

INQUIRY INTO YOUTH VIOLENCE AND CRIME WITHIN AFRICAN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

Final Report - April 2023



THE WORKING GROUP



Mr Denis Yengi FCPA
Chair



Ms Jane Nyaketcho
*Manager Operations, African
Communities Council of
South Australia*



Dr Yilma Woldgabreal
Psychologist



Mr Siegfried Mends
Legal Advisor



Mr Steve Millstead
*QC District Court Judge
(Ret) and now Barrister*



Ms Mary Ajang
*South Sudanese Women
Representative*



Mr Mba Idikauduma
Community Leader



Mr Jur Deng
*South Sudanese
Representative*



Mr Elias Kabura
Community Leader



Ms Amiok Wol
Youth Representative

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to Acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands throughout South Australia and pay respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present, and emerging. We acknowledge that the lands on which we all reside were places of age-old ceremonies, of celebration, initiation, and renewal, and that the local Aboriginal peoples have had and continue to have unique roles in the life of these lands.

Our inquiry would not have been possible without the help, support, and willingness of the African South Australian communities. We would like to thank the elders, community leaders, young people, families, and individuals who generously gave their time to participate in the focus group discussions and completion of the survey.

The following government and non-government organisations participated in our focus group discussions and shared their experiences of working with justice involved African South Australians and their families. We are greatly indebted to their contributions.

- ◆ South Australian Council of Social Service
- ◆ Australian Migrant Resources Centre (Adelaide)
- ◆ Northern Area Community & Youth Services
- ◆ Headspace
- ◆ Legal Service Commission
- ◆ Anglicare SA
- ◆ Multicultural Communities Council of SA
- ◆ Sonder Mental Health
- ◆ Department for Correctional Services
- ◆ South Australian Police
- ◆ Department of Human Services
- ◆ Multicultural Affairs SA
- ◆ Child Protection
- ◆ Youth Justice
- ◆ Courts Administration.

We would like to acknowledge and extend our special thank you to the Honourable Zoe Bettison MP and Minister responsible for the Multicultural Affairs portfolio for her continued encouragement and support throughout the inquiry process. We also acknowledge individuals who supported us during the inquiry process and express our appreciation to Ruth Ambler (Executive Director, Department of Human Services), Mr John De Candia APM (Service Coordinator, Security and Emergency Management Service, South Australian Police), and C/ Supt Graham Goodwin (Coordinator, Metropolitan Operations Service, South Australian Police).

We would also like to express our deepest appreciation to the Department for Correctional Services, for granting parttime paid leave to Dr Yilma Woldgabreal who led the facilitation of the focus group discussions, designed survey questions, analysed the data, and wrote this report. We are also very much appreciative of the \$7,628 grant from the Department of Human Services and \$98,920 from Multicultural Affairs, Department of Premier and Cabinet which covered our miscellaneous and Coordinator's salaries expenses respectively.

Finally, we would like to extend our sincere thanks to Professor Stephane Shepherd (Forensic Psychology and Criminology at Deakin University) for reading the final draft of the report and providing feedback.



CHAIR'S FORWARD

"It takes a village to raise a child" is a proverb that embodies the spirit of African cultures, which refers to responsibilities of the entire communities to provide for and interact positively with children and young people, and help them grow in a safe and healthy environment. I continue to carry this core belief despite being raised, educated and acculturated here in South Australia. This proverb always reminds me of my communal values, to look beyond my own immediate kinship circles, and to pay particular attention to the welfare and wellbeing of my African South Australian communities. Indeed, as the Chair of the African Communities Council of South Australia, my current responsibility is even greater.

In recent years, I have been lucky enough to be part of many celebratory occasions, stories of resilience, and tremendous achievements across our diverse communities. I have also been involved in dealing with many socio-cultural challenges facing our communities. However, none of the challenges were more alarming than the incident that occurred on the 25th of April 2022, where the 25-year-old Ngor Bol of South Sudanese origin was stabbed to death on a street in metropolitan Adelaide. The alleged perpetrators were also a group of young men of South Sudanese background. This shocking news reverberated throughout our communities, who were mourning the loss of one of their own and at the same time upset by the heinous crime committed by their own youth. In addition to this double tragedy, our communities had to contend with the aftermath of the crime and racialised reporting of the incident, leading to negative stereotypes and perceptions of exaggerated criminality within our communities. This was a pivotal moment for me personally and leaders of the various African South Australian communities. Determined more than ever, we decided to embark upon an inquiry to understand the causes, challenges, and potential solutions to the emerging youth violence and antisocial behaviours in our communities. I am now very pleased that this inquiry has concluded.

As I write this forward message, I am also reminded of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/237. In December 2013, the UN proclaimed 2015 to 2024 to be the International Decade for People of African Descent, with the theme "People of African descent: recognition, justice and development". The resolution established the following specific objectives for the International Decade:

- ◆ To strengthen national, regional, and international action and cooperation in relation to the full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural, civil, and political rights by people of African descent and their full and equal participation in all aspects of society;
- ◆ To promote a greater knowledge of and respect for the diverse heritage, culture, and contribution of people of African descent to the development of societies;
- ◆ To adopt and strengthen national, regional, and international legal frameworks in accordance with the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, and to ensure their full and effective implementation.

Despite the focus of this inquiry being on violence and antisocial behaviours of young people in our communities, our findings highlight considerable challenges that require strategic approaches consistent with the UN resolution noted above. We have been able to identify individual, familial, community, institutional, and macro-level social, economic, and political disadvantages that continues to contribute to the onset and development of challenging or problematic behaviours among a section of our young people. These challenges can only be addressed effectively within the spirit of ending disadvantages and paving the way for the broader African South Australian communities to participate in all spheres of life and helping them to reach their full potential. This is also in line with the South Australian Government's current strategic direction to place cultural diversity at the heart of decision making. I, therefore, urge the South Australian Government, relevant departments, and other stakeholders to carefully and seriously consider each of the recommendation that we made in this report. I am confident that what we have proposed can contribute to policy directions and development of effective prevention and intervention strategies to tackle youth violence and antisocial behaviours in our communities.

I would like to say thank you to all of those who had either directly or indirectly contributed to this inquiry. Finally, it gives me immense pleasure to launch this report on behalf of the Working Group, the African Communities Council of South Australia, and the African South Australian communities.



Mr Denis Yengi FCPA

CHAIR, INQUIRY INTO YOUTH VIOLENCE AND CRIME WITHIN AFRICAN SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE WORKING GROUP	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
CHAIR'S FORWARD	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	8
INTRODUCTION	19
Background to the inquiry	20
Defining Youth	22
Criminal Justice Prevalence	22
OUR APPROACH	23
Focus groups	24
The survey	25
Data analysis	25
FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS	26
What young people told us	27
Broken families	28
Low parental involvement	29
Intergenerational conflict	30
Negative peer influence	31
Challenging classroom environment	31
Criminal justice issues	32
<i>Relationship with police</i>	32
<i>Experiences of court and legal services</i>	33
<i>Juvenile Justice</i>	35
<i>Corrections</i>	36
What we heard from families	36
Change in gender role	37
Change in family power dynamics	37
Loss of parental confidence	38
Mental health problems	38
School related challenges	39
What we heard from community leaders and members	40
Family violence	40
Legal literacy	41
Lack of trust and help-seeking behaviour	42

Discrimination and racism	43
Views of non-government service providers	45
Disengagement from school and unemployment	46
Gaps in diversionary practices	47
Punitive responses	47
Gaps in social services	48
Views of government service providers	49
Connection with communities	50
Co-designing services and programs	51
Youth Justice-Corrections interface	52
Cultural competence	52
SURVEY RESULTS	54
Causes of youth violence and antisocial behaviours	55
Individual risk factors Broken families	55
Family-based risk factors	56
Peer-related risk factors	56
School-related risk factors	57
Community/institutional risk factors	57
Challenges and barriers	58
Discrimination and racism	58
Legal and information literacy	59
Services, programs, and interventions	59
Individual level approaches	59
Family level interventions	60
Peer level interventions	60
School/community level interventions	61
Institutional level interventions	62
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	63
Preventive Actions and Key Recommendations	64
Individual-level risk factors and intervention approaches	68
Familial/relational risk factors and intervention approaches	70
Community/Organisational level risk factors and intervention approaches	71
Societal/structural risk factors and intervention approaches	76
CONCLUSION	79
REFERENCES LIST	81

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Background to the inquiry

In the early hours of Monday, 25 April 2022, a young man was stabbed to death on a street in Adelaide, South Australia. The victim of the stabbing, 25-year-old Ngor Bol, was of South Sudanese origin from Melbourne in the State of Victoria. The South Australian Police (SAPOL) identified a group of young men of South Sudanese background as the suspects in the murder of Mr Bol. It was further alleged that the offenders of the violent crime were members of rival peer affiliated groups of young men between the ages of 16 and 25 from the South Sudanese Community in Adelaide's Northern suburbs who had been under police surveillance over the last three years.

