

THE YOUNG GENERATION AND THEIR STRUGGLE FOR A PLACE IN SOCIETY

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Introduction

The young generation in Malaysia is said to act in opposition to dominant societal beliefs, attitudes and practices. This is seen as a form of resistance (Ministry of Youth and Sport: 1995:3-13). The lives and interests of young people, including their friendships and relationships have been shown to develop as a part of complex social changes and not necessarily associated with any conscious desire to oppose dominant values in society (New Straits Times: 5/3/1997, p. 6; New Straits Times : 7/3/1997:6; New Straits Times: 27/2/1997:8).

Young people seek solutions to problems that concern them in their immediate world. Their access to knowledge, power and their opportunity to develop life skills will influence how they perceive themselves, their world and its problems, and the solutions that are available to them. As a person's knowledge about their options for self-development expands, their perceptions of the world will also differ. These lead to questions like "Do young people who are socially and economically disadvantaged see possibilities for themselves in the world? What will help young people solve their problems in productive and socially useful ways?"

The areas of concern identified by *Rakan Muda* deal with young people and their potential involvement in crime. I have therefore focused on how *Rakan Muda* functions as a crime prevention mechanism. This paper is based on the experiences and opinions of 30 young people who were interviewed in Sarawak.

They gave their views on possible solutions to social problems associated with them, on issues of empowerment and on the capacity and creativity of individuals to exercise power over their own lives.

The interviews were semi-structured and participants were encouraged to set their own agenda for discussion. All respondents talked spontaneously about the issues of youth crime and *Rakan Muda*. The small sample size meant that these stories cannot be relied upon to provide firm conclusions or recommendations regarding problems of young people in Malaysia generally. Since almost all participants (26 out of 30) were members of *Rakan Muda*, their opinions are a good source of feedback on whether this programme really helps them in dealing with their everyday lives.

It is hoped that their stories will be of particular value to those working in the welfare field, both in direct services and policy-making. In this paper, I am looking at the role of the *Rakan Muda* programme as a general crime prevention mechanism rather than looking at specific sub-group activities.

***Rakan Muda* : State Control Over Powerless Youth**

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