007, p. 362) describes the three phases of adolescence as:

1. Early adolescence (11-12 to 14 years): a period of rapid pubertal change
2. Middle adolescence (14 to 16 years): pubertal changes are now nearly complete
3. Late adolescence (16 to 18 years): The young person achieves full adult appearance and anticipates assumption of adult roles.

Other definitions have paid less attention to physical change and focused on psychological development. For example, Rogers (1977, p. 7) defined adolescence as “a process, rather than a period, a process of achieving the attitudes and beliefs needed for effective participation in society”. She also claimed that the adolescent period is a time of increasing responsibilities that could cause anxiety and stress in making decisions, but such stress can help the adolescents clarify their values and be able to cope with future problems more effectively.

As referred to before, many writers have emphasized adolescence as a stage "between" other stages:

It is the period between childhood and adulthood. It is a period when much personal growth takes place; and it is this growth – physical, psychological and social – that gives the period its special place with the field of developmental psychology. (Hopkins, 1983, p. 2)

A transitional period rather than viewing adolescence as having a specific beginning and a specific ending, it makes more sense to think of the period as being composed of a series of passages – biological, psychological, social and economic – from immaturity to maturity. (Steinberg, 1999, p. 4)

The period of biological, cognitive, and psychosocial transition from childhood to adulthood, usually lasting a decade or so. (Berger, 2000, p. 440)

The developmental period of transition from childhood to early adulthood; it involves biological, cognitive, and socioemotional changes. (Santrock, 2007, p. 16)

Others have not paid so much attention to this, or have noted that the nature of the "transition" is constantly changing:

[Adolescence is] a period of rapid change, physical, sexual and cognitive changes within the young person and changes in the adolescents' world and the demands of the society. (Conger & Galambos, 1997, p. 51)

Adolescence is often conceptualised as a transition between childhood and adulthood, yet the nature of transition has been significantly affected by the social and political events for the past two decades. (Coleman & Hendry, 1999, p. 2)

Critics of the idea of adolescence as a "transition stage" have argued that this is a very adult view, and that adolescents themselves do not see themselves in this way. Also, this perspective can prevent adults from understanding the importance to young people of ideas and activities that are more about "*being* an adolescent" than about "*becoming* an adult".

## **Adolescents and Their Families**

When Stanley Hall published his work on adolescence the majority of young people were either working on farms or in paid employment during most of their teenage years, and Freud's influential theory argued that the core aspects of personality development were completed in childhood. In this environment psychologists did not pay much attention to the role of parents in adolescent development, except as moral guardians.

By the mid-20th century the majority of young people in Western societies were spending at least half of their teenage years in compulsory schooling, and remained financially dependent on their parents. In this context, psychologists increasingly also emphasized the family's role in providing *emotional* support. As Berger (2008, p. 31) states: "families provide the necessary caring that enables children to develop emotionally, intellectually and physically", and these types of support, as well as financial support, are often expected to last unconditionally all the way through to universities (Jackson & Rodriguez-Tomé, 1993). The quality of the emotional relationship between husband and wife was also given new importance: Santrock (2007), for example, advises readers that when a couple is happily married they tend to become more sensitive, responsive, warm and affectionate towards their children and adolescents thus creating a healthy environment and a happy family. From the human development perspective, Western societies can therefore be described as "child centred" because parents are encouraged to always put children's needs first, give priority to their education, and keep them free of adult responsibilities for as long as possible (Shaffer, 2002).

Erikson's theory was very influential in promoting the idea that this should be a time without adult responsibilities and focused on self-exploration. In this environment psychology contributed to the view of adolescents as still intellectually and emotionally immature, and both requiring and benefiting from adult guidance and protection in many areas of life. Therefore psychologists increasingly emphasized the importance of good parenting in adolescence as well as in childhood, and in particular the importance of parents as "good role models".

However, there were obvious tensions in this situation: for example, on the one hand parents had to support and encourage self-exploration and experimentation, and on the other they had to protect and set boundaries; they were expected to be "teachers" in some respects (e.g., being a teenager's main source of information about sexuality), but also to be their son or daughter's "friend". In the mid- to late 20th century psychologists offered very specific advice to the public about good and bad "parenting styles", and in English-speaking Western societies "Authoritative" parenting was strongly endorsed. This combines providing a high degree of "warmth" within the family environment, allowing adolescents to take part in family decision-making that affects them, and encouraging exploration but within clearly defined boundaries. Good parents are those who are always available to provide emotional comfort and support, even though their teenage children may spend little time at home; parental authority is de-emphasized in favour of open and friendly communication (Santrock, 2007).

The other "styles" identified in the psychological literature, most commonly "Authoritarian" parenting (little warmth, strong control), "Laissez-Faire" parenting (warm but over-indulgent, without firm boundary setting) and "Neglectful" parenting have been consistently compared unfavourably with the Authoritative model. Researchers claim to have shown that use of the authoritative style enables parents to cope more successfully with their adolescents, as parents seem to understand and analyse issues before talking with their children (Berger, 2008; Santrock, 2007).

However, in the late 20th century many Western psychologists were worried that changing lifestyles and the increasing diversity of family structures was making it more difficult for adolescents to receive good support from parents. The "ideal" family with two married, heterosexual parents, was becoming less common, and more children and adolescents were growing up in families comprising unmarried couples, "skip-generation households" (grandparents caring for grandchildren), single parent families, gay and lesbian couples and widowed parents (Berger, 2008). Rising rates of divorce and remarriage increased the chance that children and adolescents would experience a major change to their family structure, which could disrupt the support and guidance received from parents. There was also concern that even in "traditional" two-parent families, both parents were increasingly likely to be in paid employment,

and evidence of studies suggests that many adolescents spend little time in interactions with their parents on a typical day (Fussell & Greene, 2002).

The importance of these theoretical ideas, and the reported demographic changes, for the issues being investigated in the present study is as follows. Firstly, during their training teachers are now taught to believe that the type of parenting a student receives will have a very significant effect on their behaviour and achievement in school. Teachers may even believe that there is little they can do if a student does not receive the right support and guidance at home. This is in sharp contrast with the dominant view earlier in the 20th century when teachers typically believed that parents were able to contribute little to their child's education. Secondly, there is great concern in many Western countries about the "breakdown" of family life and the ability of families to provide the "right" kind of parental support. Therefore, educators are also increasingly expected to be able to function as parents as well as teachers for many of their students, and provide the "role models" missing in their home lives.

### **Adolescents and Schools**

Formal schooling is only a part of the education of children and adolescents but in Western, and in many non-westerns, societies it is a very important part. Most adolescents in Western societies are enrolled in (usually compulsory) secondary education, and a high proportion will go on to tertiary study; for example, Gutek (2006) reported that more than 95 percent of adolescents aged between 14 and 17 years in the United States attend high schools and other secondary institutions, 80 percent of students graduate, and more than 60 percent go on to college.

Around the world, secondary schooling developed as the main institution for preparing young people for adulthood in rapidly changing societies (Brown & Larson, 2002). In Western societies in particular, schools are expected to operate in ways that support Erik Erikson's ideas about the importance of adolescents constructing their own identities. It is believed that the most meaningful or in-depth learning takes place when the development characteristics of the age group are understood by teachers, and when students know there is trust, they feel free to explore, try out new ideas and

things and are not scared to make mistakes. Schooling is not only important for developing the adolescents' academic skills and learning, it should also help adolescents explore wider social roles and attitudes and develop interpersonal skills in the social arena to handle relationships with friends, peers and crowds (Coleman, 1992; Santrock, 2007). While adolescents' attitudes and beliefs will be shaped by the community in which they live, an Eriksonian approach also emphasizes the importance of the active and self-conscious participation of adolescents themselves in shaping their community (Nagel & Wallace, 1997).

As noted before, this way of thinking about adolescence requires teachers as well as parents to recognize how vulnerable young people can feel when exploring and experimenting. Fenzel, Blyth, and Simmons (cited in Santrock 2007, p. 349) have reported that “schools that provide more support, less anonymity, more stability, and less complexity improve student adjustment during the transition from elementary to middle or junior high school”. It emphasizes that the teacher's role should not be an authoritarian dictator but someone who models an openness to new ideas and can be a caring and trusted mentor (Sadowski, 2003).

On the other hand, an education system has an obligation to society as well as to its students. Secondary school systems around the world often do not focus on Erikson's ideal of individual choice, but function to direct and restrict students in ways that maintain the existing social order. As deMarrais and LeCompte (1995, cited in Kubow & Fossum, 2007, p. 74) observed, for example:

The task of schooling is to reinforce the society's existing social and political arrangements, and this helps to maintain the interest of the dominant culture and even strengthened the society's class structure.

Similarly Gutek (2006, p. 205) describes the primary objective of high schools and secondary schools in the United States as being:

[To] provide a general secondary education; prepares some students for college entry and others for entry into the work world upon graduation and provides for social, civil, and personal development of adolescents.



### ***Parents' involvement in schools***

As noted before, it is now widely accepted in most Western countries that parental involvement in schools is very important. Researchers have pointed out that parents can be the main or key factors in the education of adolescents in schools at all grade levels (Sadowski, 2003; Santrock, 2007). However, it has been noted that parents are usually not actively involved in their adolescents' schooling, even though the schools have emphasized the importance of parents' inputs and involvements in schools. Many educators and policy makers believe that greater parental involvement is a top priority in raising school achievement levels, as evidence shows that students perform better when both parents are involved in their sons' and daughters' schooling. Joyce Epstein is a leading advocate of this view and has provided a framework for parental involvements in schools:

Families have a basic obligation to provide for the safety and health of their adolescents. Schools have a basic obligation to communicate with families about school programmes and the individual progress of their adolescents. Parents' involvement at school needs to be increased. Parents' involvement in the adolescents' learning activities at home needs to be encouraged. Parents need to be increasingly involved in decision making at school and collaborations and exchange with community organizations need to be encouraged. (Epstein, 2002, p. 259)

### **Peer Relationships in Adolescence**

"Peers" have been defined "children or adolescents who are about the same age or maturity level" (Santrock, 2007, p. 311), and that "peers are children's equals, and relationships among equals have different properties than those formed with persons of greater or lesser maturity" (Ladd, 2005, p. 4). Although peer relationships are an important feature of childhood, most textbook writers suggest that these relationships become a much more significant context for development during adolescence (Berk, 2007, Santrock, 2007). For example, Santrock (2007) reported U.S. research as suggesting that at the age of two years an average of 10 percent of children's interaction time is with their peers, at the age of four it is 20 percent, and between the ages of seven and eleven it rises to 40 percent. By adolescence, Americans will typically be spending more time with their friends and peers than with their families. This represents a considerable amount of time in absolute terms, as Berk (2007)

quotes figures suggesting that young people in the United States typically have about 50 hours of free time per week, those in Europe about 45 hours, and those in some East Asian countries 33 hours. It is therefore not surprising that recent Western studies clearly show that peers are a vital part of adolescents' emotional lives; they rely on their peers for companionship and emotional supports and also for learning experiences that are much easier with peers than with parents (Brown & Larson, 2002).

Currently, most Western developmental psychologists support the view that positive and good peer relationships are necessary for normal social development in adolescence and that poor relations may affect later developments (Noller & Feeney, 2006). However, during the 20th century psychological researchers often took a negative approach to the role and influence of peers, who they saw as opposing and threatening the advice and guidance of parents. One reason for the decline of this approach was that researchers started to pay more attention to different types of peer relationships, making distinctions between the role and influence of close friends, cliques, and the wider peer group, and between peers that the individual chose to spend time with and peer groups that were involuntary (e.g., school class mates).

### ***Close Friendships***

Ladd (2005, p. 7) stated that researchers have inferred the presence of a close friendship when adolescents "prefer or consistently seek out each other's company; show distress when they are separated; display or report strong positive feelings about each other; or mutually adjust their behaviours to suit their partners". According to Santrock, friends refer to "a subset of peers who engage in mutual companionship, support, and intimacy" (Santrock, 2007, p. 320).

A number of studies show that close friends share ideas, emotions and secrets (Berk, 2007; Brown & Klute, 2003; Heaven, 2001; Santrock, 2007), and act as a source of support, comfort, and mutual trust and understanding (Coleman & Hendry, 1999). Berk, (2007, p. 610) identifies the two most important functions of close friendships as "intimacy" and "mutuality", while Shulman and colleagues (1997, cited in Heaven, 2001, p. 82) summarized the functions of close friendship providing

“mutual trust and loyalty, exclusivity, emotional and material support, the right environment to discuss secrets and to exchange and share views”. Adolescents spend time talking with their friends about themselves and life events, trying to establish companionship and a sense of belonging, and also increasingly enjoy participating in activities more with friends than with adults. Supportive friendships are also seen as likely to have a positive effect on school performance:

Close friendships provide opportunities to explore the self and develop a deep understanding of another. Close friendships provide a foundation for future intimate relationships. Close friendships help young people deal with the stresses of adolescence. Close friendships improve attitudes toward and involvement in school (Berk, 2007, p. 417).

Thus, friendship experiences create good psychological health among adolescents and also provide competencies to help them cope with the demands in their early years of adulthood (Berk, 2007).

In recent years new communication technologies have provided new ways for adolescents to make friends and maintain existing relationships. Adolescents are frequently using programmes on the Internet such as “Bebo” to communicate with their friends as well as others whom they do not know well. Hu et al. (2004, cited in Berk, 2007) found that an increased amount of adolescents’ time is spent on the Internet with friends, which has also increased the perceptions of intimacy in the adolescents’ relationships. The widespread use of instant text messaging has created a sense of being in constant contact with friends and habits of expecting an immediate response to communications (Berk, 2007).

### *Cliques and Crowds*

Brown and Klute (2003) described some common types of adolescent peer groups, based around social settings in schools, as “cliques” and “crowds.” Santrock (2007, p. 324) defines cliques as “small groups that range from two to about twelve individuals and average about five to six individuals”, while Berk (2007, p. 417) describes them as “groups of about five to seven members who are good friends and, therefore usually resemble one another in family background, attitudes, and values” and also

suggests that often “several cliques with similar values form a larger, more loosely organized group”. Shaffer (2002, p. 603) defined the clique as “a small group of friends who interact frequently” and the crowd as “a large, loosely organized peer group made up of several cliques that share similar norms, interests, and values”. Research suggests cliques start off with same-sex members in early adolescence and then progress to mixed-sex members in mid-adolescence by engaging in activities of common interest such as sport teams, school clubs and other similar activities outside of school (Berk, 2007; Heaven, 2001; Santrock, 2007; Shaffer, 2002). These types of peer groups are thought to serve several different functions. Some of these functions as described by Heaven (2001, p. 85) are to:

Provide content for social behaviour, exploration of personal relationships and a sense of belonging; Foster learning and a concern with the integrity of the self: Is a source of self-esteem and helps to build one’s reputation: Facilitate the achievement of identity, a source of companionship since it helps avoid loneliness and generates various social activities. [Such a] group provides valued support and friendship.

Gottman and Parker (1987, cited in Santrock, 2007, p. 321) identified the functions of adolescent peer groups in six categories: “companionship”, “stimulation”, “physical support”, “ego support”, “social comparison” and “intimacy/affection”.

These studies show that peer groups are important because they build upon the sense of identity, and provide security and stability. It is where friends or peers share common interests, social skills, discuss and keep up with the rules, and practice feedback, so adolescents look for acceptance in groups where members are admired and can best achieve realisation and to be liked and valued by peers (Bynner, Chisholm, & Furlong, 1997). Theorists Jean Piaget (1932) and Harry Stack Sullivan (1953) stressed that “it is through peer interaction that children and adolescents learn the symmetrical reciprocity mode of relationships” (Santrock 2007, p. 312). Furthermore, opportunities to critique each other through disagreements and accepting each other’s perceptions enable peers to integrate themselves and learn from each other.

Peer groups also function to reduce dependence on family, in terms of their development in the social skills and restructuring of values and attitudes (Heaven,

2001). Peers offer valuable resources especially companionship, emotional support, creating an arena for experimenting and learning new skills and techniques especially appropriate with one's own generation (Brown & Larson, 2002; Shaffer, 2002). Very stable groups are likely to become the major influence on members' decisions about their appearance, what to wear and how to think and act. Conformity, according to Santrock, occurs "when individuals adopt the attitudes or behavior of others because of real or imagined pressure from them" (2007, p. 314). Conformity comes in many different ways and may also affect each individual adolescent's life differently. Typical conformity pressures in adolescence may vary across different cultures. For example, American adolescents report very strong pressures with regard to style of dressing and grooming and participation in particular social activities, but a study in Singapore suggested pressures from peers were perceived by adolescents to be not as strong as obligations to their families (Berk, 2007).