The murder of Mr Bol, however, was not an isolated incident allegedly perpetrated by young men of South Sudanese origins. On 13 March 2022, it was widely reported that groups of young men had engaged in a mass brawl involving the use of knives and machetes outside the Nairobi Affair Lounge on Adelaide's Grenfell Street. Six people were reported to have sustained injuries from knife and machete attacks during this incident. In February 2022, it was reported that SAPOL had laid over 120 charges against several people of South Sudanese background for engaging in crimes including knife fights, fraud, and robberies.

African South Australian communities were shocked by these heinous crimes committed by some of their young people and have since called for law enforcement bodies to hold perpetrators to account. Meanwhile, the African South Australian communities remain concerned about the far-reaching consequences of crimes committed by a small number of young people on the vast majority who are law-abiding and not involved in violence or criminal behaviour. Public and media discourse commonly take on a racialised tone, as though crimes are solely committed by a particular racial group. This can perpetuate negative stereotypes and lead to perceptions of exaggerated criminality within the broader African South Australian communities. Indeed, this fear is not without foundation. Evidence from the 2015-2016 Challenging Racism Project¹ demonstrated that sentiments toward African Australians were hardly welcoming because of racialised reporting of crimes in parts of Australia, with survey respondents possessing negative sentiment toward African Australians. This type of public perception is important and cannot be underestimated. It can undermine the status and credibility of African Australian communities, it can limit their opportunities, and importantly, it can invoke indiscriminate law enforcement responses and further vilification to members of our communities.

To address these concerns and explore potential solutions to tackle crimes committed by young people of African origin, the African Communities Council of South Australia (ACCSA) established a Working Group on 14 June 2022. The Working Group prepared a Terms of Reference, setting the parameters of the inquiry into the causes, challenges, and potential solutions to violence and antisocial behaviours of young people within the African South Australian communities.

1 Kathleen Blair et al. 2017. *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report*, Western Sydney University.



Our approach to the inquiry

We conducted a series of focus group sessions between the 6th of August 2022 and 22nd of November 2022 and engaged 119 participants during this period. Participants represented five different categories: (1) young people with criminal justice experience, (2) families of young people, primarily consisting of women and extended family members or relatives, (3) community level engagement consisting of both men and women, young people with no criminal justice involvement, and leaders of the various African South Australian communities, representing Burundi, Uganda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Liberia, Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ethiopia; (4) non-government agencies and private practitioners who have provided services to members of the African South Australian communities (i.e., the Northern Area Community & Youth Services, Headspace, The Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Sonder, South Australian Council of Social Service, Anglicare, Legal Aid, and Multicultural Communities Council of SA); and (5) government stakeholders representing the Department for Correctional Services, South Australian Police, Department of Human Services, Multicultural Affairs SA, Child Protection, Youth Justice, and Courts Administration. During the focus group discussions, we explored views and experiences of these participants extensively about causes, maintaining factors, challenges, and potential solutions to violence and antisocial behaviours of young people within the African South Australian communities.

In addition to focus group discussions, we designed a survey in line with the inquiry themes (e.g., causes and challenges, and potential solutions to young people's violent and antisocial behaviours). The objective of the survey was to obtain additional information and allow the involvement of other participants beyond the focus group settings. A total of 84 participants completed our survey, of which 78 were from African South Australian communities and six from various service providers.

Findings from the Focus Group consultations

What justice involved young people told us

Broken families: Most justice involved young people of African South Australians come from divorced or separated parents, and primarily resided with their mothers, or extended family members from an early age. They reported feeling stressed, anxious, growing up unhappy. Most spoke about their experiences of neglect and recalled being left home frequently with minimal supervision, no proper clothing, and poor hygiene. Even those who had lived with both parents reported poverty, emotionally absent fathers, domestic violence exacerbated by alcohol abuse, and poor family relationships.

Low level parental involvement: There was a consensus among justice involved young people that low level of parental involvement during their developmental years and limited parental ability to monitor their surroundings contributed to their eventual school dropout, association with negative peers, substance abuse, and the onset and development of their antisocial behaviours.

Intergenerational conflict: Another common theme from our discussion with justice involved young people was their experience of conflict with parents, leading to weakened family bonding or attachment, premature departure from family home, school dropout, and exposure to problematic behaviours such substance abuse. We heard that as young people retained fewer values from their native cultures, and more from the mainstream cultures, their parents became increasingly worried about their children losing their cultural heritage, which then gave rise to frequent disagreements at home “almost about everything” (e.g., choice of friends, clothing, and even food).

Negative peer influence: Most justice involved young people linked their offending to their environment and the influence of peer groups, which was an ongoing challenge and cause of stress for them. They spoke how easy it was to get caught up in behaviours that they would never have considered by themselves. Due to their young age, they were not always equipped with experience and skills to resist negative peer pressures.

Challenging classroom environment: We heard from justice involved young people that they wanted to learn and to succeed academically. Many wanted to complete tertiary studies and find employment in different professions. However, there was a common view expressed by these young people that schools generally lacked the cultural competence and flexibility to properly meet the needs of African South Australian students more broadly. They found the school curriculum very challenging because of their limited proficiency in English. They also reported experiencing bullying by peers and a lack of cultural sensitivity by teachers.

For these young people falling out of contact with the mainstream friends and school system meant gravitation toward negative or deviant peer groups.

We heard that even those young people who may not have been initially inclined toward antisocial behaviour ended up becoming delinquent, a trend seen in research about the “school-to-prison pipeline” phenomenon involving minority youth in parts of the world. This means school-based issues can clearly place some of the African South Australian youth on an accelerated path to juvenile justice contact, and ultimately adult criminal involvement.

Criminal justice issues

- ◆ **Police** - Almost all justice involved young people reported their experiences of over-policing and that they were treated differently based on their ethnicity. They gave examples of being regularly stopped and questioned by police in public, with police asking them to move on without any legitimate reason and racist comments being made to them by police officers. They spoke how police stop and search practices were stressful and embarrassing experiences, especially when conducted within the public gaze. Some young people described being pinned against walls by police whilst being searched.
- ◆ **Courts and legal services** - Whilst justice involved young people recognised their offending behaviour was not caused by court processes, they felt that the handling of their cases was unfair and made their circumstances worse by limited legal services. They found the court process confusing and unable to understand the legal language used during the proceedings. Moreover, they highlighted how lack of adequate legal service and cultural support made it difficult for them to go through the court process in the way envisioned by mainstream legal system.
- ◆ **Juvenile Justice** - Justice involved young people further described the mainstream Youth Justice programs as being conceptually inaccessible and difficult to follow, and often presented or facilitated by practitioners who did not understand their culture or background very well. As such, significant concerns were raised about the cross-cultural efficacy of programs and services in reducing their risk of recidivism.
- ◆ **Department for Correctional Services** - Most young people who entered the adult correctional system did not complete rehabilitation programs as the duration of their sentences were too short; however, they were engaged in literacy and numeracy courses. A few reported completing criminogenic programs designed to address violence, and substance abuse problems. Whilst motivated to participate in these programs, they spoke about their struggle to understand most of the concepts presented, which were primarily pitched to mainstream prisoners.

What we heard from families

Changes in gender role: Traditionally, African men represented their family within the public sphere and women dominated the private sphere with responsibility for running the home, caring for the children, the elderly, and others in need within the extended family network. However, migrating to Australia and being in a culture and society that is quite egalitarian has resulted in significant changes to roles and responsibilities for members of their families. For, some men unemployment resulted in feelings of reduced status, leading to their tendency to assume a passive role in the family or limited parenting role. We heard many times that women were responsible for taking the children to school and bringing them back, adding further strain within the family unit and paving the way for poor supervision and guidance of children and young people.

Change in family power dynamic: We heard that many families experienced significant changes in responsibilities upon their settlement in Australia, partly because of the faster rate of acculturation and language acquisition of children and young people. The fact that children and young people had picked up English more quickly put parents with limited English language proficiency at a disadvantage. This situation gave children and young people responsibility and power within families, elevating their status to family spokespersons. Most families we spoke to saw this situation as a threat to their parental authority, leading to compromised parent-child relationships and subsequent intergenerational conflicts.

Loss of parental confidence: We heard the shift in power dynamics did not only make communications difficult between family members, but also damaged parental pride and confidence. Most families talked about loss of confidence in their parenting capacity, with some acknowledging that their frustration was reflected in greater marital conflicts. We heard that mothers and fathers blamed each other for financial stress, social isolation, or loss of control over their children.

Mental health problems: We heard from families the extent to which both pre-migration and post-migration challenges played important roles in shaping family relationships. Common pre-migration experiences reported by families included gender-based violence, separation from family members (leaving family members behind in Africa), and not knowing or receiving information about them. With respect to post-migration experiences, many families reported isolation, poverty, conflict in values, and language barriers that impacted their parenting styles and attitudes. Most families explained how the cumulative effects of pre-migration and post-migration experiences exposed them and their children to chronic trauma manifested in the form of emotional unavailability, poor parent-child relationship, emotional dysregulation, and a host of other mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and distress.

School related challenges: Most families we spoke to felt that their children's schooling was against their cultural childrearing practices and the ability to transmit important values to their children. However, they recognised the need to negotiate and work with value differences; nonetheless, they reported lacking skills in these areas and a strong sense of disconnectedness between themselves and the other parents and teachers, and talked about feeling of isolation from the school environment.

What we heard from community leaders and members

Family violence: Leaders and members of the African South Australians expressed deep concerns at the level of domestic violence with some sections of their communities. They noted that most justice involved young people commonly come from families affected by domestic violence. Victims were identified mostly as women and children, with men being perpetrators.

Legal literacy: Focus group participants reported low levels of legal literacy and representation within the African South Australian communities. This lack of knowledge meant that some African South Australians can quickly find themselves involved in a legal issue, especially around childrearing practices. There was also a widespread concern that lack of understanding of the criminal justice system has left many justice involved young people and their families in a very vulnerable position. It was particularly noted that many justice involved young people have continued to appear before courts unrepresented and lacked insight into the importance of representation in court.

Lack of trust and help seeking behaviour: Deep concerns were expressed about justice involved young people and their families having been isolated from the broader African South Australian and mainstream communities. Information literacy ("not knowing what is out there for them") and lack of trust in service providers were noted as critical issues. It was also highlighted that current services are rather rigid and tailored to provide siloed responses.

Discrimination and racism: We heard from leaders and members of the African South Australian communities about discrimination and racism. They felt that youth violence issues were taken out of context by media narratives. Whilst recognising that violent crimes reported in the media were shocking and should be reported on and become the subject of commentary, they expressed concerns about the context in which these crimes had been reported. They felt

that the media portrayed African South Australian youth and their communities as “problem groups”, shifting the blame to communities, and thereby contributing to young people’s increased contact with the criminal justice system and subjecting other law-abiding members to scrutiny and surveillance.

What we heard from non-government service providers

Disengagement from school and unemployment: Providers of non-government services identified justice involved young people’s disengagement from school and unemployment as leading causes of their offending behaviour. They noted that most young people of African backgrounds who accessed their services were “typically school dropouts,” had “no vocational skills,” and presented with poor employment prospects.

Gaps in diversionary practices: non-government service providers regarded diversionary practices (e.g., police cautioning options and referral to mental health services or substance abuse treatment) as some of the effective strategies in tackling young people’s reoffending behaviour. However, they raised concerns that justice involved African South Australian youth were less likely to be dealt with diversionary measures, and that police were likely to refuse bail and process these young people through the formal court process even for a relatively minor offence.

Punitive responses: non-government service providers expressed concerns about the punitiveness of youth justice practices or marginal deterrence strategies on young people’s offending behaviour. They pointed out that policies and practices have moved away from the care and control approaches of delivering youth justice to reliance on surveillance or compliance-based case management approaches, which led to increase in the arrest rates by police and non-compliance actions by Youth Justice.

Gaps in social services: concerns around gaps in social services were recurring themes throughout our inquiry. Non-government service providers identified several post-migration stressors, linking these to risks of young people’s involvement with the criminal justice system. Shortage of affordable housing and lack of counselling for pre- and post-migration trauma were some of the problems noted.

What we heard from government service providers

Like all the other focus group participants, government services providers highlighted the role of individual, familial, community, and institutional level factors in young people’s offending and anti-social behaviour. They also recognised that many of the issues facing justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families related to issues associated with acculturation challenges such as experiences of marginalisation, mental health, substance abuse, and poverty.

Survey Results

Survey results were consistent with the focus group findings, highlighted the link between violence and antisocial behaviours committed by African South Australian youth and a range of individual risk factors such as substance abuse, poor cognitive development, emotional regulation problems, early experience neglect, abuse. Survey respondents indicated the role of family-related risk factors, peer pressure, school-related factors, community/institutional risk factors in young people’s offending behaviours.

In terms of intervention, survey respondents identified a range individual level interventions (e.g., sports, social skills, promotion of positive self-concept and attitudes);

family level interventions (e.g., adequate parental supervision, stability of a family unit);
peer level interventions (e.g., engaging in healthy and safe activities with peers);
school/community level interventions (e.g., culturally inclusive schools, schools that involve families, communities and promote healthy activities);
and institutional and structural level interventions (e.g., policies/procedures that promote cultural competence, building partnership with young people, families, and communities).

Discussion and Recommendations

As highlighted above, themes from the focus group discussions and survey results revealed several causes and challenges to violence and antisocial behaviours committed by African South Australian youth. Our findings also indicated important intervention and prevention implications at the individual, familial/relational, community/organisational, and structural or societal levels. The following are recommendations from our inquiry.

Recommendations for key priority preventive actions

Recommendation 1: We call upon the South Australian Government to empower the African Communities Council of South (ACCSA) with adequate funding and resources. As a peak body, ACCSA continues to advocate and play crucial advocacy and advisory role for all matters involving the African South Australian communities. This work is primarily undertaken on voluntary capacities by both members and non-members of the African South Australian communities. Funding ACCSA appropriately and adequately enables the development and implementation of culturally responsive government policies and intervention programs.

Recommendation 2: We call upon the South Australian Government support the development of an African Communities Action Plan like that developed in Victoria to address structural disadvantages and enable their participation in the social, economic, and cultural spheres and reach their full potential.

Recommendation 3: Invest in community centres starting in the north of Adelaide based on an Africa Village model. Such initiatives are currently showing promising results in Queensland. Young people and community members can go to these centres to access information and services which address their needs, including counselling, cultural activities, referral service, life skills, mentoring, and recreational activities.

Recommendation 4: Re-allocate resources from the current silos-based allocation of funds across government and non-government agencies to an integrated and more accessible model of service delivery for justice involved African South Australians, their families, and other at-risk members of the communities. These groups have very low help-seeking behaviour and most are disadvantaged within their communities and have been excluded from many opportunities that others access relatively easily. They cannot competently and confidently navigate services in similar ways to other migrants, and consequently, they have become the least serviced and connected groups across both government and non-government agencies.