### ***Peer Relationships in School***

Peer relationships in school may be voluntary or involuntary. Students will interact with friends and in groups with shared interests and a study by Patrick and Townsend (1995, cited in Biddulph, Buddulph, & Biddulph, 2003) in New Zealand showed that social competence with peers was an important motivation towards children's academic achievement. In some cases peer groups act as a direct source for socializing and educating children, rather than parents and teachers (Biddulph et al., 2003).

It is noted that adolescents may choose to work in peer groups to help, discuss and support each other, and so the group can be an important source of influence on students' school grades (Ladd, 2005; Shaffer, 2002). In a multicultural environment, some differences may be observed in peer group influence on academic achievement. For example, a U.S. study by Steinberg and his colleagues (1992, cited in Shaffer, 2002) reported that European American and Asian American students tended to value and encourage academic achievements within their peer groups, whereas African American and Latino peer groups in many low-income areas actively discouraged academic achievement, thus possibly explaining why they lag behind European and Asian Americans in school grade achievement.

Adolescence is a period when individuals will be developing a set of values which they think are important in their lives and which can influence their thoughts, feelings and actions (Santrock, 2007). At certain times and in certain situations they may be very vulnerable and can be easily influenced by the senior students or older people in the environment they live in. According to Singer (1997) everyone is influenced and persuaded daily in various ways, but the vulnerability to influence varies with each individual and to a varying extent. Further, some vulnerable adolescents are not *influenced* but are *forced* into peer groups by senior students. This happens particularly when the vulnerable adolescents are faced with social problems such as personal crisis, broken relationships, broken home, uncertainty, confusion and loneliness. The persuaders take advantage of such opportunities by influencing such adolescents to join their groups.

Some studies show that peers who are being rejected or negated by their peers may become lonely or hostile and may sometimes cause an individual to develop mental health and criminal problems or other social problems. Peers can also introduce other adolescents to use of alcohol and drugs, delinquency, and other forms of behaviour that adults would not encourage. However, research also suggests that by the later high school years adolescents tend to become more mature in dealing with discussions and decision making, are more likely to listen to advice from parents and teachers, and better able to resist pressures from peers to become involved in antisocial behaviours (Santrock, 2007).

### **Other Cultural and Subculture Influences on Adolescence**

According to Kubow and Fossum (2007, p.74), culture is “the ideas, values, beliefs, practices and customs of a particular nation or group of people”, while Santrock (2007) also emphasized the passing on of beliefs and behaviours from generation to generation. Kneller (cited in Smith, 2007, p. 12) has an extended definition of the word culture:

By culture as such we mean all the ways of life that have been evolved by [people] in society. By a particular culture we mean the total shared way of life of a given people comprising modes of thinking, acting and feeling which are expressed in religion, law, language, art, and custom as well as material products such as houses, clothes and tools. From another

perspective we may regard a culture as the learned and shared behaviour, thoughts, acts and feelings of a certain people together with their artefacts—learned in the sense that this behaviour is transmitted socially rather than genetically, shared in that it is ascribed to by the whole population or some part of it.

Therefore, people who belong to the same culture to some extent share the same beliefs and values and think, feel and act in the same way. However, many Western societies in the 21st century are becoming increasingly *multicultural*, and within such societies members of certain ethnic groups, particularly minority groups, may struggle to maintain traditions. They may also experience discrimination, and be at a disadvantage in schools and other social institutions. There has been much research about how these issues can affect adolescent development.

### ***Multicultural ethnicity and minority groups***

The United States comprises many different social groups such as racial, ethnic, religious and cultural groups, and researchers still report widespread racial disparities in academic achievement. Black students may perform poorly and also be rebellious in schools towards teachers and administrators because of the social identity that is connected to them, especially skin colour, that is regarded as a major signal of oppression in the United States and its schools (Leiding, 2006).

Multicultural education policies have tried to reduce or eliminate these problems by striving to "reduce prejudice and discrimination, to work towards equal opportunity and social justice for all groups and to effect equitable distribution of power" (Leiding, 2006, p. 58), and similarly Banks (2006, p. 187) noted that "a key goal of multicultural education is to help all students, including majority group students, to develop more democratic attitudes and values and behaviours". These efforts are also reflected in changing school materials. Twenty years ago, ethnic content was not popular in textbook or curriculum materials in U.S. elementary and high schools whereas recently much more ethnic content is used in social studies and language arts textbooks in the hope of diffusing some of these tensions.

However despite some progress, many writers believe that many minority students in countries like the United States and Britain will continue to experience problems, and that some conservatives fear that multicultural education might create revolution in the society (Banks, 2006; Sadowski, 2003). Social class inequalities also make the situation more complex, and making multicultural education to work successfully will require people with the will and vision to make it happen (Banks, 2006; Gutek, 2006).

### ***Rites of passage***

One way in which traditional and beliefs are passed from one generation to the next is through observance of particular rituals, some of which are related to developmental milestones. Many cultures include formalised ceremonies, known as *rites of passage*, which can be defined as “rituals that signify the passage from one period of life to another”, (Shaffer, 2002, p. 162) or “ceremonies or rituals that mark an individual’s transition from one status to another, especially into adulthood” (Santrock, 2007, p. 416).

Many writers in the late 20th century noted that most modern societies no longer have ceremonial initiations to mark exit from or entry into childhood, adolescence and adulthood. However, although Bocknek (1980, p. 65) stated that the recognition of adolescence through formal rite of passage has been outgrown in Western industrial societies, Sebald (1977) suggested that the loss of formal rites of passage could be making it more difficult for adolescents to know their place in society. In the United States high school graduation may now be the closest thing to a national rite of passage for adolescents (Santrock, 2007), although cultural minorities may have ethnic or religious ceremonies such as the Jewish bar mitzvah, or the Hispanic quinceanera where the priest blesses gifts in mass that are then presented to a girl as she turns fifteen (Berk, 2007).



## **Cult and the Supernatural in Western Society**

### ***Involvement in Cults***

In addition to, or in opposition to, mainstream religions there are records throughout history of people's involvement in cults. Whereas a "sect" is normally defined as "a subdivision or splintering off from an already established religion, so Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons may correctly be described as Christian sects" (Barrett, 1996, p. 16), a cult is usually focussed on one person and their teachings. Sects may be recognized as founded on legitimate religious protest, requiring some form of conversion for membership and ongoing high commitment (Hexham & Poewe, 1997). On the other hand, cults are more likely to be defined as "a religion regarded by the majority culture as spurious or unorthodox" (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 1993).

Cults can be judged good or bad depending on the objectives of the group. Most groups will foster the idea that there is only one set of acceptable beliefs and practices, and demand unquestioning loyalty and obedience. Santrock notes that a cult group may be regarded as dangerous by mainstream society if it uses deception in recruiting and mind-control techniques to destroy the individual's freedom of thought, demands that members sever ties with former family and friends and creates total dependence on the cult for self identity exploits members' labour and finances, and certainly if it persuades its members to kill themselves or harm others who are non-members. The potential for abuse is highest in cults that are "physically and socially isolated from the outside community" (Santrock, 2007, pp. 263-264). For some writers, however, cults are seen as almost inevitably harmful. For example, Rudin (1990, cited in Hunter 1998) observed that "what makes a group a cult is the deception and manipulation of its members and the harm done to them and to society, not its ideals or theology." He defined cults as:

Groups or movements exhibiting an excessive devotion or dedication to some person, idea or things; Such cults employ unethically manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group's leader to the detriment of members, their families or the community.

However, not all cults have a religious focus. Hassan (1990) suggested there are four main types of cult: religious cults, political cults, psychotherapy/educational cults, and commercial cults, and that in any type a "destructive cult" may be described as "a group, which violates the rights of its members and damages them through the abusive techniques of unethical mind control" (p. 37).

### *Interest in the Supernatural*

In some, but not all, Western societies today active involvement in organized religion is declining. However, there seems to be a rapidly growing interest in the supernatural (see, for example, Hume & McPhilips, 2006). An increasing number of television drama and cartoon series feature humans (often adolescents) battling evil supernatural forces, and an increasing number of people advertise services as psychics to provide predictions and advice, connect the living with loved ones who have died, and even solve murders.

People may join cults for a variety of reasons, but are often in a transitional phase of life, stressed by particular educational, financial, relationship or family problems, and/or attracted by the messages of charismatic leaders. In societies where adolescence is talked about as a "transitional stage", and the main psychological task of adolescence is described as "constructing an identity", it might be expected to find many young people attracted to cults and/or interested in exploring supernatural phenomena. The rapid growth of music and media aimed at an adolescent audience during the late 20th century played a significant part in these developments. A survey conducted in some middle and secondary schools in England and Wales in 2000 showed that 54 percent of the total respondents said they were "interested" in the occult and the supernatural, while 26 percent responded that they were "very interested" (BBC News Online, 2000). Some specific areas of interest are as follows.

Firstly, in the late 20th century heavy metal rock music was identified as an important source of attraction for adolescents wanting to explore these dimensions. Rudin (1990, cited in Hunter, 1998) reported that American adolescents deeply involved in heavy metal music often used fantasy and role-play games based on occult ideology, incorporating obsession with violence and bragging about their

activities to boost their self-image. He suggested that adolescents who were most vulnerable to this involvement seemed to be experiencing social problems such as feelings of emptiness, psychological stress, feelings of loneliness, and not belonging or wanted, and confusion. However, other studies suggested gifted and creative adolescents, and those from “democratic” and “egalitarian” homes and upper social economic levels, were also often attracted (Hunter, 1998). Cults around heavy metal continue to be a cause for concern amongst the adult community. For example The Jehovah’s Witness official website carries reports from the BBC about the promotion of songs that are "obsessed with madness, possession, demons, blood, curses, violence of every kind, including rape, self-mutilation, murder and suicide” (“Dabbling in the occult”, 2002).

Second, some research has studied adolescent involvement in Satanism and witchcraft. Davidowitz (1989, cited in Hunter, 1998) pointed out that there has been an increase in the number of adolescents being attracted to Satanism and many of them are from abusive families who became very vulnerable to satanic cult recruitment. However Clarke (1994), who defined Satanism as “devil worship, recognition of Satan as the charismatic being who is honoured and exalted by his followers,” considered it attractive to adolescents for a wider variety of reasons. On the one hand she suggested many adolescents who practise Satanism are trying to deal with feelings of alienation and detachment from friends, family and community, and may become caught up in intensive and compulsive violence. On the other hand, many may become involved as a more "normal" part of adolescent rebellion, curiosity, and the desire for mastery and control.

Traditionally witchcraft was identified with Satanism. More recently, the study of witchcraft has been revived in the West, and modified in some cases to a less harmful identification with the cult of paganism. Wiccan author Vivianne Crowley (1998, cited in Pearson, 2002a, p. 147) explained that:

Wicca is the name given by its practitioners to the religion of witchcraft. The word ‘Wicca’ derives from the Anglo-Saxon word for witch and has been used in its present form since the 1950s. Within the Wicca community the term 'witchcraft' is used in a special sense to mean a Pagan mystery religion and nature religion, which worships Goddess and God and is open to both men and women. The words ‘witchcraft’ and

'witch' are often capitalised by practitioners to distinguish their form of witchcraft from anthropological and other users of the word.

Former drug addict and satanic high priest Mike Warnke was quoted by Hunter (1998) as arguing that a person:

Is constructed like a triangle, with one side representing his physical needs, the second his mental needs, and the third his spiritual needs. [Therefore] a person fulfilling only his physical and mental needs is not complete ... [and] is consciously or subconsciously undergoing a search for spiritual fulfilment, whenever he can find it – in drugs, the occult.

Of course, it needs to be said that spiritual fulfilment does not have to be acquired through drugs and the occult, but Warnke acknowledged that the desire in adolescents to complete that gap may lead them to explore ideas regarding the supernatural. Furthermore, Hutton (1996, cited in Pearson, 2002b, p. 15) considered Wicca to be "a particular and extreme incarnation of some of the broadest and deepest cultural impulses of the nineteenth and twentieth century British world. Perhaps, therefore, it is not surprising that the adult producers of television programmes aimed at older children and adolescents have recognized these "attractions" and "impulses", and so often incorporated themes of Satanism and witchcraft from both positive and negative perspectives.

This continues to alarm some groups within Western societies: for example, the Jehovah's Witness website cite an article in the U.S. News, which reports that "children and teenagers today have access and exposure to a bewildering – often disturbing – array of imagery and information that would have been unimaginable even 20 years ago" ("Dabbling in the occult", 2002). Nevertheless, one of the most successfully marketed explorations of children's and adolescents' involvement with the supernatural—the "Harry Potter phenomenon"—has had the enthusiastic approval of huge numbers of parents around the world. It seems likely, therefore, that most adolescents in Western societies will continue to be exposed to a wide variety of ideas about the occult, even if they do not personally become involved in groups or cults that are focused on Satanism, witchcraft or other such practices.

## **Section Two: Adolescents in Non-Western Societies**

Section Two revisits some of the key issues covered in Section One. It considers to what extent "adolescence" is different in non-Western societies, and to what extent Western ideas are becoming more influential in the lives of young people and their families. It focuses particularly on the situation in Papua New Guinea, as the location for the present research study.

### **"Adolescence" and Pubertal Rites of Passage**

Herdt and Leavitt (1998) have pointed out that many non-Western societies do not have a term to describe adolescence, as the term is a Western concept. However, through colonization the concept of adolescence has emerged in areas such as the Pacific, and has become seen as a distinctive stage of life. These authors argued that while Western adolescents are adapting to changes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the lives of non-Western adolescents are changing even more rapidly due to the pace of change and development in their societies. In many Pacific countries changes in the diet has brought changes in the physical maturation, so boys and girls are reaching puberty earlier.

In many non-Western societies, even if "adolescence" is not recognized as such, the onset of puberty is a special and valued point in the lifespan. Many tribal and village societies celebrate the onset of puberty with an initiation ceremony, a public occasion and ritualised announcement to the community that marks an important change in privilege and responsibility (Berk 2007; Santrock, 2007).

According to Sommer (1978, cited in Santrock, 2007) many non-Western societies treat the pubertal rites of passage as the avenue through which many adolescents gain access to sacred adult knowledge, such as special responsibilities and sexual practices. In some societies, these are accompanied by special arts and ceremonies, which are performed publicly or secretly. Celebrations of these rites of

passage may be different from one culture to another, but they serve the same function of marking the transition from childhood to adulthood (Hopkins, 1983). Similar ritual ceremonies may also signify childbirth, adulthood, marriage, parenthood and death. Moreover, these rites of passage qualify an individual with rights, roles, responsibilities and obligations into a culture.

Initiation ceremonies emphasize a new identity in the society through drama and ritual, which highlights those roles, obligations and cultural practices required for identification into the adult reference group. In several non-Western societies the status of adolescents changes following rites of passage through initiation ceremonies. For example, the Kaguru, a cultural group in Tanzania, hold initiation ceremonies for both boys and girls around the time of puberty. Boys are initiated in groups and girls are initiated individually depending on when they receive their first menarche (Hopkins, 1983). In some cultures rites of passage may sometimes be forced onto adolescents entering puberty. Some may be very painful and stressful processes that would involve dramatic ceremonies particularly of boys. Moreover, some of these ritual practices involve spiritual contacts with the spirit of their ancestors and in most cases these young boys are not ready for such rituals (Santrock, 2007).

Traditionally rites of passage have been accepted as a valuable aspect of the culture, as they show children who arrive at puberty are now recognized as adults. However, they are disappearing in many non-Western societies because of the Western influence during colonization where the different missions and colonizers opposed such practices (Herdt & Leavitt, 1998).