Recommendation 5: In line with Recommendation 3 and within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, fund the development and implementation of education programs for justice involved young people, families, and other at-risk members of the communities to improve their information literacy and help-seeking behaviour.

Recommendation 6: Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop culturally sensitive and responsive interventions that enhance family relationships, connectedness, and wellbeing.

Recommendation 7: Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop a positive parenting skills and support system for fathers.

Recommendation 8: Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop culturally sensitive and accessible alcohol abuse and mental health services for at risk African South Australian youth, families, other members of the communities.

Recommendation 9: Fund and invest in the development of culturally responsive domestic violence intervention program within the African South Australian communities.

Recommendation 10: Fund and invest in a family safety framework, like MAPS (Multi Agency Protection Service), to protect vulnerable families from domestic violence and youth violence in the home. We heard that young people's violence at home is a serious problem within some families, it remains unaddressed and under-resourced, especially in comparison to young people's violence in the public sphere and street-based violence. We heard that these young people experience high levels of comorbid mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, anger issues, and trauma. We further heard that under-reporting is common as a result of a lack of community acknowledgement and understanding, parental guilt, denial, self-blame, stigma, shame, and not wanting their children to be subjected to a criminal response.

Recommendation 11: Whilst most of justice involved African South Australian youth are male, we heard from families that young girls have increasingly engaged in suicidal and self-harming behaviours further increasing the strain on at-risk groups within the communities. Fund a research project to explore and understand these issues in depth, with the aim to develop and implement appropriate prevention and intervention programs.

Recommendation 12: We call upon the South Australian Government to seek and promote bipartisan commitment to implement well-coordinated, long-term, and properly-resourced anti-discrimination policies that ensures the full participation of African South Australians across both public and private spheres.

Recommendation 13: We call upon the Australian Government to establish independent body to pursue complaints from members of the African South Australian communities about perceived and actual experiences injustices due to their interactions with the criminal justice system and other institutions.

Recommendation 14: We call upon the South Australian Government to implement initiatives that improve attitudes and perceptions that are hard-to-legislate-against discrimination (e.g., tackling racialised reporting of crime that perpetuates stereotypes).

Individual-level intervention approaches

Recommendation 15: Develop trauma-informed interventions tailored to the unique challenges and experiences of justice involved African South Australians.

Recommendation 16: Develop a suite of evidence-based interventions that aim to help the emotional, cognitive, and behavioural development of young people based on their positive attributes rather than focusing on the negative attributes; or identifying what they excel at or something that they like to do, and using these to develop their reintegration plan and goals.



Familial/relational intervention approaches

Recommendation 17: Appropriately consult with justice involved African South Australian youth, families and relevant community leaders in the design and development of intervention programs to stimulate change in their attitudes and behaviour.

Recommendation 18: Justice involved African South Australian youth represent a hard-to-reach population group. Therefore, both government and non-government service providers should invest in programs that promote trust, positive relationships, and connections.

Community/Organisational level intervention approaches

Recommendation 19: Develop justice reinvestment strategies to tackle the causes of crime and address entrenched disadvantages.

Recommendation 20: Invest in African South Australian children's early years to prevent harm and reduce the probability of later offending.

Recommendation 21: Invest in helping justice involved young people of African backgrounds to stay engaged or re-engage in education and training.

Recommendation 22: Invest in programs that improve interaction between the police and African South Australian youth, especially those from South Sudanese backgrounds.

Recommendation 23: Police undertake compulsory professional development training about cultural sensitivity and norms of African South Australian communities to improve their cultural competency and duties without bias.

Recommendation 24: Ensure police practice guidelines require minimal use of discretionary stops and searches, strongly promote police cautioning, bail agreements, early intervention, and referrals for less serious or first time African South Australian young offenders.

Recommendation 25: Police should involve families, community leaders, and other relevant agencies in addressing problem behaviours and in identifying and preventing crime.

Recommendation 26: Courts implement culturally responsive restorative justice approaches to reduce reoffending and enhance community safety.

Recommendation 27: Courts should develop a diversionary scheme for African-South Australian youth, ensuring meaningful involvement of families and representatives of relevant communities.

Recommendation 28: Fund and establish a legal service specific to support at risk African South Australian youth, families, and other vulnerable members of the communities.

Recommendation 29: Provide intensive wrap-around Youth Justice supervision programs that offer an array of services tailored to the specific needs of justice involved African South Australian young people.

Recommendation 30: Provide adequate post-supervision and post-release support.

Recommendation 31: Ensure that justice involved young people, parents, families, and communities have meaningful partnership and participation in the development and implementation of Youth Justice rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Recommendation 32: Ensure adequate transitional planning and continuity of intervention work when justice involved African South Australian young people are transferred to adult correctional systems.

Societal/structural level intervention approaches

Recommendation 33: Ensure legal and citizenship rights (e.g., eliminate discretionary or arbitrary treatment of African South Australian youth by police).

Recommendation 34: Reduce poverty by increasing participation of at-risk youth, families, and community members in the labour market.

Recommendation 35: Improve information literacy to ensure access to key areas of services, especially in education, housing, health, and welfare sectors.

Recommendation 36: The South Australian Government work with relevant departments to ensure measurable and accountable cross-cultural competence.

Recommendation 37: The South Australian Government to promote and invest in schemes that encourage opportunities for African South Australians within the business communities.

Recommendation 38: The South Australian Government invest in research to develop, pilot, and evaluate a whole-of-government early prevention programs that address the underlying drivers of violence and antisocial behaviours by African South Australian youth.

Recommendation 39: The South Australian Government work with relevant departments and agencies to ensure that recommendations made throughout this report are genuinely considered and actioned.



INTRODUCTION



The number of African migrants living in Australia has increased significantly in the last three decades. According to the 2021 Australian Census, over 400,000 people identified Africa as their ancestral origin (Australian Bureau of Statistics; ABS, 2022)¹. This represents 1.6% of the Australian population, and 5.1% of Australia's overseas-born population. The majority (62.4%) had arrived on refugee and humanitarian visas, with 19.1% arriving on student visas and 9.2% as skilled migrants. In South Australia, African migrants are a small, diverse, and relatively recent population. There are approximately 35,420 African-South Australians, of which 24% are White South Africans and the remainder from Sub-Saharan and North Africa regions. Whilst the breakdown of specific ancestral origins is difficult to ascertain from the ABS data, the majority were born in South Sudan, Congo, Kenya, Ethiopia, Sierra Leone, Nigeria, Eritrea, Liberia, Somalia, Ghana, and Burundi.

Most African Australians have settled well and shown tremendous resilience and survival strategies in the face of considerable acculturation challenges, and actively contribute to the multicultural and diverse fabric of Australian society. Recent research on the resettlement adjustment of African migrants in Australia indicated that 34% identified as bicultural or integrated, 20% as traditional, 22% as assimilated, and 24% experiencing considerable acculturation challenges². These statistics highlight that most African migrants (including those in South Australia) fare reasonably well, however, about a quarter have continued to experience ongoing acculturation problems. This has particularly been the case within the South Sudanese community, though it is important to acknowledge that other African Australian communities also share similar acculturation challenges, but to a lesser degree.

Background to the inquiry

In the early hours of Monday, 25 April 2022, a young man was stabbed to death on a street in Adelaide, South Australia. The victim of the stabbing, 25-year-old Ngor Bol, was of South Sudanese origin from Melbourne in the State of Victoria. The South Australian Police (SAPOL) identified a group of young men of South Sudanese background as the suspects in the murder of Mr Bol. It was further alleged that the offenders of the violent crime were members of rival peer affiliated groups of young men between the ages of 16 and 25 from the South Sudanese Community in Adelaide's Northern suburbs who had been under police surveillance over the last three years.