## **Adolescents in Papua New Guinea**

### ***Background of Papua New Guinea***

Where is Papua New Guinea? Papua New Guinea is one of the countries in the equator. After Australia, it is the largest country in the south Pacific. It shares a common boundary with Indonesia. Papua New Guinea occupies the eastern part of the island, which is just of the equator and 150 kilometres north of the tip of Australia. Papua New Guinea comprises over 600 islands but 85 percent of its land area of 463, 840 square kilometres is on the mainland. Most of the landmass is covered by tropical

rain forests and is divided by massive mountain ranges. Papua New Guinea comprises twenty provinces (Dunford & Ridgell, 2006).

Papua New Guinea's population is about 6 million, and 85 percent of the total population lives in rural areas. The population is growing at the rate of 2.7 percent per annum, and is predicted to reach 7.5 million by 2020. According to the 2000 census, 45 percent of the total population is estimated to be below the age of 15 years. The *PNG Human Development Report, 1998* (Office of National Planning, 1999) projected that by 2010 the school age population and the economically active population will have grown by 45 percent and 67 percent respectively.

There are hundreds of ethnic groups indigenous to Papua New Guinea, but they have been grouped together under five different labels as Papuans, Papuo-Melanesians, Negritos, Micronesians and Polynesians (Essai, 1961, p. 30). Over 800 different languages are spoken throughout the 20 provinces, but PNG has three official languages: English is an official language although only a few speak it, many people speak the Creole language Tok Pisin as a lingua franca, and the Papuans in the Southern region speak Hiri Motu ("Papua New Guinea", 2008). As demonstrated by the heterogeneity of languages spoken, there is a diversity of physical characteristics and cultures depending on the province of origin. Because of this diversity, many different styles of cultural expression have emerged; each group has created its own expressive forms in art, dance, weaponry, costumes, singing, music, architecture and much more.



Figure 1. Map of Papua New Guinea ("Papua New Guinea", 2008)

### ***Initiation Rites at Puberty***

Initiation ceremonies similar to those in African countries such as Tanzania take place in some areas of Papua New Guinea, where boys and girls go through separate and different rites of passage. For example, in Madang province in Papua New Guinea, boys between the ages of 15 to 20 are kept in a secluded area without food and water for almost 30 days following a period of initiation, which includes instructions from recognised adult men, and total discipline from the boys. After a month of seclusion the initiates emerge and show their manhood by marching through the whole village. Another example from the East Sepik Province is known as the "Tambaran". It means "a secret men's cult". It is a cult of war and human sacrifices, its magic is designed to protect the village from enemies, quell disturbances in the community, and guarantee the fertility of villages and plants upon which the people depend (Tuzin, 2000). These practices still exist, but in recent times many young boys no longer go through this initiation. In other parts of the country too these practices are disappearing, due to the influence of colonization and the introduction of Universal Primary Education. In particular the girls' initiation ceremonies are not as popular as in the 20th century because of the fact that most girls are in schools when they receive their menarche, and it is no longer so easy to go through the initiation, although it is still celebrated in some families.



### *Adolescents and Their Families*

Papua New Guinea has very strong tribal and family ties. Most of the families live in rural areas. The families are usually made up of an extended family system: there is the nuclear family but is surrounded by extended family members such as grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. These family systems are based on traditional aspects of life. The different types of families comprised of nuclear family in some urban households, extended families in villages and rural areas, and polygamy is still practiced in some areas.

In many areas families continue to play a major role in the education of children and adolescents. Traditional knowledge is mainly thought of in terms of how to do things, especially the day-to-day living such as gardening, building houses, fishing, hunting, and handicrafts. Children learnt the skills of doing or making those things in a casual and unplanned way through observations and imitation of their parents, other family members like their aunts, uncles, and grandparents or by a few authority figures and the local community. A major purpose of traditional knowledge has been to pass on to the population the “know how” of getting things done in order to survive and to preserve traditional culture for the future, as a reproduction of the immediate past (McLaughlin & O’ Donoghue, 1996).

Boys were taught by the men the skills of hunting, fishing, and how to build houses and canoes, while girls were taught by the women the skills of weaving, knitting, gardening, cooking, making such things as baskets, mats, bilums (string bags), and learning how to become good wives and mothers in the future. The aim of traditional education was generally self-control of the emotions in the sense of making sure that one’s expression of one’s emotions did not harm anyone else. Traditional education was integrated with the community, and taught children to see the world through the eyes of the community (Matane, 1986, p. 8). It was integrated with times and seasons and extended over the years. It satisfied the needs of the family and the community. Traditional knowledge may also include revealed, sacred or secret knowledge (Children, especially young boys, while going through the initiation processes and ceremonies were also taught simple spells on how to keep the rain

away, how to catch a shark, crocodile or pig, and serious love magic that can be used to attract the opposite sex.

### ***Early Development of the Formal Education System***

Formal education in Papua New Guinea is directly linked to the history of various Christian missions. The missions were in the country in the 17<sup>th</sup> century but the beginning of the mission education was started in 1873 by the London Missionary Society in Port Moresby (McLaughlin & O' Donoghue, 1996). The Christian missions' major concern with education was to increase the conversion of the native people to Christianity.

From the perspective of the colonial government, there was resistance to development of a widespread education system. For example, Herbert Murray, who was Lieutenant Governor of Papua for thirty-two years (from 1909 to 1940), stated in 1912:

I do not think that we should attempt to give the Papuan anything in the nature of a higher education. ... He is inferior to the European, and, if we wish to avoid trouble, we should never forget this, and should never look upon him as a social or political equal. (Stella, 2007, p. 105).

Education was vaguely identified with the task of civilizing, and the educational process meant the spreading of a respect for law, the eradication of sorcery and murder, the maintenance of order, and the imprinting of moral values (Essai, 1961, p. 167). However, there was also a concern that education would make the natives look down on manual labour and become lazy, as well as "the fear that once Papua New Guineans obtained western education, they would no longer be subservient and manageable" (Stella, 2007, p. 107). Stella has suggested that there was therefore "benign neglect" of education to avoid production of a situation where the local people would be in a position to evaluate the operation of the colonial authorities. When a United Nations Visiting Mission came to PNG in 1962 they expressed criticism of the lack of educational development, especially of the development of higher education (Stella, 2007). It was not until political independence was achieved

in September 1975 that really significant expansion of secondary and tertiary education systems occurred.

### *Development of the Formal Education System After Independence*

At independence in 1975 there were four "National High Schools" in Papua New Guinea, and this is still true today. They were Sogeri in the Southern region, Kerevat in the Islands region, Aiyura in the Highlands region, and Passam in the Momase region. They all were (and are) boarding schools where students and staff live on campus. At the time of independence the government wanted to promote "National Unity and Identity", so students for these schools were chosen on merit (results in Grade 10 examinations) irrespective of their regional affiliation to study at Grades 11 and 12. The National High Schools were therefore initially schools of excellence, which the country's top academic students attended. They produced the elites of the country to become leaders in all areas of development, be they doctors, lawyers, accountants, economists or engineers. At this time there were also "Primary schools" offering education from Grades 1 - 6, and ordinary "High schools" for Grades 7 - 10.

As the new nation developed there was a sense of urgency to expand the system to cater for the growing population, and a series of influential reports recommended the building of more schools. In 1990 Papua New Guinea was a signatory to the Jomtien Agreement that endorsed the notion of "Education For All", and with the endorsement of a report for radical reform of the education system there was a major restructuring of schools in 1994. In particular, there was a lot of pressure on the government through various education sectors—the national, provincial and even Church-run schools—to improve the infrastructure to cater for more students to do Grades 11 - 12 in their own provinces rather than sending them to the National High schools. As a result of restructuring, "Primary schools" now covered Grades 3 - 8, and the best "High schools" became "Secondary schools" for Grades 9 - 12. This allowed many students to study further to Grades 11 and 12 but without the cost of travelling to one of the National High schools, and also without meeting the previously strict academic prerequisites. The Secondary schools were to be administered under the Provincial government and the National High schools by the

National Government. Some of the existing High schools remained to cover Grades 7 - 10, mostly in remote rural areas.

These reforms did bring educational and political problems, but on the whole they were the right strategy given the development status of the nation. And with the increase in population the country needed an educated population to facilitate its developmental objectives. In particular, the objective of "Integral Human Development" spelled out in the *Matane Report* (Matane, 1986, p. 6) which was adopted by the government, stated clearly that:

This philosophy is for every person to be dynamically involved in the process of freeing himself or herself from every form of domination and oppression so that each individual will have the opportunity to develop as an integrated person in relationship to others. This means that education must aim for integrating and maximising: socialisation, participation, liberation and equity.

Since the reforms there have been changes in the operation of both the Secondary and National High schools throughout the country. The National High schools continued to be the responsibility of the national government while the secondary schools are the responsibility of the provincial education divisions, as well as some Church-run secondary schools. The National High schools continued to be the best equipped with infrastructure, such as good science labs and libraries, had the best qualified and experienced teachers, and the management in general was good because the government wanted to ensure that there was continuity and sustainability.

However, the National High Schools no longer had the best students academically. Prior to 1995 these schools always competed amongst themselves on how many students they would send to the different tertiary institutions of the country. The stark contrast therefore is that the National High schools are no longer the schools of excellence instead they have fallen way behind in terms of academic performance in comparison with their Secondary school colleagues.

After restructuring, the new Secondary schools also had problems. Enrolments in Grade 12 increased dramatically since 1995 from around 2,000 to 6,615 in 2003. This rate of expansion far exceeded the targets set in the *National Education Plan*

1995 – 2004 (Department of Education, 1997). There have been class sizes rising well above the recommended figure of 30, reflecting the enormous demand for this level of education, and poor control measures put in place to cope with the changes. Therefore currently many more students than before in Papua New Guinea continue their studies to Grades 11 and 12, but standards are not so strict. Students attending the National High schools now do so because they apply to go to them, not because they are the selected elite. Students who study at Grades 11 and 12 in Secondary schools do so because their parents are willing to pay, whether or not they meet the academic prerequisites. However, results have shown that many students coming out of these regional Secondary schools are just as capable as those coming from the National High schools, and this is an encouraging sign of the reforms at work, and the government's plan for educational development 2005 -2014 seems to aim to phase out the National High schools:

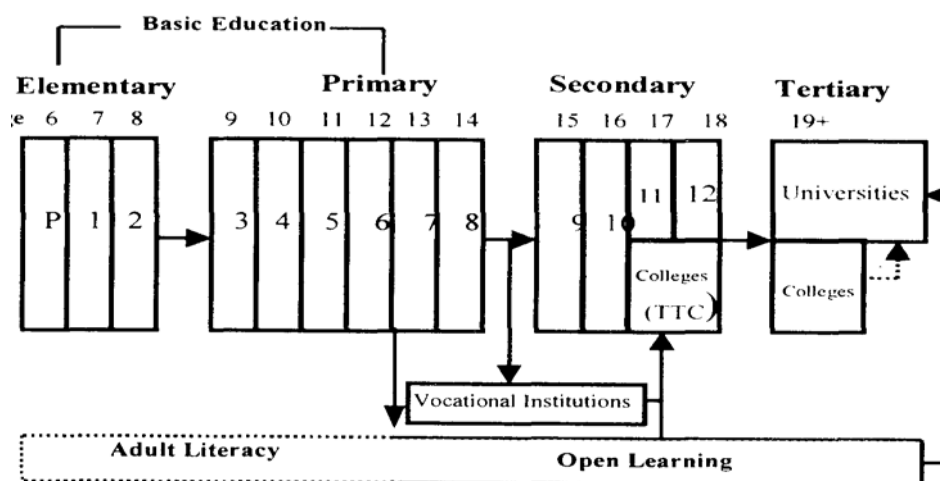


Figure 2. Future Developments. (Department of Education, 2004).

***Some Effects of An Expanded Secondary School System***

As in many "developing" countries, one effect of increased access to education has been the rising status of "white-collar" jobs and the reduced status of manual labour. Most urban workers in Papua New Guinea now hold white-collar jobs, which most Papua New Guineans see as the development of human resources. People in the rural

areas often also see white collar jobs far more important than improving village resources, even though this is where most of the population are living.

The rapid increase in enrolments in Grades 11 and 12 has also resulted in a serious shortage of qualified Papua New Guinean teachers, particularly in science, agriculture and the various technologies now on offer. Many graduates are now employed without teaching qualifications, and ordinary High school teachers in specialist subjects have been recruited into Secondary schools, even though they may not be equipped to prepare students for further studies in tertiary institutions. As a result an increasing number of teachers in Secondary schools lack pedagogical training and skills, and have not been actively encouraged by the government to take up teaching diploma programmes.

Another specific result of this situation is that we have schools that do not have teachers qualified/specialised to handle student discipline issues. Student discipline has been and still is a major salient issue in our school system right throughout the country, and few tangible suggestions have been offered. Although there is no one solution to discipline problems, the absence of well-trained teachers in the area of counselling is recognized as a major issue.

### **Cult and Supernatural Practices**

*"Cargo Cult"* There seem to be no records of traditional cults which have survived in Papua New Guinea, but PNG is one of the Melanesian countries that have the relatively recent history of "cargo cult" as one of the popular supernatural practices. Dunford and Ridgell (2006, p. 149) defined cargo cult as "a religion based on getting the good things the white men had" the people thought the things would come in cargo planes so they cleared land and waited, but the planes never come. Billings (2002, p. 31) studied some areas in the New Ireland province in PNG, and commented that cargo cult:

Is a compound of idolatry, witchcraft, and the crudest forms of immorality [that] started during World War II when cult leaders told the natives that shiploads of cigarettes, chocolate, clothing, and other PX supplies were gifts from the gods and the dead relatives.

A group from Misima Island in PNG decided to kill all the white and mixed-race people with the hope that the spirits of the dead will sail back with all the cargo, or material wealth that the Europeans have unfairly diverted from them. People who were most active in proclaiming the spirit nature on Vanatinai and nearby islands were the men who were in their youth that time and had laboured for the Americans at Milne Bay (Lepowsky, 2004). Despite Christianity in some areas of Papua New Guinea people are still talking and are still expecting cargos from ships and planes, which they believe will one day arrive.

*Cults Practices in Secondary Schools* There is no evidence that "cargo cult" has flourished secondary schools, although students will bring with them to school what they have seen and been taught about in their families and by other authority figures in their communities and will have some knowledge of local supernatural beliefs.

As increasing numbers of young people in Papua New Guinea spend many of their adolescent years more with their peer group than with adults, and in some cases many years away from home in boarding schools, it may be expected that they experiment with practices that keep traditions alive. On the other hand, especially in urban areas, modern technology brings PNG students increasingly in touch with ideas from overseas, including the Western mass media aimed especially at children and youth.

Because the formal education system is based on the Western model, it also socializes young people, and their teachers, into Western expectations of "adolescence". This brings expanded opportunities to "search for an identity", and perhaps encouragement to challenge old ideas. Many students may therefore experience secondary schooling as an exciting and adventurous time leading to new possibilities for the future. They may not see themselves as connected to the traditional culture but able to create something they think is new or better. On the other hand, schooling can bring new anxieties that were not faced by previous generations: for example, feelings of loneliness and alienation from their home communities, uncertainty and fear of failure in a competitive environment. In these circumstances, adolescents in Papua New Guinea may be attracted to cults for the

same reasons as their Western peers: to conform (or not to conform), to be led, to be devoted to a cause, to explore an identity and gain a sense of belonging (Rubin, 1990, cited in Hunter, 1998).

However, there has been growing concern in the country that "cult" in secondary and national high schools is having more negative than positive effects, and is promoting antisocial behaviour in students. There is belief that cult practices typically involve satanic worship, with the leader of the group having extraordinary powers and knowledge because of his ability to communicate with Satan and other evil spirits. Likewise for girls, similar activities are sometimes referred to as witchcraft. There is concern that this can lead to destruction of self-esteem, their identity because they are trying to live up to the expectation of the group, their peers, and the name itself.

### **Conclusion**

Traditionally in Papua New Guinea society, and for many people still today, most of a teenager's time is taken up by being occupied with adult-oriented activities: girls spend time with their grandmothers, mothers, and aunties while boys are with their grandfathers, fathers and uncles. In this situation, young people learn about life mainly from adults and spend little unsupervised time with peers of the same age; they pass quickly from childhood into adult roles.

This situation is changing for the increasing number of young people in PNG who are attending Secondary and National High schools. They spend less time with their families and more time with their peers, and they enter adult roles at a later age. Their future lives are likely to be very different to the lives of their parents. If they also have access to modern technologies like television, mobile phones and the internet, their present lives are becoming more like the "adolescence" of Western societies.

Although the increase of Western influence is probably inevitable, there is a risk that young people in PNG may feel alienated and confused in a time of rapid



social change. The purpose of this exploratory study was to collect some accounts of cult practices in schools from the students' perspective, and the suggestions they have for reducing any existing problems.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter documents the methodology used in this research. It discusses how the study was carried out, the settings in which the study was conducted, the participants who were involved, and the process of preliminary data analysis.

#### **Research Objectives and Choice of Target Population**

As discussed in Chapter Two the purpose of this project was to collect information regarding peer group relationships and behaviours in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea, with a particular focus on current concerns about cult practices. As current understanding comes mainly from parents and other adults, the aim was to provide opportunity to explore the students' own perspectives. Several methodologies could have been used to collect such information. For example, observation of students in the school setting: "watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 9). Students could also have been interviewed, individually or in groups, or asked to complete written questionnaires.

However, for various reasons, it was decided *not* to involve students currently in schools. Firstly, the research had to be conducted within a short time frame, and it was not possible for reasons of time or money to arrange visits to a representative sample of schools to conduct observations or interviews, or to organize the confidential collection of written accounts. (Even without such constraints, asking students to put experiences, ideas and opinions in writing may have been difficult and/or considered threatening.) Secondly, there were more general ethical concerns about asking students to disclose and discuss highly sensitive aspects of their current lives. Thirdly there was a risk that school administrators would put pressure on students (or the researcher) to reveal what had been said, jeopardizing the confidentiality of the research process. Fourthly, there was a risk that accounts of certain events and experiences reported in the thesis would be identified (correctly or

incorrectly) as having very recently occurred at a particular school, even though participating schools would not have been named. It was therefore decided that the target population would be young people who had very recently left school and who would be reporting primarily on past events at their previous institutions. The easiest group to reach within this population were those who had progressed to another educational institution, and Madang Teachers' College was chosen as the site for the study due to the researcher's previous affiliation with the College and familiarity with its routines and procedures.

## **Research Design**

### ***Individual Interviews***

It was believed that participants (teacher education students) would find it easier to talk than to write about their experiences, and so the research interview was chosen as the first methodology for this project. The research interview is defined by Cannell and Kahn (1968, cited in Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2004, p. 269) as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him [sic] on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, or explanation”. Information is collected through direct verbal interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee or individuals. In this study interviews were tape-recorded with participants' permission and lasted approximately 30 minutes.

### ***Focus Groups***

This study was an exploratory project, and no previous studies on this topic had been conducted in PNG. Therefore, it was not known whether participants were likely to find it easier talking about these issues in one-to-one interviews or if group discussions would be more comfortable and/or produce richer data. Therefore, it was decided to also offer the opportunity for participation in focus groups.

A focus group interview is defined as “a research technique that collects data through group interaction on a topic determined by the researcher” (Morgan, 1997, p. 6). The purpose of focus group is to focus discussions on a particular issue, often involving people with the same experiences or some similar characteristics and knowledge about the topic (Bell, 2005). In focus groups it is more likely that participants would build on each other’s talk and discuss a wider ranges of experiences and opinions than in individual interviews” (Morgan, 2002). Furthermore “focus groups are undoubtedly valuable when in-depth information is needed about how people think about an issue—their reasoning why things are as they are, why they hold the views they do” (Laws, 2003, cited in Bell, 2005, p. 162).

Ideally, a focus group is "a carefully planned discussion designed to obtained perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non threatening environment” (Krueger, 1994, p. 6). It can promote discussion in the sense that, if someone is confused with a question, by listening to others they should be able to pick up and join in the conversation. In some cases, participants want to say something but are reluctant to say it because of taboo but there might be somebody in the group that can openly discuss the sacred or taboo that somehow opens the door for other participants to join in the conversation. In other words as best described by Kitzinger (1994, p. 108), “one person’s revelation of ‘discrediting’ information encourages others to disclose”. Overall, focus groups provide the opportunity for participants to construct their meanings collectively with their peers (Morgan, 2002).

For these reasons focus group interviews have become very popular in conducting research in the fields of social science and health. However they can sometimes go wrong, as Hayes (2000, cited in Bell 2005, p. 163) warned:

Groups have to be carefully balanced in relation to the age, sex and ethnic status of respondents: for example, if young people, women, or people in ethnic minority groups are in disproportionately fewer members in the group they feel socially constrained and may not contribute freely to the discussion. It may sometimes be necessary to have single sex groups in similar age ranges in order for the atmosphere to be permissive and relaxed.

Participants in this study were therefore offered the opportunity to take part either via focus group discussion or individual interview. Those opting for group discussion were allowed to organize group membership to be with others they felt comfortable with. Focus group sessions were tape-recorded, with participants' permission, and lasted approximately one hour. If someone wanting to join a focus group *also* wished to discuss issues in private interview then they would have been invited to use both options. Therefore, focus group sessions were scheduled to take place before the individual interviews.

### ***Schedule of Questions for Interviews and Focus Groups***

Although studies have been conducted previously in PNG on "cargo cult", cult practices in schools have not been researched before. Therefore there was no existing research framework to work with, and original interview questions were developed for the present project. Topics were selected to be used within a "semi-structured" format.

Semi-structured interviews “offer the opportunity for the researcher and the participants to develop a reciprocal, dialogic relationship based on the mutual trust, openness and engagement, in which self disclosure, personal investment and equality is promoted”, and also “promote free interaction and opportunities for clarification and discussion between the research participants through the use of open-ended questions rather than closed questions” (Bishop, 1997, p. 33). Therefore many open-ended questions were used in this study to allow participants to express themselves freely rather than being restricted to yes or no answers. However, some structure was imposed through using schedules in which all participants were asked the same questions, and in approximately the same order, so that responses on key issues were obtained in every session.

The full protocols for the focus group discussions and individual interviews are provided in Appendix E. In summary, participants were first invited to share some personal information, including which secondary/high school they had attended. Questions on cult practices were designed to collect information on:

- (i) Participants' personal knowledge and experience of practices at the secondary or national high school they recently attended.
- (ii) Participants' more general beliefs and opinions about cult in secondary and national high schools.
- (iii) Participants' views of the appropriate role of teachers, schools administrators and the education authorities in monitoring and/ or taking actions regarding cult practices.

Opportunity was provided at the end of interviews and group discussions for participants to offer comments on any issues not previously covered, or to add to earlier statements.

## **The Research Setting and Conduct of the Study**

### ***Research Setting***

The research was conducted at Madang Teachers' College, Madang Province, Papua New Guinea in June 2007 (see Figure 3).

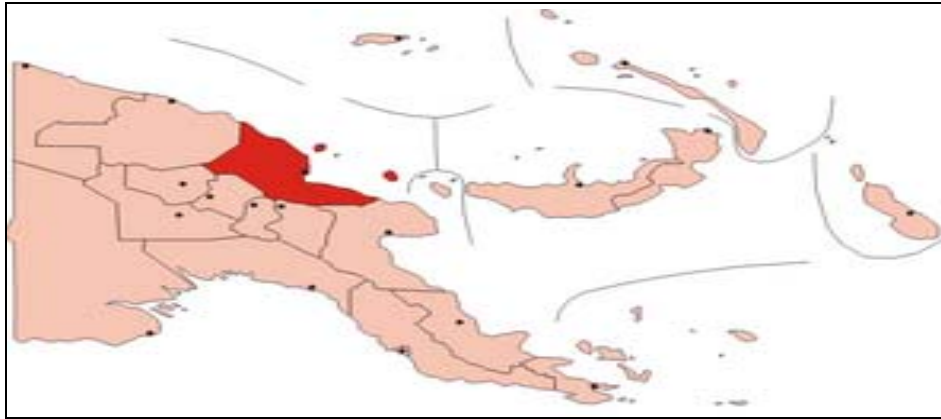


Figure 3. Map of PNG showing Madang province ("Madang Province", 2008)

About Madang Province First experiencing major Western exploration in 1871 ("Madang", 2008), Madang Province is one of the 20 provinces in Papua New Guinea (see Figure 3). It is on the northern coast of the mainland and shares the land border with six other provinces, namely East Sepik, Morobe, Eastern Highlands, Simbu, Western Highlands and Enga provinces. Its land mass is about 29,000 square kilometres, including many small islands and four large ones: Karkar, the largest, Manam, the second largest, Bagbag and Long Island. Manam and Karkar Islands have volcanic sites. The population of the province was recorded as 365,106 in the 2000 census, and many people in PNG call it “Beautiful Madang” because of the beautiful scenery and the smiling and friendly people. Many outsiders say that the provincial capital, also called Madang, is one of the prettiest towns in the South Pacific ("Madang", 2008; "Madang Province", 2008; Papua New Guinea Tourism Authority, n.d.).

Madang Teachers College Madang Teachers’ College (MTC) is situated along the north coast road of Madang, about ten minutes drive from town and about five minutes to the airport. It is the largest of the six primary school teacher training colleges in Papua New Guinea, with approximately 600 students (the other five are the government-run Port Moresby In service College, which is currently known as Papua New Guinea Education Institute, PNGEI, and four colleges run by different churches). Madang Teachers’ College is the only government-owned pre-service

college and recruits students from all over the country in an effort to create a common Papua New Guinea identity amongst those from culturally disparate groups in the hope that they in turn as teachers will develop a national consciousness amongst their pupils. It is a boarding institution but student teachers from the local area attend as day students.

Teacher *education* is a relatively new concept in Papua New Guinea. As McLaughlin & O' Donoghue (1996) noted, until recently most educators spoke of teacher *training*, and training is what they attempted to do. This had its origins in the work of the various Christian missions which begun in the late nineteenth century for the purpose of training indigenous pastors and teachers in basic literacy and Bible-teaching skills, but with very little theoretical content. Teacher education has since undergone considerable changes and development. It began with the "A" course for teachers in 1957, which involved mostly Grade 6 graduates (Leach, 2004) and was one only year in duration because of the urgent need for teachers. Subsequently, Grade 10 graduates were selected for teacher training, usually for two years, culminating with awarding of teaching certificates. Under government control, Madang Teachers' College was subsequently the first primary teachers college to change the two-year programme to a three-year diploma, and then the three-year diploma programme was changed to a two-year trimester programme. The two-year trimester diploma programme is currently operative and is offered in MTC and other primary teachers training colleges, culminating with the award of the Diploma in Primary Teaching.

### ***Recruitment of Participants for the Present Study***

In May 2007 the project was submitted to the University of Waikato School of Education Research Ethics Committee for approval. According to Bell and Cowie (1999, p. 199) the primary ethical concerns of a project of this type are:

Principally those of the ongoing maintenance of confidentiality with respect to the data; obtaining informed consent from all participants; monitoring for potential harm through out the project; and the methods for dealing with any concerns of the participants with respect to being involved in a research project.



After receiving approval, a letter seeking permission to carry out the research project was sent to the Principal of Madang Teachers College (see Appendix B). A lecturer at the college was assigned to do the initial arrangements for the pre selection of participants, and a public announcement in the College invited all Year 1 student teachers to take part in the study. On arrival in Papua New Guinea the researcher met with the Principal to clarify any details of the purpose of the study, the methods to be used, and to finalize requirements such as allocation of rooms for interviews.

Thirty students initially volunteered to participate. Twenty four were randomly selected to form the main sample, and the other 6 placed on standby should some decide to withdraw. Of the main sample 15 indicated a willingness to participate in the focus group interviews only, 5 to participate in the individual interviews only, and the other 4 were willing to participate in both the individual and the focus group interviews.

The full procedure for gaining informed consent was implemented on the researcher's arrival at MTC. The researcher met with the potential participants, distributed information sheets and explained the study to them. A written letter addressed to the participants outlining the nature of the study and some of the ethical considerations, and including a consent form for signing, was distributed at the same time (see Appendix C & D). They were also informed of the confidential nature of the interviews and that any information collected from them would not be discussed or made available to staff of the college, their parents, other student teachers or anyone else not directly involved in this study. In the research report information would be presented anonymously, and if there were a need to quote something said by anyone of them a pseudonym would be used in place of their names.

Potential participants were given five days to decide whether to participate in this study or not and return the consent form to the researcher. At this stage four individuals decided not to become involved in the study, so other students on stand-by took their place. After the consent forms were returned the researcher met with all the participants to outline the programme, including how the interviews were to be conducted, the venues where the interviews would take place, and the days and time for each group and for each individual participants to meet. Participants were reminded of the confidentiality arrangements, and were invited to choose a

pseudonym. From that time on any information relating to the participants' taped recorded and transcripts were identified through the use of the pseudonym, as names were used on any raw data but will not be used in the transcribing and the discussions.

At the beginning of the group discussions and interviews the researcher reminded the participants that they continued to have the right to withdraw from the project during the discussions themselves or at any time during the following week up to the researcher's departure from the College. This deadline reflected the fact that it was not feasible to expect participants to have the ability to communicate at any later date with the researcher after her return to New Zealand.

### ***Final Sample***

During the final days before the collection of data began, three further trainees (all females) withdrew because of ill health or clashing commitments. The final sample for the study therefore comprised 21 teacher trainees, 13 males and 7 females. There was no insistence on participants revealing personal details for the study; however, both individual interviews and focus groups opened with a brief sharing of personal backgrounds to get discussions under way. This yielded the information that participants came from 14 provinces throughout the country and brought to the discussions their backgrounds and experiences in 18 schools, 14 Secondary and 4 National High schools. One or both parents of 12 participants were subsistence farmers; the others had parents in, or retired from, paid work (for further details see Appendix G). They contributed to the research as follows:

*Focus Group 1* Group 1 was a mixed-sex group with five participants. In the presentation of results they will be identified by their chosen pseudonym, and indicators of the sex (Male/Female) and Group membership as follows:

Jux, M, G1

Mian, F, G1

Tilec, M, G1

Woriwo, M, G1

Zyle, M, G1

Focus Group 2 Group 2 was also mixed-sex and had six members:

Asha, F, G2

Bataclitz, M, G2

Bossip, M, G2

Dandii, M, G2

Konge, M, G2

Tigsmarhn, M, G2

Focus Group 3 Group 3 comprised five young women who asked to be interviewed together:

Diinan, F, G3

Junior Undaztood, F, G3

Logens, F, G3

Sato, F, G3

Sonja, F, G3

Individual Interviewees Six trainees participated in the individual interviews, one female and five males (one of whom had also contributed to the Group 1 discussion):

Blockfaith, M

Dibatizh, M

Kenjl, M

Koiidi, F

Tasingwa, M

Tilec, M (also Group 1)

### **Preliminary Data Analysis**

On return to New Zealand, the tape recordings of the three focus group discussions and the six individual interviews were all transcribed in full. Responses to questions in the semi-structured format were examined across the groups and individual interviews. Although some different issues were raised on different occasions there were no major differences that seemed to require the material from the groups and interviews to be examined separately. Therefore the transcripts were pooled together for a thematic analysis. The detailed organization of the presentation of the data is explained in Chapter Four.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### **Format for Presentation of Results**

This chapter documents the data that emerged from analysing the individual interviews and focus group discussions. In the confidential environment provided by the study, participants were willing to talk freely about their experiences and opinions, and to offer suggestions. The focus group sessions, which the researcher expected to take 20-30 minutes, each lasted more than one hour because of participants' willingness to exchange information.

Guided by the question protocols (Appendix E & F) and other issues raised by participants, several themes dominated the discussions. Presentation of the data is therefore structured as follows:

#### Encountering Cult

Learning about Cult

Knowledge and Beliefs about the Extent of Cult Practice in Schools

Choice or Coercion

#### The Nature of Cult

Worshipping of Supernatural and Other Figures

Membership Rituals and Other Behaviours

#### The Function of Cult

Personal Advancement

Peer Group Support and Sense of "Belonging"

#### Adult Perspectives on Cult

Parent and Community Concerns

The Role of Teachers and Counsellors

The Role of School Administrators

Involvement in Cult and Helping Others in the Future

Material from the transcripts is presented in this chapter in two main ways:

- (1) Contributions from individual participants, either as stand-alone statements or as shorter extracts within the text;
- (2) Sections of dialogue from the focus group discussions featuring two or more participants (and sometimes the researcher, represented as "JT").