The murder of Mr Bol, however, was not an isolated incident allegedly perpetrated by young men of South Sudanese origins. On 13 March 2022, it was widely reported that groups of young men had engaged in a mass brawl involving the use of knives and machetes outside the Nairobi Affair Lounge on Adelaide's Grenfell Street. Six people were reported to have sustained injuries from knife and machete attacks during this incident. In February 2022, it was reported that SAPOL had laid over 120 charges against several people of South Sudanese background for engaging in crimes including knife fights, fraud, and robberies.

African South Australian communities are concerned with serious offending committed by some of their young people and have since called for law enforcement bodies to hold perpetrators to account. Meanwhile, our communities are concerned about the far-reaching consequences of crimes committed by a small number of young people on the vast majority who are law-abiding and not involved in violence or criminal behaviour. Moreover, Public and media discourse

1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census Data

2 Andre M. N. Renzaho, et al, 2022. *The Influence Region of Origin, Area of Residence Prior to Migration, Religion, and Perceived Discrimination on Acculturation Strategies Among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Australia*, *Journal of International Migration and Integration*, 23, 141–160.

commonly take on a racialised tone, as though crimes are solely committed by a particular racial group. This can perpetuate negative stereotypes and lead to perceptions of exaggerated criminality within the African South Australian communities. Indeed, this fear is not without foundation. Evidence from the 2015-2016 Challenging Racism Project³ demonstrated that sentiments toward African Australians were hardly welcoming because of racialised reporting of crimes in parts of Australia, with survey respondents possessing negative sentiment toward African Australians. This type of public perception is important and cannot be underestimated. It can undermine the status and credibility of African Australian communities, it can limit their opportunities, and importantly, it can invoke indiscriminate law enforcement responses and further vilification to members of our communities.

To address these concerns and explore potential solutions to address crimes committed by young people of African origin, the African Communities Council of South Australia (ACCSA) established a Working Group on 14 June 2022. The Working Group (referred to as “We” hereafter) prepared a Terms of Reference, setting the parameters of the inquiry into the violence and antisocial behaviours of young people within the African South Australian communities. Key objectives in the Terms of Reference were to:

- ◆ consult with key stakeholders, including government and non-government agencies, leaders of relevant African South Australian communities, young people involved in the criminal justice system, families, and individuals particularly from the South Sudanese Community to obtain information as to their knowledge, attitudes and opinions regarding the violence and crimes allegedly committed by young men from their communities.
- ◆ identify prevalent challenges within the African South Australian communities that lead to criminal activity.
- ◆ create a forum for open and frank discussion of matters of relevance, and interest to young African South Australians and communities.
- ◆ identify culturally appropriate intervention strategies that can be developed to engage and enable young African South Australians to participate positively in the society.
- ◆ prepare a report for ACCSA on the consultation process, findings, and recommended solutions.

3 Kathleen Blair et al. 2017. *Challenging Racism Project 2015-16 National Survey Report*, Western Sydney University.

Defining Youth

Youth is defined by various age criteria in different contexts. Government and non-government service providers commonly define young people as those aged between 12-24 years⁴. In academic studies, statistics and international standards, the age group referred to young people is often 15-25 years, although in certain contexts this can include those between 25–30 years of age⁵. Our inquiry focused on young people whose age ranged between 15 and 25 years.

Criminal Justice Prevalence

We were unable to access de-identified data from the South Australian Police, which limited our ability to ascertain the rate of African South Australians proceeded against by police over the past few years. However, the proportion of young people of African backgrounds entering the South Australia Youth Justice has risen from 1.9% during the 2019-2020 period to 4.5% during the 2021-2022 period⁶. Data from the Department for Correctional Services (DCS) indicated that African South Australians represented 1.8% of the adult prisoner population in 2022, with 89% under the age of 30 years⁷. Whilst trend data could not be ascertained from the official DCS records, 0.9% of those released from the adult prisons in 2017 were of African backgrounds compared to 1.4% in 2021, suggesting a rise in the number of African South Australians entering and leaving the adult prison system. We were unable to access specific Youth Justice data about age, gender, types of offences, length of convictions, and types of sanction (detention vs community-based), further limiting our ability to provide comparative information.



4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2021. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/children-youth/australias-youth/contents/introduction>

5 Lucas Walsh et al., 2021. *Australian Youth Barometer: Understanding Young People in Australia Today*, Monash University.

6 Youth Justice, South Australia. Deidentified archival data, 2023.

7 Department for Correctional Services, South Australia. Deidentified archival data, 2023.

OUR APPROACH



We held the inaugural Working Group meeting on 14 June 2022 at the South Australian Parliament House. The meeting began with a high level of enthusiasm, thoughtful engagement, and discussion of identified priority themes in the Terms of Reference. We also agreed to prepare a step-by-step project plan. A subsequent meeting was held on 28 June 2022 at the Salisbury Community Hub, a northern suburb of Adelaide in South Australia, where we discussed and approved a rigorous, practical, and feasible project plan with a mix of focus group discussions and survey methods.

Focus groups

We planned to conduct a series of focus group discussions between the 6th of August 2022 and 22nd of November 2022. We agreed to guide focus group discussions using the following broad questions:

- ◆ In your view or experience, what causes and maintains violence and antisocial behaviour among the African South Australian youth?
- ◆ What challenges do you think are there for these young people to successfully rehabilitate and cease offending behaviour?
- ◆ What do you think are some of the potential solutions and preventive strategies?

Using these open-ended questions, we let the conversations flow to topics that focus group participants felt were most important, whilst still ensuring that the focal questions were adequately covered during each focus group discussion.

We held focus groups sessions on the following dates and times:

Table 1. Focus Group Sessions Schedule

FOCUS GROUP SESSION	SESSION DATE AND TIME
Focus Group #1 – Community leaders and members	August 6, 2022; 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
Focus Group #2 – Youth	August 6, 2022; 2:15 pm – 5:30 pm
Focus Group #3 – Families	August 7, 2022; 10:00 am – 1:00 pm
Focus Group #4 – Youth	August 7, 2022; 2:00 pm – 5:30 pm
Focus Group #5 – Women Representatives	September 3, 2022; 9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Focus Group #6 – Community leaders and members	September 3, 2022; 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Focus Group #7 – Youth	September 4, 2022; 10:00 am – 2:00 pm
Focus Group #8 – Service providers	October 7, 2022; 9:30 am – 12:30 pm
Focus Group #9 – Service providers	October 7, 2022; 2:00 pm – 5:00 pm
Focus Group #10 – Government organisations	November 22, 2022; 10:00 am – 2:00 pm

It is important to note that most young people with a history of criminal justice experience were reluctant to participate in the formal focus group settings. As such, two members of the Working Group, who had prior working relationship with these young people, conducted informal sessions at their preferred locations (e.g., parks, football grounds, or other places where they were hanging out). Doing so ensured that they were comfortable with the process, open to speak honestly about their experiences, and importantly to have their voice and play active role in suggesting potential solutions.

The survey

We designed a survey in line with the inquiry themes (e.g., causes and challenges, and potential solutions to young people's violent and antisocial behaviours). The objective of the survey was to obtain additional information and allow participation beyond the focus group settings. The survey was distributed using a snowball recruitment technique by asking community members, leaders, and stakeholders to invite other participants they knew (e.g., families, friends, or colleagues) to participate. The snowball method was chosen because of the heterogeneity of the African South Australian communities and the importance of reaching out as diverse participants as possible. The survey was conducted using either an online or a paper-pencil format. Aims, confidentiality, voluntary nature of participation was clearly stated, and informed consent was sought.

Data analysis

We analysed notes and transcribed audio records from the focus group discussions thematically. We sensitised the coding process by the socio-ecological conceptual framework¹ to explore the data at the individual, family, community, and structural level perspectives. We then generated dominant themes about the causes of young people's violent and antisocial behaviours, challenges, and suggestions for potential solutions. Through continued discussions and reviews, we agreed on themes that were consistent with the socio-ecological conceptual framework. An initial draft was shared with members of the Working Group, who participated in the facilitation of focus group discussions, for verification and accuracy. The report was then further revised to ensure that findings reflected the diverse conversations that occurred during our inquiry.