## **Encountering Cult**

### ***Learning about Cult***

It was evident during the discussions, and confirmed by the transcripts, that all 21 participants had some knowledge about cult practices in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea. Many had heard about cult before they actually attended one of these schools, and 16 of 21 named more than one source of information. Some heard of it when they were in primary schools from their teachers; some from their friends or older students in High schools, Secondary and National High schools; some from parents and other family members. They may also have been already aware of similar practices within the community:

I was frightened because my uncle used to practice cult. He normally goes to his house; lock the door of his room in the nights and about 12 midnights he would put off the lights and lights the candles and he would pray to Satan. (Junior Undaztood, F, G3)

On the other hand, this participant also indicated that this had provided her with evidence of the benefits from such practices:

I don't know much about the school but I want to use my uncle as an example of some benefits he gets out of such practices. My uncle practices some kind of satanic worshipping that many things he asked for were given to him. He could stop the rain and whenever we want to kill a life chicken he will just sit in the house and there would be a dead chicken in the kitchen ready to be cleaned and cooked. When asked how he did it he would never say how it happened.

Participants generally believed that most students in a given school would soon learn what was happening there, even if they had heard nothing beforehand:

In secondary schools like I was in secondary school at Bugandi Secondary School, you know when students enter their first year of schooling in secondary school, the seniors will get them in ah (.) peer group then introduce the system of cult and peer group to them. From there the student will start to follow their seniors and do whatever the seniors tell them to do. (Tilec, M)

A kind of culture in schools and for some reasons it become cult and we had to follow cult in order to enjoy the environment. ... This happened at Passam National High School. Other secondary schools have their own system. (Dandii, M, G2)

### ***Knowledge and Beliefs about the Extent of Cult Practice in Schools***

Participants generally expressed the belief that cult is being practiced in most PNG Secondary and National High schools. For example Dibatizh (M) said "It is a practice all around the country"; Tilec (M) believed it is "a practice in all schools" and Blockfaith (M) that "all secondary and national high schools in the country are practicing cult". However, Koiidi (F) thought cult is "more common in national high schools than secondary schools", and Kenjl (M) believed cult is practised "only in non church run schools but not in church run schools like the Catholic or Lutheran agency schools".

Without first-hand knowledge of all schools, some participants explained their understanding of the current situation with reference to what they had heard from other MTC teacher trainees. For example, Koiidi (F) said she had heard "a lot of

stories about cult especially from national high schools”, and Blockfaith, Tigsmarhn and reported similarly:

From experience I heard from other students that attended other secondary and national high schools talk about cult activities in their schools, which mean that cult activities are going on in all the secondary and national high schools. (Blockfaith, M)

Some of us were actually involved in activities that were related to cult activities. We have either witness something that took place at the schools that we attended or have seen and heard from some of our friends that students were involved in cult practices to get free money. (Tigsmarhn, M, G2)

### *Choice or Coercion*

Participants' reports suggested that students may be allowed much more choice in some schools than others with regard to involvement in cult practices. Two members of Group 1 compared their experiences, for example:

Zyle, F: From my previous secondary school, students get involved in such groups because they need help and support from other members of the group in terms of money.

Mian, F: It is the opposite in my former school; students were forced by senior students or ringleaders to get involved in such groups.

However, Zyle also agreed that membership was not always a matter of individual choice but of being pressured by others:

But one thing you can tell if they are practicing cult is those people who are involved have a ringleader. The ringleader can disguise himself but you can really tell that they are watching your everyday activities. If they find some weaknesses or something bad about your character or personalities and because there are many different types of groups in my former school, they race to get students with such attitudes into their

groups. It was actually peer pressure, Group Company and whether you like it or not, you have to join because it's your life.

Many others also reported themselves or others coming under various pressures to join, for example:

Students tend to get involved in cult practices due to some facts like peer pressure like their peers influence them into taking part like one of them my former school mate he has gone to Passam National High School and his friends influence him to join this cult thing and he joined them. (Kenjl, M)

Because it's kind of a peer pressure or ... like when you first enter the school, definitely you are going to be part of the group so you know it's just like ah... when seniors they consume alcohol they come and talk/preach about their group in the school and from there it attract the boys especially to be part of their group and if the boys reject they will feel that they are out of place and no one will like to talk to them, from there students like to join such cult and peer group so that's the main reason ... (Tilec, M)

In my former secondary school, there is a group called RWCR ... One of the rules for this group is to smoke marijuana day and night and get dress in black clothes. The ringleader makes decision for the group, if he says they won't attend classes then everyone in the group will not attend classes or if the ringleader says they won't eat food for 2 to 3 days then group members will go without food for the number of days as directed by the ringleader. No one in the group will go against the ringleader because he is someone that many teachers and students know about such groups but they can't say anything because they don't have evidences. (Bossip, M, G2)

In the Group 3 discussion Sonja explained how she had resisted pressures and made her choice between two possibilities:

There were two groups we had in my former school. These are girls groups. When I went in the first group wanted me to join them but because I don't wanna get myself involved in such drinking and smoking and doing all sorts of activities, I decided not to join that group so I stayed until that other group which was okay to me approached me



and I joined them. The purpose of joining this group is because group members try to help and assist each other in terms of sharing, assisting with assignments and schoolwork and helping and comforting each other in times of hardships and loneliness. (Sonja, F, G3)

## **The Nature of Cult**

### ***Worshipping of Supernatural and Other Figures***

Participants defined cult in various ways, and their contributions indicated some ambiguity regarding the way in which certain practices should be interpreted. However, the most common definitions involved the supernatural, and the worship of evil spirits:

Cult is a way of worshipping like worshipping of Satan or evil spirits. When students want to worship or do the cult thing, they go to a sacred place where no body else apart from the group members know and worship their idols etc. (Asha, F, G2)

I would say it's devil worshipping too but I would define it, as it is a type of practice which, is done by certain group of people. It can be religious practice or sometimes practices that involve worshipping of the devils. (Jux, M, G1)

A way of worshipping but it's normally practiced in groups. Cult is (something like a devil image) placed somewhere in the middle of the place of worshipping where students who are members of the group go to worship that idol to get whatever they want. (Diinan, F, G3)

Cult is a way of worshipping people, idols, devils or evil spirits for a purpose or reason and is not practiced by [just] any group of people but only by certain group of students. (Woriwo, M, G1)

Several participants who had direct or indirect experience of supernatural cult practices in their former schools reported particular events that they interpreted as involving spirits or spirit possession, for example:

I was really scared because it's not normal to worship devil and also boys who are members of such groups can do unusual things to the girls without the girls knowing about it. (Zyle, F, G1)

I was scared too because during that year I was in school, there was a group called (Turingi) who were worshipping devils and at the same time there were rumours going on around too that they were picking little children to offer as their sacrifices to the devils. When they come to school and when you look at their eyes, their eyes are usually very red like devils eyes that made me more scared. (Jux, M, G1)

I was in secondary school and there was a rumour about an incident going on amongst students at the school saying a boy was killed and hung on the fence on the roadside as a result of cult practices. I was frightened and confused because I still did not know why and how the boy was killed and why there was no evidence of the dead boy hanging on the fence. (Sato, F, G3)

Like if one of the schoolboy or girl like if he ah ... Let's say, in tok pisin they used to say *hatim bel ah* [provoke or to make people get angry]; okay if he do that to one of the girl or boy okay then in the night they will use some of the cult words and they will change into another invisible human being and they will go into their dormitory. When students are influenced that those involved in such groups are well off, they decide to join these groups so that they be like their friends. ...

Once the spirit of whatever is being worshipped is fed up, it can turn around to control the person that has been worshipping him by commanding them to do unacceptable things because if he does not obey him he could kill him. (Tasingwa, M)

It may sometimes change your image or physical appearance and it can affect your thinking cap, example—loss of concentration. I can remember one time when one girl was totally changed into another figure I mean appearance (of a man's face) and she was chasing all the girls around the dormitory and after that she just cool down and after some 5 to 10 minutes she changed back but she didn't know what had happened to her. (Koiidi, F)

Some of the bad things if they don't follow the rules they might get hurt or they will die without any sickness or sometimes they will just feel like they have severe pain in their body. ...

Ye, students can die from it if they are not careful like one student died in the school I last attended. He was in the dormitory and he want to go out to the ablution block so he went there and somehow he just died there, slept there, we didn't know what's the cause. (Dibatizh, M)

Some commented on how students not involved in cult might be affected "because cult worshippers only want to achieve their goals and don't care about others" (Sonja, F, G3). Supernatural practices could affect any students, but Junior Undaztood (F, G3) believed "the main ones to suffer are the Christians due to satanic worshipping".

When students are in the midst of their doings like worshipping and initiation ceremonies, they could harm or hurt other students or people. (Dandii, M, G2)

Those people involved in cult practices could make themselves invisible and go to opposite sex dormitories and disturb the good students by undressing them or doing something else to them. (Tasingwa, M)

When the cult students they do like example for ghost games or something like that and they didn't successfully complete the game and they went to their dormitories or whatever and in the night the spirit can attack all of the students or on the other hand if the administration find out about students doing such activity they can terminate or suspend the school then it will affect all the students including innocent ones. (Tilec, M)

However, others did not seem to share this view:

Those students not involved in such practices would not be affected unless they decided to interfere with those involved; otherwise they are just normal students. (Blockfaith, M)

Some participants also noted that cult might refer to the less dangerous worshipping of real people "that a group fancy" (Diinan, F, G3); the female participants in Group 3 particularly referred to singers or film stars.

### ***Membership Rituals and Other Practices***

Participants' reports suggested that in many schools the establishing and maintaining of institutional traditions was a key element in cult. A common feature was the passing on of "Generation Names":

I was scared because I was told that they would come looking for juniors, especially new entrants to get them to join those groups that were already there so the generation names could continue or pass on. (Mian, F, G1)

After hearing about cult I started experiencing it in Grade 10 so when I did Grade 11 towards the end of the year, five senior boys were leaving so they had to pass the generation names to us. That's when I experienced this in groups where we normally follow some rules. (Bataclitz, M, G2)

Some secondary and national high schools have generation names that were used in the past 20 years and still exist, for example Maenduo Lords of Passam National High School; Bishops of Kerevat National High School and Right Wing Cool Rebels (RWCR) of Kondiu Secondary School and many more. These names clearly show that cult is practiced in most of our secondary and national high schools. (Bossip, M, G2)

We were given names and we have to live up to those names meaning that we have to follow what the name of the groups means such as 'Sexy Days', 'Pamuk dok' [Prostitutes] in pidgin. Another name is number '69' and the other is 'Professional'. It was like some kind of tradition that has to be followed. These practices are not good as they only spoil our image and we lose respect. (Asha, F, G2)

However, Tilec suggested that Generation Names do not have to be considered as "cult":

At my former school boys would take part in such activities but it's not related to cult but it's kind of a peer group thing or I can say that it's kind of 50 percent cult and 50 percent peer group because some of the generation names were derived from ghosts' names so this kind of generation name there is also some kind of incantation ways going on and we would be forced to join those groups. (Tilec, M, G1)

Groups also had rituals associated with initiation into the group or the election of leaders, and several practices were identified, for example:

I was once involved in it [cult] myself but it came to a stage where we were asked to sleep (have sex) with our own brothers as it was one of the things we had to do to show that we have passed. I didn't feel good about this so I withdraw from that group. (Mian, F, G1)

The most frequently mentioned practice was "buffing", a test of physical strength that involves fisting, punching or hitting a person hard on the chest. Group 3 talked about this as follows:

JT: Some of you mentioned that you were actually involved in some sort of groups in the schools. Do you know of any generation names that are being used at the schools?

Junior Undaztood, F: I have actually had an experienced in the passing on of the generation names where the name was passed on to me in the initiations process. The generation name that was passed to me is 'Loliten'. It is based on characters of the past students.

Logens, F: In my former secondary school we also have something similar however, from what I know of was a girls group and it used to be called 'Side Kick'. Members of that group do not do buffing like other group does in order to pass the generation name; instead they bring food and drinks and celebrate the position of the new leader of the group.

Diinan, F: I was actually involved in a group where group members have to buff me and I passed that test before becoming the leader of that group.

Sonja, F: In the secondary school that I last attended there were many different groups but the groups were divided following same sex. Boys have their own groups as well as girls. Other schools they do buffing but for our case in Malala, we don't do buffing as mentioned by others, however we mark a time to get together and during that time we bring food and drinks and appoint the next person to carry on the generation name without buffing. For the boys side, I don't really know but from

what I heard they usually do the same. Such groups like this are good because we do not hurt or harm anyone in the group as well as other students.

However, others drew attention to the possibility for deliberate or accidental injury:

Another good thing about cult is that we have peers and we are easily influence by them however sometimes when the leader says something then we don't oppose it, we go by it. We can't oppose it because they will do something to hurt us. From experience at Kerevat National High school, if somebody refuses the leader would do chest buffing on that person that refused to participate and that could be dangerous if not done properly. (Asha, F, G2)

I don't think it's good because when someone in the group does something wrong or doesn't want to participate then the rest of the group members will do something to hurt that person. (Tigsmarhn, M, G2)

Buffing or punching of chest when passing on generation name under the influence of liquor can harm the person who is going to be the next leader especially when all members in the group have to punch the future leader on the chest. (Kenjl, M)

### **The Function of Cult**

Although adult concerns have highlighted coercive and ritualistic aspects of cult in Secondary and National High schools, participants talked a lot about benefits of involvement. Two main themes appeared in the data: (a) hopes for personal advancement, and (b) support and belongingness.

#### ***Personal advancement***

Many participants talked about an expectation that involvement in cult would help them do well at school. Some discussed this with reference to the supernatural, for example:

It sometimes gives students luck, for example a boy from the school that I last attended had a human skull with him. Few days before the exams he placed the skull beside him and wrote letters in the alphabetical orders from A to Z and numbers ranging from 0 to 9. The next day was going to be exam day, during that night he placed the skull in the dark place and asked the skull for the answers to the questions and the skull spelled the answers to each questions in order. That boy wrote the answers down and memorised them. He did very well and got all the answers right. (Tasingwa, M)

Some of the benefits of practicing cult in secondary and national high schools would be to pass the national examinations. So students worship the devils or evil spirits so they can make the students pass the exams. (Jux, M, G1)

Apart from passing the exams from the experience in my former school many students were having school fees problems and could not afford to complete their fees so one of the other benefits would be to have money. For example, a boy from my former school got heavily involved in worshipping the devil because he could not complete his school fees and the devil provided money for him and he was able to pay for his school fees. (Mian, F, G1)

Some described the benefits coming more from assistance from other students: “money, resources and other things needed would be provided” (Tasingwa, M); "having access to things or achieving their goals” (Jux, M, G1). Academic help (appropriate or not) was identified as a major advantage of group membership:

One of the reasons ah ... for their studies ah ... involving in such groups is to get good marks in schools. Cult practices are usually ah ... done in peer groups where they share the same interest in discussing what is to be done for assignments and tests but for each of the group there are certain principles or rules that members of the different groups follow. ...

One of the benefits is if you put all your concentration in full and follow all the rules that is easy for you to further your studies to university level because you will get very good marks. (Dibatizh, M)

As for the practices in my former school when it comes to assignments, group members would come together and discuss and incorporate answers together thus helping each other. (Tilec, M, G1)

Blockfaith (M) observed:

When it comes to doing assignments, when there are some very smart boys in the group, they would do the assignments and pass it to others in

the group to copy in which many times these students score very good marks but are never caught.

Several also mentioned advantages in the future:

One good thing about cult in secondary and national high schools is that when a former student of a school and from a cult group occupies a job, then it becomes very easy for current student members to get employment with the employer of the former student. (Bataclitz, M, G2)

Ah ... you could be recognised by other students that you are someone with special powers and would be respected by other group members. You can be easily given a job provided someone in the work area was a former member of the group that you are now involved in. (Tilec, M, G1)

If we are stranded out there and we call the group the seniors will help by providing what we need that's for those who have already left school. Also it would be very easy to find employment if one of the previous member of that group is working in the company or department. (Blockfaith, M)

However most adults seem to be worried that involvement in cult will have negative effects on academic achievement, and many participants also believed that it caused problems, for example:

One of the bad things of involving in cult groups in secondary and national high schools is that when a student is heavily involved in the group activities he or she will not have time to do their studies and will not do well in their schoolwork. (Logens, F, G3)

During the study time like when the time came for us to have a conference or meeting whatever we are doing we have to leave that and go to the group meeting. And also when it comes to the time of marking someone in the group to be the next leader, all members in that group have to leave whatever they are doing be it be in the middle of a class or study time, students have to give whatever excuses they can to leave and attend that initiation of the new leader because it is compulsory for that group. (Blockfaith, M)



On the other hand, several participants argued that the effect of cult on school success depended on whether or not they were a "true follower": students suffer "if not following the right procedures and not abiding by the rules" (Tilec, M). Bossip (M, G2) explained:

Those that suffer from the effects of cult depend on the state of their mind. When they do not have the faith and they do not really believe in their particular group, then they are the ones who are mostly going to be affected, because to be in such groups you have to have faith and believe that whatever is carried out will work so those *olsem ol gat tupela tingting nabaut* [who are two minded] usually fail their exams. Those that have faith and believe in whatever they do usually are the lucky ones.

### ***Peer Group Support and Sense of "Belonging"***

Participants said they believed that an important reason for joining the groups in Secondary and National High schools was the fear of losing friends: "you can't risk losing your best friends" (Logens, F, G3) and "friends will leave you if you don't want to join the group" (Asha, F, G2). For new students, the groups were an alternative to loneliness, especially when the school was a long way from their home: "You will have many friends then your friends should be able to help you in times of trouble" (Jux, M, G1).

However, participants did not only speak about group membership for avoiding loneliness and other problems, but also in a much more positive way:

I got involved in a group because of *pasin blong luksave* [the kind of approaches of being accepted or wanted by people's attitudes]. Like we left our parents behind to go to secondary and national high schools. Having to leave our parents and the loved ones and travel far to secondary and national high schools is always emotional especially when we don't get to see our parents until end of the schooling year for some. That's why when we first arrived at our new schools there are senior students in the schools that made us feel welcome and at home. There is that bond between us that is very hard to say no if they are already in a cult group and ask me to join them because I will definitely join the group because I wouldn't want to let them down. (Sonja, F, G3)

One good thing about cult in secondary and national high schools is that when we have many friends and we are in need then our friends will assist us. (Dandii, M, G2)

When someone in the group gets into trouble with another member of a different group, his group members will help him fight the other group members. (Jux, M, G1)

Groups like this, one of their characteristics is most of them are very open and talkative students so it will be very easy for you to go and tell them about your worries or problems and also they know how to approach you and they can really convince you to join the group. (Junior Undaztood, F, G3)

Logens (F, G3) reported on her experience of the positive aspect of cult rituals:

We have generation name but there is no initiation before passing down of names but it's good because we have our smaller ones where we look after them when they are sick or when they need anything they come to us like foods or money, any thing. That's a good thing about some of these groups.

### **Adult Perspectives on Cult**

This issue has attracted teachers, educational personnel, politicians and other adults—particularly parents with children either currently attending or who will be attending Secondary and National High schools in the near future. The students have realized this as one of the major concerns and therefore referred to various reasons parents and other adults are concerned.

### ***Parent and Community Concerns***

In their discussions, participants demonstrated good understanding of the concerns of parents and other adults in the community. For example, members of Group 1 commented as follows:

JT: Why are our parents and other adults talking too much about cult issues especially in secondary and national high schools?

Jux, M: This is because when their children attend these secondary and national high schools, they can sometimes get involved in such activities or they could be affected by such activities.

Mian, F: Also parents would be thinking about their children's safety. For example, in the secondary school that I last attended, it was like we were forced to do it so in addition to what [Jux] said, parents could be also thinking of their children's safety. And also talking from experience, if you refuse to take part, they could do something to hurt or harm you. There were cases that members in such groups also took other substances like alcohol and drugs, so it's not very safe.

Woriwo, M: Yes, parents are also concerned about their children's well being and they are also worried that if their children take part in such activities their performances in the school could be affected.

Similar stories were told in other groups, for example:

Parents are concerned because children are away from them and can join peer groups and end up doing other things like taking drugs, consuming alcohol and not doing well in their schoolwork. Sometimes students join outsiders and they do robbery and stealing. (Bossip, M, G2)

Sometimes in order to get a generation name a building can be burnt down. This will affect the whole student body not only those involved in cult so parents are worried because they spend a lot of money on school fees. (Logens, F, G3)

Parents are concerned about the lives of the students because there were cases or incidents at a former school where someone involved in cult activity killed an innocent girl so the school was suspended for the whole year. (Junior Undaztood, F, G3)

There are some villages near the schools so boys make friends with youths in the village and that's how they meet and work together. The

youths from the villages could bring drugs or alcohol for their school friends so after they consume those stuff it gives them strength and courage to participate in worshipping and other activities as well. (Konge, M, G2)

Participants hoped that this study would help parents to be aware of the real life experiences in secondary and national high schools. By sharing their experiences honestly about exactly what is happening in schools, and explaining what cult is, parents can advise their children on what they would expect and be able to make good decisions when faced by real life challenges.

### ***The Role of Teachers and Counsellors***

The study asked participants about their experience of teachers and other staff such as counsellors or pastors acting as advisers on issues relating to cult. In some cases participants believed teachers were not aware of what was happening, or preferred to be involved as little as possible. They also reported that students would often be reluctant to trust teachers with problems, or be afraid of the consequences of being seen talking to teachers:

Nobody knows about such practices in this secondary school. Some of the teachers who have gone through similar practices would know but are not saying or doing anything, which I guess may be its not bad. But as far as I know teachers were never informed of what students do in those groups. (Dibatizh, M)

Most of the teachers knew this but they ah ... the people involved in the cult itself do not really listen to the teachers and they don't want teachers to interfere with what they are doing. I think some teachers know about it because sometimes they try to advise students but students do not want to listen so teachers do not want to interfere with them. (Kenjl, M)

In the first place when a teacher sight such activities especially cult, they are working with the power of Satan so the teacher find it difficult to approach the students while they are in the midst of such activity. The teacher sees their faces only and calls for them the next day. (Tilec, M)

In most cases when students are caught red handed by teachers they are reported to the administration where in most cases students have been expelled from school but if they are not caught but some stories have leaked out to teachers then they would carry out investigations. (Blockfaith, M)

In my former school it depends entirely on how students see their teachers. If the students trust a particular teacher and knows that whatever they share with the teacher will be kept confidential then they would go to see that teacher, otherwise they will never go to any teacher and talk about such things. (Tilec, M, G1)

Students do go to see certain teachers in the school but they talk about other personal or social problems but they would never talk about cult related activities. (Bossip, M, G2)

There are teachers in the school that students can go to see however in most cases students hardly go to see them because they are scared and also not comfortable with that teacher. Students do not know whether they could trust those teachers or not and they are also in fear that they could be reported if they approach teachers and tell them about what's happening, so they keep it to themselves until they are being caught. ...

Even though there are teachers and school counsellors, students find it hard to go and see them or talk to them because they always too busy with their teaching loads and do not have time and also students are ashamed of other students seeing them going. (Logens, F, G3)

If I go and seek assistance from a teacher my group members will be keeping their eyes on me and they will get cross with me and I will be their target. The group members will come after me and could do something worse to me. One of the rules is when a member is caught or reported to teachers or the school administration, she or he must not say anything about the group or the group's name so they have to make up stories about something else or that will be the victim when he or she comes back to the dormitory. (Sonja, F, G3)

Counsellors and pastors were reported as available to help in some schools, although participants did not always see this involvement as satisfactory:

There are only two secondary schools in this province and there have been evidences that cult is practiced in my former school and it was only last year that the school decided to use Pastors from different churches to help counsel the students. (Mian, F, G2)

It would be very hard for the national government to stop such practices so I think those chaplains should be in schools or full time counsellors. (Dibatizh, M)

There was one time that we were told to go and denounce our group names etc. We did not trust all the teachers because of we tell them something they will go and report us so the only way we could do is to go to the Chaplin or the counsellor. (Asha, F, G2)

There is a school counsellor in my former school but students do not approach the counsellor when they are involved in cult activities. Sometimes a school counsellor does not have time for students because they need to prepare for their lessons or are busy teaching so students do not go to see them. (Jux, M, G1)

Alternatively, Kenjl suggested use of peer counselling tactics:

Punishment should not be used as a way of stopping such practices instead find out about groups in the school and get students to interact between those groups to make them come out of it. (Kenjl, M)

### ***The Role of School Administrators***

Participants reported actions taken by the school administration when students are caught practicing cult activities. The common disciplinary actions usually conducted by the schools are expulsion or termination from studies. However some schools also have other ways of dealing with students:

Another bad thing about involving in cult practices in secondary and national high schools are the breaking or not following the school rules and when a person is caught then she or he can be suspended or expelled from school. ...

Sometimes when it's their first time they are referred to the disciplinary committees and second time it will be decided as to whether the student continues or is suspended. (Sonja, F, G3)

If a student is caught practicing cult activities, the school administration would expel the student straight away. There won't be any investigation as such activities can be very dangerous and is not accepted in the schools. (Woriwo, M, G1)

The school administration will suspend them from school and send reports to other secondary and national high schools so they cannot enrol that student because he was involved in cult. (Junior Undaztood, F, G3)

Other disadvantages are when students are in the midst of their doings like worshipping and initiation ceremonies, they could harm or hurt other students and people. And when they are caught, they won't be given any chances; they'll be expelled on the spot or will be referred to the police and straight to the prison. (Dandii, M, G2)

The students expressed their views regarding the actions that the school administrations take on students who practice cult. Some students were in favour of strict action and others suggested something else could have been done. In Group 2, there was considerable disagreement among members about the actions that the school administrations take.

JT: Do you think this is fair?

Bossip, M: It's fair because it's against the code of conduct of secondary and national high schools and if students are expelled from such practices then it's fair because students know very well that they should not participate in such activities.

Dandii, M: It's unfair because only those ones that are caught are expelled while others not caught are still at school because their friends could not report them. Those who are still at school continue with the group so the generation name continues as well.

JT: Could something else be done to help students with such attitudes?

Bataclitz, M: Students should not be expelled from studies straight way but should be brought to school counsellors to get help and also do further investigations to find out the real troublemakers and then discipline them.

In Group 1, two students argued that it's not fair that the administration should give chances to the students by having them suspended from studies for one year or have them transfer to another Secondary or National High school. It was also suggested that the school administration should put the students concerned on good behaviour bond and monitor them on the daily basis. In Group 3, two students supported the idea of expelling students because they spoil the name of the school. For example, Sato (F) explained that from her point of view "that person or the people involved in that type of activity will bring burden to the rest of the school". Other students in Group 3 suggested that the school administration should invite pastors from different churches to come and pray with the students, isolate the students concerned from the rest of the students, and clear any sites in the school that students can use as the place of worshipping or of such practices.

### **Involvement in Cult and Helping Others in the Future**

When asked to discuss ways to improve the situations they had just left behind in their former Secondary and National High schools, participants offered a variety of suggestions. They were agreed that students needed more assistance to deal with the demands of school, but did not have a unanimous view about the role of cult.

Many participants suggested that more efforts must be made to bring the issue of cult "out into the open". However some did not think that schools should act to ban cult, believing this would be either impossible or undesirable, but they wanted action so that new students would be better informed "of the challenges they will face" (Woriwo, M, G1):

Some of these activities were already in place for many generations 10 to 20 so it's hard to tell students to stop activities. Some of the generation in national high schools especially is over 20 years so only way is the



schools should put such activities open. The school should discourage students not to practice cult but tell students to form some kind of organization like my former secondary school. We have previous students senior students, some of them are now lawyers, doctors, teachers etc and during our initiations we have an underground organization where we come together and talk and discuss such activities. All of them know who the ringleader is and they want to stop such activities and try all the best but they never succeed so the only way they should legalise such activities in secondary and national high schools. (Tilec, M, G1)

I also would like to say that the schools should bring this out in open because most of the time, they know about such cases but keep it to themselves, so may be it would be good they try to make all students aware of such groups in schools and also warn them of the consequences if it gets out of hand and they are caught. (Mian, F, G1)

Others saw making parents and students more aware of cult practices as part of a process that would lead to their decline, for example:

When you bring the matter out to the public, say about cult, everyone will know about it and they will say so cult is not a good thing so we should talk to our children and we should stop them, they should see some of these things so they would stop from some of them. We should bring it out also because it is for other people to know and also to help other people who are trying to go that school to avoid such things. (Asha, F, G2)

They will have to emphasise the effects of such activities and what kind of consequences students could face when they are involved in such activities. When such things are brought out openly, that's when students will get to see the real result of practicing such activities and will stop. If the school authorities deal with the concerned students quietly and the rest of the students are not aware, then they could be the ones forced by those practicing cult to join them. That's why I think it would be good idea if at the beginning of each school year the school administration should inform all the students that such practices could happen among students themselves and explain the consequences they would face if they were caught, for example students caught practicing cult activities will be expelled from school straight away. This would help new intakes,

as senior students would be keeping their eyes on whom to get into those existing groups. (Logens, F, G3)

School is the most important and to join in such groups will totally affect your learning, and I'll say to the school that if they find out instantly about this cult group I think they should handle it effectively and not only within the school. Students should not participate in such activities, and concentrate on their studies, because once they are caught they would be dealt with either by the school administration or the police if it becomes serious. (Koiidi, F)

Bossip (M, G2) expressed the opinion that potential leaders of the country might be destroying their future by involvement in cult, so that action should be taken at the highest level to eliminate these groups:

I want to make a suggestion here. If the government can look for means and ways to enforce Principals and Headmasters of those particular schools where cults are normally practiced to stop these students from practicing cults. ... So it's best the Principals or the Department of Education should look for some ways to stop such practices in schools.

Many participants also discussed actions they might take as individuals to advise younger relatives and friends "not to practice evil doings" (Tilec, M), and "persuade them to leave such groups and form other groups" (Kenjl, M):

As for me, I would strongly oppose my friends to take part in any of those cult activities because I was heavily involved in it myself and so I would not like to see my friends fall into the same track. (Mian, F, G1)

I would go straight to my best friend if he or she is involved and tell them straight that the bible says that sorceress, witchcrafts, magic man will not be forgiven. I will try to help by talking and discouraging them from practicing cult activities. (Junior Undaztood, F, G3)

I would advice students not to practice evil doings and just do good things such as helping each other with their schoolwork. (Tilec, M)

Students should be strong to make right decisions by not joining those groups for the good of their future. (Sato, F)

I would talk to them in a good way personally telling them that it's a very, very bad practice especially for young people and if they continue it would severely affect them in their adulthood. (Koiidi, F)

Tell them not to involve in such activities like that if they want to do so then they should not do it—it's not good for them when they grow up. Talk to students I feel comfortable to talk with who I know are involved in such groups, and see if we can find some strategies to stop such practices. (Tasingwa, M)

I would suggest that cult practice is not good. My advice to future students is from experience. When I was still at secondary school I thought cult practice was a good thing and got involved but now that I am out of secondary school I realized it was not a good thing. (Blockfaith, M)

Several participants thought that the development of cult in schools was mainly a response to boredom and lack of other activities. Therefore they suggested that institutional effort should be made to provide alternative structured activities for students:

I think authorities should restore former objectives because it will get students involved in such activities so they tend to forget what they are doing. If they are left like that and after classes and they don't have anything to do, then they get into small groups and get involved in other activities. Also in the cultural group or provincial groups there are senior students there that could help new students. So authorities should restore former objectives, for example regional groups or provincial groups reintroduced so they can use spare time for practicing for school cultural events or doing fund raising activities to raise money for the end of year parties, picnic etc. This would probably help ease the boredom amongst students. (Sonja, F, G3)

I think that the schools should form some kind of organization or group in schools and a teacher should be in charge to lead and direct the

students with some principles and guidelines to follow. (Woriwo, M, G1)

Some participants also advised against schools drawing conclusions that all peer group activities should be considered "cult":

I would suggest that cult activity is a satanic worship so I don't like my school or any other school to practice such activity because it's to do with evil satanic worship. I could you know suggest that the school should have a peer group like Bugandi Secondary school where we help each other instead. Some of the teachers think that we are practicing cult but actually no, like I mentioned earlier some of the names were derived from ghosts names so they think that we practice cult but actually no. (Tilec, M, G1)

Sometimes there are certain group of people that practice cult mostly to do with worshipping and all that, others just like at the end of the week boys *olsem ol save tanim baket o spinim baket-pidgin* [making of home made brew] but that's when some of the teachers have this impression that when boys are doing that they think they are doing cult activities. That's where I think teachers are wrong; they shouldn't be thinking that way because cult practices are different from that. (Logens, F, G3)

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents an overview and discussion of the main findings of this study. The purpose of this exploratory study was to collect information from former students on the existence of cult practices in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea, and on their perceived influence on students' personal well being and academic achievement. The discussion will focus on their understandings of the term "cult", how it plays a role in peer relationships in these schools, and how it is part of the changing nature of adolescence in Papua New Guinea society. The recommendations will consider the views of parents, the role of teachers and administrators and other staff in schools, the possible implications for Department of Education policy, and suggestions for future research.