We also analysed the survey data from those who were not part of the focus group discussions, but nonetheless were willing to put their views and perspectives forward by participating in the survey. This provided additional information and complemented findings from the focus group discussions. We reported results of the survey after presenting findings of the focus group discussions.

1 Urie Bronfenbrenner, 1989. *Ecological systems theory*.

FOCUS GROUPS FINDINGS



We engaged 119 participants during the focus groups consultation period. The number of participants per session ranging from 6 to 12, which enabled in-depth discussions. Descriptive statistics and breakdown of participants is presented in Figure 1. As can be seen, we engaged participants under five categories:

1. young people with criminal justice experience,
2. families of young people, primarily consisting of women and extended family members or relatives,
3. community level engagement consisting of both men and women, young people with no criminal justice involvement, and leaders of the various African South Australian communities, representing Uganda, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, Liberia, Congo, Ghana, Nigeria, and Ethiopia;
4. non-government agencies and private practitioners who have provided services to members of the African South Australian communities (i.e., the Northern Area Community & Youth Services, Headspace, The Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Sonder Mental Health, South Australian Council of Social Service, Anglicare SA, Legal Services Commission, and Multicultural Communities Council of SA); and
5. government stakeholders representing the Department for Correctional Services, South Australian Police, Department of Human Services, Multicultural Affairs SA, Child Protection, Youth Justice, and Courts Administration.

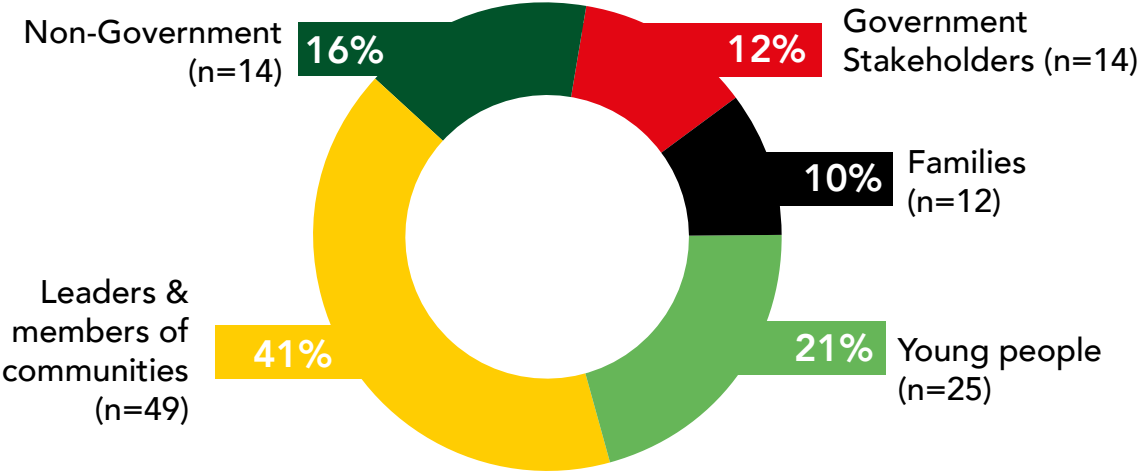


Figure 1. Focus group participants demographic information

What young people told us

Analysis of data from the focus group discussions involving young people with criminal justice experience produced several themes about the causes of their violence and antisocial behaviours, and challenges they have faced. The themes we identified were not mutually exclusive, however, relate to several factors at the individual, family and structural levels as depicted in Figure 2 below.

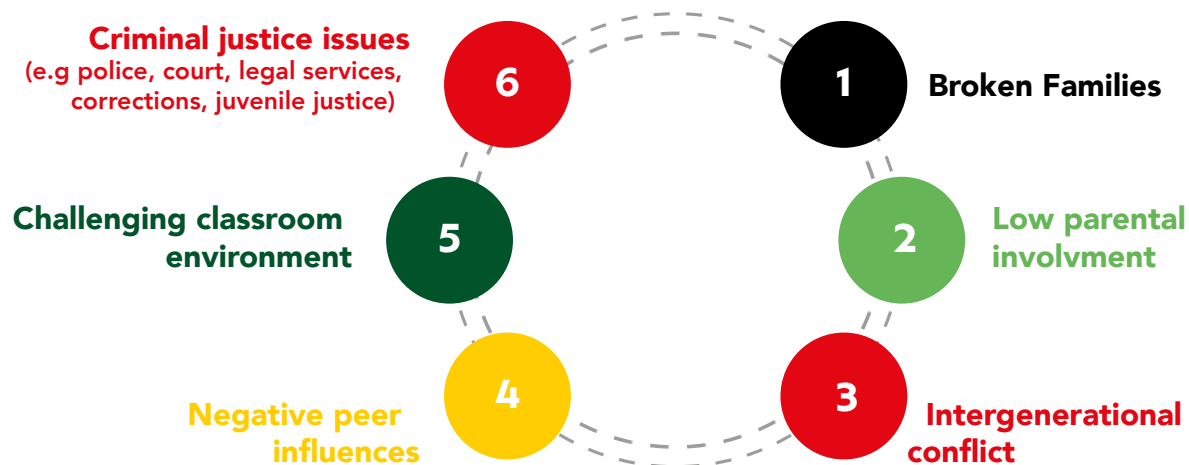


Figure 2. Themes from focus group discussions with young people of African backgrounds

Broken families

During the focus group discussions, we met with 25 justice involved young people of African origins. All had experience of repeated involvement with either the youth justice and/or adult criminal justice system. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years and there was only one female participant. The majority were from South Sudanese backgrounds. Seventy-six percent (n=19) come from divorced or separated parents, and primarily resided with their mothers, or extended family members from an early age. Most reported feeling stressed, anxious, growing up unhappy. They also spoke about their experiences of neglect and recalled being left home frequently with minimal supervision, no proper clothing, and poor hygiene. Even those who had lived with both parents reported poverty, absent fathers, domestic violence exacerbated by alcohol abuse, and poor family relationships.

Comments such as these were common themes among justice involved young people we met and highlighted how broken homes increased their risk of involvement in problem behaviours and marked the onset and development of antisocial or delinquent behaviours. Ideally, these young people should have had the chance to pursue socially desirable lives that are rich with opportunities to learn, work, connect with others and engage in the community. For this, the ways in which conflicts and disagreements are negotiated within families are important blueprints for dealing with issues in other contexts. Although it is not uncommon for families to have ups and downs during young people's developmental years, appropriate boundary setting can give clear guidelines as to what is acceptable and what is not. These young people would have also benefited from parental modelling that promoted positive relationships and effective communication and problem-solving skills to deal with environmental challenges. Unfortunately, their home environments were chaotic, or not conducive to help them learn new skills and flourish into early adulthood.

“ My father was stubborn, and he was always right. He didn't listen except yelling at all the family. Mom kicked him out in the end, but he kept turning up all the times to blame her for destroying his life. He didn't really care about us, but himself. (23-year-old male).

“ Well, I wouldn't really say my father existed. He was only interested in the people he was hanging out with for drinking. The only times I heard him talk was when he wanted to argue about money with my mother. He never worked but he wanted to control the money.
(19-year-old male)

“ My dad tried to work for a long time and to help the family, but he was unsuccessful and gave up on everything in the end. The drinking then got him wild. It was so scary to see my father lash out whenever he was drunk. I was so happy when he left my mom for another woman, but angry at him for doing that to her and abandoning the family. I also left home after my dad left. I guess things did not work out as I expected. I started to drink and wasted all my Centrelink money on alcohol and did some crime with my friends to support my habits. I wouldn't be here talking to you today if I had a strong and supportive family
(25-year-old male)

“ There was a lot of stuff going on at home. Family dynamic had gotten to a point where I just couldn't cope with it anymore. I moved to interstate to live with family members, but everything started to go downhill. (20-year-old male)

Low parental involvement

Most young people we spoke to told us that their parents had not attend parent-teacher meetings, had no contact with teachers, and that they did not receive support from their parents at home for their academic development. They attributed this to several reasons, including their parents' struggle to make ends meet and inability to take time away from work to come to their schools, while others mentioned their parents' English language barriers to make meaningful contribution to their schooling.