#### Discussion of Findings

##### 'Cult' in Secondary and National High Schools: The Students' Perspective

In previous generations in Papua New Guinea, adolescents learnt most of the skills they needed for adult roles through observing and imitating their parents and other older members of their communities (Matane, 1986). They spent only a little unsupervised time in the company of their age peers, and did not look to them for advice or support to any great extent. Even when most children in PNG were attending primary school, when school was over students would go back home and spend the rest of time with parents and other adult family members. As big brothers and sisters they would also have to take on the responsibility to mind their little ones while parents did the daily chores such as gardening, fishing, and hunting and also participate in other community activities. Therefore the only valuable time to be with peers was during school times during the weekdays, and the ideas of the "peer group" and "peer group pressure" did not have much importance.

However, many aspects of this traditional situation changed when greater numbers of young people stayed in school during their teenage years. Many schools were boarding institutions, and students spent much of their time away from their families and local communities. They typically spent much more unsupervised time in the company of their age peers. The adults in the school (teachers, administrators, and other staff) were not usually available as "parents" to offer comfort, support and advice. In this situation the peer group became much more important, fulfilling many of the roles of parents and other family members. Traditional ways of older students looking after younger ones also changed to fit the social environment of the schools. In these respects, the importance of the "peer group" developed among PNG adolescents in a similar way to that described for their counterparts in Western societies (Berk, 2007; Heaven, 2001; Santrock, 2007; Shaffer, 2002).

Although students may not have come from communities where supernatural cults existed, they brought with them many underlying beliefs about supernatural forces and supernatural practices that were present in their families and communities, and it seems that these became a part of new "traditions" that helped to develop a sense of identity and belonging for students. Development of school cults was believed to be particularly strong in the National High schools, where students were most likely to be far away from their home communities. There has been concern that the newer Secondary schools have also followed these developments.

Although the present research was only a small-scale exploratory study, the 21 participants had personal experiences to discuss from a representative sample of PNG Secondary and National High schools. They may also have heard news of what was happening at other schools, and in their few months at Madang Teachers' College before the study they had the opportunity to share and compare stories with student teachers coming from other schools. They may not have had experience of talking about cult with an adult like the researcher in a formal setting, but despite some initial apprehension to the inquiries respondents were willing to discuss cult issues openly during my interviews with them. The discussions revealed some of their confusions about what the term "cult" means or how it should be applied, but all respondents

indicated they had some knowledge of cult and its rituals and practices. In other words, the results support the idea that cult practices are common in our Secondary and National High schools and that for someone to go through the education system and deny that one has knowledge or is not aware of cult or its practices is to deny what has become *de facto* standard practice in our schools. Looking more closely at what respondents said suggests the main points in their information are as follows.

### ***Understanding of the Term "Cult"***

The discussions suggested that there are different conceptualisations of cult in different schools. It is obvious that there are various forms; not only in their practice but also in the manner or form they evolved. Some of these forms have their origins in traditional local beliefs that were developed and refined over time for different reasons. There is not one form that is conceptualised as the perfect system or practice, but particular environments seem to support different practices. A thorough analysis of the results seems to suggest that the respondents' experience and understanding of "cult" in schools can be associated with one or more of two main meanings.

Firstly, there is the worshipping of something or someone they fantasise. In many cases this seems to be the worshipping of Satan or other supernatural idols, or objects such as skulls. In connection with this worshipping participants reported a number specific incidents of "supernatural" occurrences, such as students changing appearance, changing shape, becoming invisible, being forced to perform certain acts, or incidents of students as victims being harmed or even killed. Some of these practices may have direct links with traditional supernatural beliefs but others represent traditional practices being modified into a new version. For example, several respondents mentioned that students involved in cult believed that this would bring them financial and other resources, which is similar to the "cargo cult", a practice done by people in certain areas of Papua New Guinea, who wait for the ancestors to supply them with goods (Billings, 2002; Lepowsky, 2004). However among other groups in certain schools a "cult" may only involve the adulation of particular living people such as singers or movie stars, and have no association with satanic worship or other supernatural practices.

Secondly, the results confirm the idea that cult can be primarily "generation culture", where the main objective is ensuring that "generation names" are passed on from one generation to another year after year as new students enter the school. Evidence of some of the generation names were given by respondents to confirm such practices. One respondent said some Secondary and National High schools have generation names that were used in the past 20 years and still exist and gave examples such as: Lord Maenduo; Bishops; and Right Wing Cool Rebels (RWCR). Another respondent said she experienced the initiation before the generation name (Loliten) was passed on to her. Another respondent said the generation name in her previous school is "Side Kick" where the name is passed on with food and drinks celebration. In this situation, the key person usually is not Satan or some other idol but the "leader" among the students themselves. The findings also revealed that students are usually expected to obey the cult leader at all times and members of a cult group have to live up or follow the tradition of the group that they are members of, and that students who are heavily involved in cult activities would be trapped or controlled by the cult authority figure.

Participants' descriptions of cult at their former schools indicated that most groups generally monitored members behaviour, for example by members normally wearing certain type of coloured clothes of which the most common colour is black, and watching who they talked to—especially teachers. Reports suggested that many groups had initiation processes and other rituals which can be dangerous to the students' health and safety. Clark (1994) noted that satanic worshippers often performed rituals as a means of deriving that power and energy which is believed to be in their bodies, and the main ritual described by respondents in this study was "buffing". Buffing is particularly an important part of choosing group leaders: when the student does not faint or collapse then he or she has proven strong and fit to lead the group into the next generation. Leaders of cult groups become popular among the students and although adults perceive this as a danger to their futures, several participants believed that leaders (and sometimes even ordinary members) are at the upper hand to get employment from former group members who are currently occupying jobs in a firm, company or department. Therefore it would be interesting to know more about how leaders emerge in these groups and what characteristics they have.



The respondents also suggested other negative norms such as fasting in order to achieve their goals. Fasting means going without food for 2 to 3 days which may cause other health problems; for example, students may get sick, may faint and may not concentrate in class and as a result will not perform well academically. As another example, one of the cult groups mentioned was named 'Sexy Days' so the members in the group are automatically seen as prostitutes and they also have to practice that because that's the group tradition. Such practices can spoil their images and so other students would not respect them and would see them as prostitutes. In these ways the cult groups in PNG schools are like many cult groups in other parts of the world where such behaviour control is the regulation of an individual's physical reality which includes what clothing to wear, what food to eat and when to eat, when to sleep and for how long, as well as types of the jobs and the type of rituals and other activities to be performed (Hassan, 1990).

### ***Reasons for Joining Cult Groups***

Many respondents admitted they had belonged to cult groups in their former schools. The statements presented in Chapter 4 indicate that some had been attracted by possible advantages and joined willingly, but others had felt under pressure to join. It is evident from the results that some students are vulnerable and are forced into groups not of their own choice, which they later regret. It is possible to say that such students may have some very close friends in the group that it becomes very hard for them to refuse, so they become followers in those cult groups. Responses also suggested that some participants had positive memories, some had only negative memories, while others had felt positive while at school but now, as trainee teachers, described cult in negative terms.

There was some support for the findings of research from other countries which suggests that adolescents who get involved in Satanism do so out of a need to belong and to address feelings of alienation and detachment from friends, family, and community. For example, it is consistent with Curran (1989 cited in Clark, 1994) that adolescents' involvement in satanic worshipping has been "termed immediate

antidote for loneliness and act as a possible solution” to their problems. Participants reported joining such groups, or knowing others who had joined, because of peer pressure, boredom, loneliness and lack of financial support from their families and in the hope that their friends would support and comfort them during those times.

Clark (1994) stated that satanic worshippers gain the power and control that offers “quick fix” to their problems, which attracts adolescents to join so their problems can be solved quickly. Results of the present study showed that many respondents had believed they benefited intellectually from the knowledge by being helped to pass the national examinations and to continue to do further studies through universities by worshipping Satan. Some students worshipping Satan had easy access to money where they were able to pay their school fees. For example, one respondent said a boy from his former school was heavily involved in worshipping the devil because he could not complete his school fees and the devil provided money for him and he was able to pay for his school fees. These are some pulling factors that made students become members of cult groups in schools so they benefit from the outcomes.

Participants' responses suggested that students will know very well that when they are caught in cult groups they will be suspended from school or sometimes terminated from studies. However the findings also suggest that this will not stop them from forming and getting involved in cult, and that many will believe that they will suffer the *most* negative effects, and not achieve whatever privileges that other followers of the group will achieve, if they are not a true follower, not following the right procedures, and not abiding by the rules of the group.

Therefore it was clear that although many participants said they had been scared about involvement in cult, it seems important to understand students would be recognized as having special powers when they become members of such groups, and that members believed there were therefore many personal *advantages* to involvement in cult. These perceived advantages could be access to financial benefits, help with schoolwork, or the more general benefit of peer group acceptance. Members of a group take care and watch over each other's backs and protect and defend their friends.

Although several participants reported having experienced pressure to join cult groups, others indicated that they had been willing to join, and although there was some confirmation of reports that older students might coerce younger ones to join groups other participants also said that older students welcomed new students in a more positive way. Younger students look for older students for support, comfort and security knowing that senior students are seen as trustworthy or as big brothers and sisters.

### ***Cults and Other Peer Groups in Schools***

When respondents talked about their peer group relationships when they were at school it was not always clear that they were talking about "involvement in cult" as such. In fact, some participants commented that teachers and school administrators sometimes believed students were practising cult when they were just involved in ordinary adolescent peer groups. As described in the Western literature of adolescence, students form cliques according to same sex and about the same age so they can be engaged in similar sports and other activities, enjoy the same music, or just spend time together and enjoy each other's company. They might also wear same style of dressings and have the same attitudes, and develop a shared group identity to prove to other groups that their group is the best (Berk, 2007; Santrock, 2007).

However, there may be overlap between "ordinary" and "cult" groups. The findings make it clear how important friendships are to students in Secondary and National High schools: for many students their friends take the place of their parents. Students want to have friends who are able to listen to them, understand them, and share thoughts, feelings and problems. Therefore if a student's close friends become involved in cult they will also want to join, even if they have no other personal reason for joining and even if they believe it is wrong. Although there may be disadvantages, the advantages are stronger: they could be accepted for what kind of a person they are, they are given assistance with assignments and other schoolwork and projects,

and they are able to comfort each other in terms of hardships, loneliness and financial support.

## **"Cult" in Secondary and National High Schools: Adult Perspectives**

### ***Parents and Communities***

It is evident from the personal information shared in the discussions that more than half of the respondents come from families who live in rural areas (villages) where access to money is a problem. These families mostly rely on the sale of cash crops such as copra, cocoa, coffee, and vanilla to support their children who are in schools. It is also evident from the results that most students have identified various reasons for why parents and other adults are concerned. Participants are aware that parents and other adults have been really worried about what's going on at Secondary and National High schools especially with the behaviour of students. Parents are concerned because of the distance that their children have to travel to schools and that they have to give control over their children to the schools while they are away from home and studying. Parents are concerned because they believe that by the time a student is involved in cult activities, other forms of delinquent behaviours such as truancy, theft, vandalism and drug abuse become prevalent (Clark, 1994) and so it may affect the student permanently.

Most parents in PNG see great value in education and have made many sacrifices to ensure that their children attend school and gain access to the chance for a better future so they may find well paid jobs and in return support the parents and the extended family. Parents are worried because if their children are involved in cult they may not get to complete their schooling, would end up in cities and may be involved in other criminal activities, and will not get paid jobs and live a better life. Past events have shown that parents' fears can be considered quite justified: for example, there have been cases where the whole school was suspended and students from that school were not allowed to enrol into other schools.

However, the findings of this study suggest that although participants understand parents' concerns, they also see cult in Secondary and National High

schools as a "fact of life" that cannot be easily eliminated by actions such as suspensions and expulsions. Most of the respondents said the notion of cult is true in secondary and national high schools and so whatever goes around comes around. Parents and other adults have also got to accept the fact that Papua New Guinea has changed a lot recently, so such practices that have been there in the past have changed. The students of today are able to use computers and access other ways of doing cult. Students also listen to the media to songs and other things of interest, so that every year each new lot of students will be trying something else to what has been done in the past.

There is starting to be some discussion in the news media of these issues, but news stories may not be well informed. The recommendations of participants in this study suggest that the best action would be to try and provide parents with a more accurate knowledge of cult practices, looking at possible positive aspects as well as the negative, so that they can advise their children and prepare them for what they may experience in school. Since students are unlikely to be able to avoid cult in schools, the best thing is to make them better informed so that they should be able to make good decisions when faced by real life situations and challenges.

### ***Schools***

It is evident from the results of the study that most schools take serious disciplinary action against students caught practising cult activities. The most common actions are either suspension from studies or expulsion from school, but it seems that some schools have a more lenient policy and refer students to disciplinary committees or school counsellors in the first instance and then take other actions later if a student continues with the same offence.

A question was asked if the participants thought such disciplinary action was fair. The findings indicated that most were in favour of the kind of disciplinary action that is currently used by the school administration. Respondents said such actions seem fair as students know and expect to follow the schools Code of Ethics and at this stage students should be able to make right decisions. However, their comments also

suggested that many schools did not have enough resources in terms of having adults in the school that students could go to see to discuss personal issues or anything bothering them about relationships with peers and peer groups. Although some schools have pastors, or teachers who are also in the role of school counsellor, these people were apparently not used much by students to discuss such matters. Some respondents reported that school counsellors do not have time to see the students because they are busy preparing for teaching or have heavy teaching loads, and do not have enough time set aside to see students who need personal help. Others reported being scared and not comfortable visiting school counsellors in fear of being reported to the administration if they confided stories about involvement in cult, or being ashamed to visit school counsellors as other students would know and suspect that they have problems or are reporting their group activities to them. Some respondents reported that there was no one in particular in their schools to go and see apart from teachers and the deans, so students have to keep holding back what's bothering them even though they may share with their friends. Overall the results suggest that most students will go to see certain teachers to discuss about some social problems but they don't talk about cult related activities.

Respondents' comments provide evidence of a need for better counselling services to students and this finding is very important for Papua New Guinea schools. According to the National Plan for Education 2005-2014 (pp. 66-67), the Department of Education acknowledges the growing importance of counselling for secondary students to help in countering recent problems leading to antisocial behaviours in schools. The Department of Education plans to have training of trainers for school based teacher counselling as a key strategy and to have teacher counsellors in every Secondary school by 2007, but to date not all schools have teacher counsellors.

Participants reported instances in their schools when teachers had dealt with students caught practising cult related activities. Although it is evident that some teachers have tried their best to help students in trouble, or to provide general advice about cult activities, others are reported as ignoring the problems and letting students continue with whatever they are doing. It was also clear that some teachers have come across students practising cult activities but couldn't approach them because of the fear of the power of Satan if they intervene, which could hurt/harm them, while others

have tried to investigate problems but often do not have enough evidence to allow the administration to take disciplinary action and students are able to get away easily.

Overall, the findings seem to suggest that most teachers want to help students

whenever and wherever possible, but need better training to deal with difficult situations and in some cases more support from school administrators.

Several participants suggested that schools should not wait for problems to arise but be more proactive in their approach to dealing with cult. The purpose of this approach would be to be realistic about the existence of cult groups but to create awareness in the students at the beginning of all the school year of what activities were not acceptable. Schools should acknowledge that some of the generation groups in National High schools have existed for well over twenty years and it would be hard to completely prevent students' involvement in these activities, so it would be much better to openly discuss this issue in public with the whole student body. All students would then know what kind of consequences they will face if they are involved in activities regarded as dangerous, and will also know the school policy to support and help students who are under pressure to join activities they don't want to take part in.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Looking to The Future**

For better or worse the Western concept of "adolescence" is becoming a more realistic and meaningful description for the teenage years in the lifespan for many young people in Papua New Guinea, especially among those in urban areas and those who continue their education to Grade 11 and 12 or even beyond. They spend much more time with their peers, and may spend long periods and have many more choices to make about both their present and future than their parents did.

The findings of this study clearly suggest that peer groups have an important role in PNG schools. Membership of these groups may be voluntary, and based around close friendships, or in some cases membership may be more involuntary, with students feeling under considerable pressure to join either to obtain benefits or to avoid being vulnerable to harm. If we understand "adolescence" for students today not so much as a "transition period" but a developmental stage in its own right, then we should expect the role and function of many peer groups to be as much about "*being* an adolescent" as about "*becoming* an adult". However, this situation often produces conflict, with parents and teachers becoming very concerned about student behaviour in these groups. It was clear that the participants, now that they are teachers in training, do have many concerns about the way peer groups operate at their former schools, even when they did not see themselves at a disadvantage when they were students.

It is therefore important that during their training teachers are encouraged to think about the changing lives of young people in PNG and what it means to see the world through their eyes. While teachers and schools have a responsibility to keep students safe, they should also acknowledge the importance of allowing students to experience risks and challenges that will help to give them important skills for dealing with a rapidly changing society. Schools and parents must also accept that the growth of new technologies means that adolescents in PNG will have ever increasing access to the outside world, and be able to engage with global ideas and in global friendships in ways that older generations may not understand.

But although this globalization may be inevitable, schools may also wish to consider how they can help important local traditions and beliefs to survive. It must be remembered that some aspects of generation cult were originally introduced into National High schools for the purpose of encouraging students from different ethnic backgrounds to come together and have a sense of united identity, so that schools may want to retain and foster positive aspects of group membership, accepting that adolescents will continue to change and modify these practices to make them more enjoyable and meaningful. Adolescents in PNG may find themselves pulled in many directions as they try to resolve the "identity crisis" (Erikson, 1963/1995). At the present time involvement in cult at Secondary and National High schools represents a



significant part of many students' exploration of their PNG identities and schools should try to be as supportive as possible in this process.

### **Further Research**

The results of this exploratory study suggest that further research could help to provide schools and the Department of Education with some additional important information about the students' perspective on cult in schools. Schools will have more opportunity to eliminate practices they really disapprove of if they have a better understanding of the students' point of view. This study has shown that there is *not* a common viewpoint among students, and an understanding of this complexity will provide counsellors and other advisors with better information to help individual students with their problems.

It also appears that fascination with the supernatural is a growing phenomenon among adolescents in Western societies. As a result of new technologies, PNG adolescents are likely to increasingly come into contact with Western ideas, and so it seems reasonable to expect that cult practices will continue to change and evolve. Research can help school authorities to track these changes, and evaluate their effects on students.

The results of the present study also indicated that PNG students want to explore friendships and peer groups to deal with identity issues and support each other in terms of academic, sporting and other achievements. In a rapidly changing society peers may be a better source of support and advice than parents and teachers with regard to some things adolescents have to deal with (Berk, 2007; Santrock, 2007). However, the findings of this study also suggested that some "ordinary" peer group activities may be mistaken for cult by teachers and school authorities. Therefore, further research could be useful to provide a clearer overall picture of the roles of close friendships, cliques and crowds in PNG adolescents' lives.

Future researchers may not only consider interviews and focus groups for their methodologies, but could creatively explore other possibilities. For example,

observational methods could provide a better understanding of what is really done during initiation procedures and other cult rituals. Students may even be willing to make their own digital recordings of group behaviours to provide informative archives for schools.

In conclusion, this exploratory study has provided information that schools and education authorities may find useful background for further discussion around issues of students' involvement in cult in Secondary and National High schools in Papua New Guinea. It is hoped that these discussions will help to promote safer schools in ways that do not involve teachers and administrators implementing very strict disciplinary policies that can destroy the independence and imagination of our young people.

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## **APPENDIX A: LETTER TO THE PROVINCIAL EDUCATION ADVISOR**

2/44 Wellington Street

Hamilton East

HAMILTON 3216

New Zealand

The Education Advisor

Madang Provincial Education Office

P. O. Box 2070 MADANG

Papua New Guinea

Dear Sir

**Subject: Seeking permission to carry out my research project in the province.**

I was a lecturer at Madang Teachers College in Papua New Guinea but am currently studying towards a Master of Education degree at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I'm writing to you seeking permission to conduct a research project in Madang Teachers College in the province.

The title of my research project is '*Cult Issues in Secondary and National High Schools in Papua New Guinea*'. The purpose of the study is to gain insights from year 1 student teachers at Madang Teachers College who have recently left school, on cult issues in secondary and national high schools as the focus of this project is based on secondary and national high school experiences. This information will complement what we already know of the views of teachers, parents and other adults. I would like to involve fifteen to twenty year 1 student teachers at Madang Teachers College from the different secondary and national high schools in the country. Data will be collected through focus group interview and individual interviews. All information collected will be kept confidential.

The data collected and produced will be used for the submission of my thesis. All procedures involved in this study will adhere to the regulations of the university.

I would appreciate if you could contact me through the above address or email ([jtd6@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jtd6@waikato.ac.nz)) if you accept my request to conduct my study at Madang Teachers College. Please response at your earliest convenience so that I can make necessary arrangements and inform you of the time of my coming.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated,

Yours sincerely,

Judy Tatu Drawii

## **APPENDIX B: LETTER TO THE COLLEGE PRINCIPAL**

2/44 Wellington Street  
Hamilton East HAMILTON  
New Zealand

The Principal

Madang Teachers College

P.O. Box 218 MADANG

Papua New Guinea

Dear Sir,

**Subject: Seeking permission to carry out research project at Madang Teachers College.**

I was a lecturer at Madang Teachers College in Papua New Guinea but am currently studying towards a Master of Education degree at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I'm writing to you seeking permission to conduct a research project at your college. I already have the approval of the education advisor in the province.

The title of my research project is '*Cult Issues in Secondary and National High Schools in Papua New Guinea*'. The purpose of the study is to gain insights from year 1 student teachers who have recently left school, on cult issues in secondary and national high schools as the focus of this project is based on secondary and national high school experiences. This information will complement what we already know of the views of teachers, parents and other adults. I would like to involve fifteen to twenty year 1 student teachers at the college who have just completed grades 12 from different secondary and national high schools in the country. Data will be collected through focus group interview and individual interviews. All information collected will be kept confidential. The data collected and produced will be used for the submission of my thesis. All procedures involved in this study will adhere to the regulations of the university.

I would also like to ask if you could allow one of your staff to do an initial stage of recruitment of the year 1 students for me, preferably (Mrs Elias). I will conduct the final recruitment exercise once I arrive in Madang, Papua New Guinea. I would appreciate if you could contact me through the above address or email ([jtd6@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jtd6@waikato.ac.nz)) if you accept my request to conduct my study at Madang Teachers College. Please response at your earliest convenience so that I can make necessary arrangements and inform you of the time of my coming.

Your assistance will be greatly appreciated,

Yours sincerely,

Judy Tatu Drawii

## APPENDIX C: INFORMATION SHEET

Dear participants

I was a lecturer at Madang Teachers College but am currently studying towards my Masters of Education at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. As part of my graduate degree, I am undertaking a research thesis on 'Cult Issues in Secondary and National High Schools in Papua New Guinea'. In order to carry out my study, I need some year 1 student teachers that have just completed grade 12 through secondary and national high schools to interview. This project is designed to gain insights to from year 1 student teachers on cult issues in secondary and national high schools that you have previously attended. The data collected and produced will be used for the submission of my thesis. All information collected will be kept confidential at all times.

- If you wish to participate, you will be invited to
  - (a) join a group of students from your former secondary/national high school to discuss what you know about cult practices at that school
  - (b) be interviewed individually about your knowledge and opinions of cult practices in secondary and national high schools
  
- The group discussions and individual interviews will each take about 20 minutes, and will be tape-recorded.
  
- Anything you say will be treated confidentially and not reported to the Principal or the staff of the college. I will do my best to ensure the confidentiality of the participants, however I cannot guarantee this as students may, despite being requested not to, discuss information outside the group.
  
- You will not be identified by name in the research report, but you may choose a "pseudonym" if you wish to.

Thank you

Researcher: Ms J.T. Drawii

## APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM

Research Project: Year One Student Teachers Views on Cult Issues in Secondary and National high schools in PNG.

Researcher: Ms J.T. Drawii

- The researcher has explained the study to me and I have read and understood the information sheet. I agree to participate in this research project. I may withdraw from participating anytime I wish to provide I give seven days notice to withdraw to the researcher.
- I am willing to be selected for participation in the **group discussions**.

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

### PARTICIPANTS CONSENT FORM

**Research Project:** Year One Student Teachers Views on Cult Issues in Secondary and National high schools in PNG.

Researcher: Ms J.T. Drawii

- The researcher has explained the study to me and I have read and understood the information sheet. I agree to participate in this research project. I may withdraw from participating anytime I wish to provide I give seven days notice to withdraw to the researcher.
- I am willing to be selected for **individual interviews**

Name: .....

Signature: .....

Date: .....

## **APPENDIX E: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Phase 1: Questions**

#### Introduction

We will start off by introducing ourselves (where you come from, a bit about your family, parents working or not, your previous school).

1. Have you ever heard of the word cult? If yes....

- a) When was the first time you heard of it?
- b) How do you know about it?
- c) How did you react towards it?

2. How would you define cult? Or what does cult in secondary schools mean to you?

There have been a lot of talks going on amongst adults like parents, teachers, education personnel, politicians, and other adults about the issue of cult in secondary and national high schools in Papua New Guinea even in newspaper articles. Many of the comments made were negative.

3. What do you think about this?

- a) Why are our parents and other adults talking too much about cult issues?
- b) What could be one best description you could give for cult practices in secondary schools?
- c) Whenever you read in the newspapers about this issue, if you do, how do you feel? Why do you feel that way? Or what are your feelings?

What I'm going to say here is not true, as I don't know much about this but let's say, there were some students in your school that take part in some activities that was related to the definition of cult that was mentioned earlier by some of you.

4. What would make you think that cult is practice in your former school?

- a) Why do you think cult is good in schools especially in secondary or national high schools where top students like you are studying in?
- b) What would you do if your friends were involved in cult practices?
- c) Would you like to take part in cult activities if your friends are involved? Why?

5. What would the school do if they know some students are involved in activities relating to cult?

- a) What would the school administration do to the students?
- b) Do you think this is fair?
- c) Could something else be done to help students with such attitudes?
- d) Is there anyone in particular in the school that students can go to see anytime regarding such cases? Someone that students can trust who can also advice and help them, like teachers, or counsellor etc.

Students or adolescents in you age group are often very creative and very energetic that they can do so many things. Therefore, students involved in such groups have various reasons for participating in those groups.

6. Why do you think students get involved in such groups?

- a) What are some advantages and disadvantages of involving in such groups?
- b) What are some benefits of practising cult?
- c) Why do some suffer from the effects of cults?

You are going to be teachers in a years time, now what would you say to parents who would approach you and ask about some of the things we just discussed.

7. a) How would you respond to them if they are asking about their children?

- b) What are some advices you could give to future students of secondary and national high schools?

8. Would you like to suggest something that the school or the department of education can look at the near future?

- a) Should school authorities support students and bring this issue out in open? Why?
- b) Should authorities restore former objectives or attempt to stamp out or punish students involved in cult practices?
- c) Any other comments that you would like to make, please feel free to say them.

## **APPENDIX F: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

### **Phase 2: Individual Interview Guide Questions**

Welcome each participant for individual interviews.

Introduction and outline:

Would you like to tell me a bit about yourself, (family, and position in family, parents' employment, roles & responsibilities in family)?

Tell me about cults in your former school.

1. What is your personal view of cult issues in secondary schools?

- a) Do you think it is practice in most/all the national high and secondary schools in the country?
- b) What made you think that way?
- c) Why do you think cult is good and need to be practiced in schools?

Many people especially adults assume that students in secondary and national high schools practices cult.

2. Why do adolescents in secondary and national high schools involved in such practices?

- a) Why do you think students in secondary and national high schools get involved in cult practices?
- b) If your friends are in a particular group that you really like to join, will you become a member of that group because your friends are there or because of your love or interest in what the group does? Why?

Let's say you know of some adolescents whether it's in the school you attended or in other schools that are involved in such activities.

3. What happens to their schoolwork?

- a) How is their schoolwork affected?
- b) Is it some kind of fun activities because students get bored? Why?
- c) How do teachers deal with such cases?
- d) Do students go to see their class teachers or any teacher in particular to talk to about some factors affecting their schoolwork? Why?

4. Is it true that friends can influence you into doing something silly?

- a) Why do you say that?
- b) Have you ever been convinced by friends to do something good or bad in the school? If yes, what is it and what did you do it?
- c) How did you feel after doing that?



- d) Would you like your younger brother or sister to be involved in such activities?

Some things we discussed earlier on are probably not what is happening in the school but many people like to talk about it and made it looked so bad.

5. What would you like to suggest or say regarding this issue of cult in secondary schools?

- a) Do you think this is really happening in secondary schools or people just like to make it an issue?
- b) If this is real, what would you say or suggest should happen?
- c) How would you like to help those involved?
- d) Would you like the school to be responsible then in what ways?

6. What are your attitudes towards cult practices in schools?

- a) What are some advantages of involving in cult activities?
- b) What are some disadvantages of involving in cult activities?
- c) What are some things that you may benefit from by participating in cult activities?
- d) Would you say students that practice cult suffer from it?
- e) Those students who are not involved in cult practices, how do they suffer from cult practices done by other students?

7. Should school authorities support the current practices in schools?

- a) What do you think about this statement?
- b) Do you think it would be a good idea to restore punishments in order to stop students from practicing cult?
- c) What are some suggestions you would like to make?

## APPENDIX G

<b>PSEUDONYM</b>	<b>SEX</b>	<b>HOME PROV</b>	<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>SCH PROVINCE</b>	<b>INTERVIEW</b>	<b>PARENTS JOB</b>
Asha	F	ENB & WNBP	Marianville Sec	National Capital Dist	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Bataclitz	M	Central	Mainohana Sec	Central Province	Group	Father working
Blockfaith	M	EHP	Aiyura Nat High	Eastern Highlands	Individual	Both subsistence farmers
Bossip	M	Western Highlands	Kondu Sec	Simbu Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Dandii	M	Madang Province	Passam Nat High	East Sepik Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Dibatizh	M	WNBP	Hoskins Sec	WNBP	Individual	Father working
Diinan	F	New Ireland	Namatanai Sec	New Ireland Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Junior Undaztood	F	Simbu	Yawe Moses Sec	Simbu Province	Group	Father working
Jux	M	North Solomon	Hutjena Secondary	North Solomon Prov	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Kenjl	M	Madang Province	Malala Secondary	Madang Province	Individual	Father died
Koiidi	F	Central	Sogeri Nat High	Central Province	Individual	Father Church Pastor
Konge	M	Morobe	Bumayong Sec	Morobe Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Logens	F	East Sepik	Mercy Secondary	East Sepik Province	Group	Both parents working
Mian	F	Manus/New Ireland	Popondetta Sec	Oro Province	Group	Mum died father retired
Sato	F	Western Province	Awaba Secondary	Western Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers
Sonja	F	East Sepik	Malala Secondary	Madang Province	Group	Father working
Tasingwa	M	Morobe	Grace Memorial	Morobe Province	Individual	Both subsistence farmers

			Sec				
Tigsmarhn	M	ENBP	Kerevat Nat High	ENB Province	Group	Mum died father s/farmer	
Tilec	M	Madang/Simbu	Bugandi Secondary	Morobe Province	Group & Individual	Both subsistence farmers	
Woriwo	M	East Sepik	Brandi Secondary	East Sepik Province	Group	Both subsistence farmers	
Zyle	F	Milne Bay	Cameron Secondary	Milne Bay Province	Group	Both parents working	