Some young people recalled being spoken to by teachers for being disruptive and failing to complete homework activities. They shared instances when they were asked to give notes to their parents; however, they did not deliver those notes or convey the messages, limiting the opportunity for parents to identify early school-based problems.

“ My mom couldn't understand anything. No point reading or giving my teacher's notes to her. It would've been very uncomfortable for her to come to meetings
(24-year-old male).

There was a consensus among young people that low level of parental involvement during their developmental years and limited parental ability to monitor their surroundings contributed to their eventual school dropout, association with negative peers, substance abuse, and the onset and development of their antisocial behaviours. Indeed, the link between young people's current antisocial behaviours and low parental involvement during young people's early developmental and school years is not a surprise. This is because that parental involvement in school has long been heralded as an important and positive influence on young people's early learning journey and socioemotional development. Research has demonstrated

that parental involvement is associated with academic success, and that school programs that promote and increase parental involvement have positive impacts on young people, families, and communities². This means that parent-school partnership is not only a critical aspect of young people's success later in life, but it also serves as a protective factor and helps to alleviate any behavioural issues at the earliest opportunities. Put simply, families and schools are the main actors in the construction of children's and young people's future.

Intergenerational conflict

Another common theme from our discussion with young people was their experience of conflict with parents, leading to weakened family bonding or attachment, premature departure from family home, school dropout, and exposure to problematic behaviours such as substance abuse. We heard that as young people retained fewer values from their native cultures, and more from the mainstream cultures, their parents became increasingly worried about their children losing their cultural heritage, which then gave rise to frequent disagreements at home "almost about everything" (e.g., choice of friends, clothing, and even food).

“*My parents wanted me to be like them, but I didn't know much about their culture. It was so boring and stressful, man! Why can't you be like your friends or be yourself.*
(15-year-old male).

A few of the young people went on to disclose that conflict with their parents led to a range of internalised problems (e.g., feelings of loneliness, rejection, depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem) and externalised problems (e.g., gravitation toward antisocial behaviours, aggression, and conduct disorders). These young people further felt rejected, unsupported, and trapped between their parents' cultural traditions and those of the broader community.

“*For them [parents] education is about becoming a doctor, an engineer, or a famous lawyer. I wanted to be a musician, but in their eyes, I was bad just because I did not show interest in who they want me to become. I tried to rap all the time because it was probably one of my dreams and still is, but I had no support and encouragement”
(23-year-old male).*

As noted earlier, most young people reported limited parental involvement in their education. However, a few shared their experiences of increased parental pressures to succeed in certain professional domains and felt that their parents' perspective on education was narrow and limiting. A comment such as this indicated not only parents' desires for their children to retain their cultural values, but also for them to excel in their studies. However, the stories of young people we spoke to highlighted how parental hopes can sometimes be at odds with that of the children. From the perspective of young people, these types of conflict can be addressed by creating supportive family and community environment that discourages coercion. The belief that cultural support during their developmental years is key for helping them navigate the environment and avoid confusion that arises from differing sets of values and expectations.

² Evan Ripley-McNeil & Kenneth M. Cramer, 2021. Does Level of Parental Involvement Predict Juvenile Delinquency? *Journal of Interpersonal Relations, Intergroup Relations and Identity*, 14, 128-140.

Negative peer influence

Most justice involved young people linked their offending to their environment and the influence of peer groups, which was an ongoing challenge and cause of stress for them. They spoke how easy it was to get caught up in behaviours that they would never have considered by themselves. Due to their young age, they were not always equipped with experience and skills to resist negative peer pressures.

“ One day I was walking down the street with my friend. Apparently, this guy was racial towards my friend or something. I never wanted to do it but my friend pushed me to do it. I just went with him and later got charged for an assault (17-year-old male).

We heard similar stories during the various focus group discussions, with most justice involved young people linking peer pressure to incidents of violent offending and other antisocial behaviours. The relationship between deviant peers and young people's offending behaviours is well established in research³. For some, it presents one of the strongest risk factors in predicting youth offending, which is primarily learned and reinforced through intimate personal groups and association with criminal patterns.

“ I didn't really like the taste of alcohol in the beginning. I kept on drinking to fit in. Now I feel I can't have fun without this thing. (23-year-old male)

Challenging classroom environment

Most justice involved young people told us that they wanted to learn and to succeed academically. Many wanted to complete tertiary studies and find employment in different professions. However, there was a common view expressed by these young people that schools generally lacked the cultural competence and flexibility to properly meet the needs of African South Australian students more broadly. They found the school curriculum very challenging because of their limited proficiency in English.

“ Most students in my class were the same age as me, but what everybody in the school didn't understand was that I was in a refugee camp for a few years, and I missed out on schooling for a few years. (25-year-old male)

For these young people the major issue of concern was the lack of appropriate support available to them at school, including a lack of people who could understand the background and culture of African South Australians. They sometimes felt blamed by teachers for acting out, creating tensions in the schoolyard, and that they were often accused of starting fights. Justice involved young people also reported that they did not feel accepted by their peers and struggled to feel as though they belonged:

Identity formation is a difficult process for any young person, but for young people with migrant and refugee backgrounds there are additional difficulties. They commonly juggle the expectations of family and community with those of the mainstream society, and the impact of racism on identity formation. Research shows that experiencing racism adversely affects self-esteem, self-confidence, sense of connection, belonging to the broader community, and all of which are critical for children and young people's identity development⁴.

3 James Bonta, Donald Arthur Andrews, 2016. *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*.

4 Priest et al., 2013. *A Systematic Review of Studies Examining the Relationship Between Reported Racism and*

“ I felt like an outsider, and this made me angry all the time. I often asked myself whether I ever belonged to these places
(25-year-old male).

Some justice involved young people told us that they felt anxious and self-conscious about participating in classroom discussions, leading to their eventual disengagement. They reported experiencing bullying by peers and a lack of cultural sensitivity by teachers. For these young people falling out of contact with the mainstream friends and school system meant gravitation toward negative or deviant peer groups. We heard that even those young people who may not have been initially inclined toward antisocial behaviour ended up becoming delinquent, a trend seen in research about the “school-to-prison pipeline” phenomenon involving minority youth in parts of the world. This means school-based issues can clearly place some of the African-South Australian youth on an accelerated path to juvenile justice contact, and ultimately adult criminal involvement.

Overall, justice involved young people linked their offending behaviour to the intersection of multiple experiences of marginalisation. They spoke at great length about their disadvantaged position because of their race/ethnicity or refugee background. They reported experiencing racism, discrimination on their day-to-day life at school, and an overall complex presenting needs, which raised questions and concerns about the support they received, their journey into the justice system and their level of unmet needs during their developmental years.

Criminal justice issues

Relationship with police

We asked young people about the types of interactions they had with police. A common perception was that police officers lacked an understanding of culture and acted in disrespectful manner when interacting with young people. This situation reportedly produced conflict between young people and police, resulting in some young people being charged for offensive languages, resisting arrest, and assault.

Almost all justice involved young people reported that they were treated differently based on their ethnicity. They gave examples of being regularly stopped and questioned by police in public, with police asking them to move on without any legitimate reason and racist comments being made to them by police officers. They spoke how police stop and search practices were stressful and embarrassing experiences, especially when conducted within the public gaze. Some young people described being pinned against walls by police whilst being searched.

“ We can’t walk down the street as a group without getting stopped, searched, and humiliated.
(24-year-old male)

“ If I am out in the city in the weekend, I guarantee I will get stopped. The most embracing thing is others watching when it happens and giggling at what is happening to me. I just want to have fun and be normal like other young people, but you know they [police] spoil it on you and make you feel different wherever you go.
(19-year-old male)

“ We black people get searched all the times; I would say every second day at least. They spot us from a mile. When they stop us, they ask the same questions all the times – What is your name? Where are you going? What have you got on you? It was like they [police] have a vendetta against us.
(25-year-old male)

“ I have already stopped doing this crime sh*t for a long time, but I’m still getting harassed every time I try to hang out with my mates.
(22-year-old male).

Justice involved young people also reported being told to do things by police, rather than being asked, and this was perceived as further evidence for a lack of respect. The police were seen as being able to “get away” with this due to their position of authority, and this had resulted in some of the young people feeling disempowered and devalued.

“ They [police] tell us what to do, and we got to do it. You can’t ask questions because they’re in charge. They see us as just troublemakers...they really have no patience for us, like the way they should be. They think every black kid in the street is the same, rather than viewing them as individual.
(18-year-old male).

Most justice young people used a range of emotional words to express their feelings. These included, among others, feeling “humiliated,” “intimidated,” “scared,” “nervous,” “angry,” “agitated,” “disrespected,” and “violated.” Clearly, young people’s daily lived experiences highlight a lack of trust and confidence in the police. We are not surprised by these findings, given a plethora of research demonstrating that police officers’ behaviour is often discretionary and can be impacted by implicit bias⁵. Such biases result in officers connecting people to stereotypes based on identity characteristics rather than actual behaviours. Research has also shown that predominantly people of colour are subject to higher rates of police-initiated contact regardless of actual local crime rates, resulting in over-policing of lower-level crime and behaviours⁶.

However, it is worth noting that young people were not entirely critical of their treatment by the police. Although they reported that some police officers, especially younger and newer recruits were quite heavy-handed, they also described some officers as “respectful,” “polite,” and “doing their job.” This indicates that treating every young person of colour with respect, sensitivity, fairness, and dignity is important for the law enforcement process.

Experiences of court and legal services

Whilst justice involved young people recognised their offending behaviour was not caused by court processes, they felt that the handling of their cases was unfair and made their circumstances worse by limited legal services. They said they were often confused and unable to understand the legal language used during the proceedings. Although appearing before the court was not something to be celebrated or enjoyed, they found the process as stressful, intimidating, frightening, and a daunting experience.

5 Lorie A. Fridell, 2017. *Producing Bias-Free Policing: A Science-Based Approach*. New York: Springer.

6 Fagan et al., 2010. “Street Stops and Broken Windows Revisited.

“ I went to court twice for gathering around shops and the police thought we were going to do something illegal and charged us for loitering. Going to court really scared the hell out of me. I had no support on both occasions. (19-year-old male).

Lack of support was, thus, a common theme among justice involved young people who participated in our focus group discussions. Most young people did not tell their parents or other family members about their court appearances in fear of repercussions and kept information relating to criminal charges to themselves. They explained that they were either afraid of their parents' reactions, or embarrassed about the situation, to request their help. They said they had to contend with practical issues by themselves, including finding the location of the court, travelling to court, and dealing with worries associated with a long wait for their cases to be heard.

A few young people who did tell their parents about their court cases reported that their parents had limited knowledge of the legal system, highlighting their marginalised and impoverished backgrounds, which made it difficult for them to be involved in the way envisioned by legal system. Thus, socio-economic barriers and common life stressors (e.g., job issues, financial concerns, and marital/domestic problems) were noted as reasons for their parents' limited involvement in their legal cases. These young people also wanted to seek help from external services, but were unable to navigate and access legal services or representation prior to their appointments. Most remembered being given limited time to discuss their cases with a duty solicitor whom they had not met before, and in most cases, this happened just minutes prior to their appearance before a magistrate or a judge.

“ When I got there [to court], this guy [solicitor] called me up and I never met him before. He rushed through everything, quickly read it. I didn't understand most of the things he said, but I simply went along with it. (20-year-old male).

Some young people suggested that advance information about the court process, including information about their rights and responsibilities, would have helped to alleviate their concerns. They said this could contain a practical step-by-step guide of how to get to court, and what to do upon arrival.

In addition to concerns about the delivery of justice, some of the young people perceived a lack of respect from court employees and felt that they were spoken down to in a patronising manner. Whilst conceding that court was not intended to be a nice experience, they felt that this should not preclude them from being treated in a fair and respectful manner. They said



they would have liked to speak with someone with knowledge or understanding of their backgrounds; however, most reported the sheer lack staff with cultural competence in the areas of legal aid or services.

“ There should be a written information and someone who can sit with you and explain things properly without rushing. We black fellas sometimes get done for something we did not do because of misunderstanding.
(18-year-old male).

Juvenile Justice

The young people we spoke to had experiences of both juvenile detention centres and community-based supervision orders. The services they received were primarily compliance management, ensuring their adherence to court-ordered conditions (e.g., compliance with electronic conditions, curfews, abstinence from substance abuse, and so on). Most young people reported receiving criminogenic focused mainstream intervention services in line with the ‘what works’ approach⁷, which is usually tailored to risk factors associated with offending. Additionally, some young people told us that they were referred to a culturally tailored reintegration support program, specifically designed around their wellbeing. They told us that this program was delivered by an external mentor who was of an African background, and that they felt understood and respected. All spoke favourably about the utility and practical usefulness of this service relative to the mainstream programs they received under the supervision of the Youth Justice.

Justice involved young people further described the mainstream Youth Justice programs as being conceptually inaccessible and difficult to follow, and often presented or facilitated by practitioners who did not understand their culture or background very well. Such comments were not surprising for the Working Group. Whilst a large body of evidence indicates the efficacy of juvenile justice programs here in Australia and internationally, there are significant concerns about the cross-cultural efficacy of these programs in reducing recidivism⁸. It has been specifically argued that policies and programs that rely on the ‘what works’ approach dominantly draw upon on the values and worldviews of the mainstream culture, assume a ‘one-size-fits-all’ intervention methods, and tend to separate offending behaviours from socio-cultural and environmental contexts. This demonstrates the need for Youth Justice to form stronger partnerships with African South Australian communities, practitioners, and scholars to co-design and ensure the efficacy of their programs and services.

Whilst young people under the supervision of the Juvenile Justice spoke favourably about the cultural competence of the program they received externally, they described the service as being very brief and not going far enough to encapsulate their complex needs around trauma, conflict resolution with families, career pathways, and psychoeducation to mitigate the effects of racism and marginalisation. We investigated the structure and content of the cultural program described by young people and found that it was an eight-week wellbeing orientated interaction. Young people clearly found this program useful and accessible primarily because of the positive working-alliance they formed with a facilitator of an African background; however, we formed the view that much work remains ahead. The cultural contents of the program need to be theoretically articulated and empirically validated consistent with evidence-

7 James Bonta, Donald Arthur Andrews, 2016. *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*.

8 Harry Blagg & Thalia Anthony, 2019. *Decolonising criminology: Imaging justice in a post-colonial world*.

based practice. Such a program should be researched thoroughly and co-designed with active participation of justice involved young people, families, communities, African Australian scholars in the field, and service providers.

Corrections

More than half of the young people who participated in the focus group sessions spent time in the adult prisons, and/or served community-based supervision orders. The majority did not complete correctional rehabilitation programs as the duration of their sentences were too short; however, they were engaged in literacy and numeracy courses. A few reported completing criminogenic programs designed to address violence, and substance abuse problems. Whilst motivated in participating in these programs, they spoke about their struggle in understanding most of the concepts presented, which were primarily pitched to mainstream prisoners.

Whilst the number of African South Australians in the adult correctional system is relatively small, it is slowly increasing. Thus, it is fundamentally important for the Department for Correctional Services to articulate the unique rehabilitation needs of this population group at the practice, policy, procedure, and cultural levels. It is worth noting here that most of the young people we spoke to were under 25 years old and were developmentally distinct from older adults. Their neurological, psychological, and social development were incomplete. We learnt that the Department for Correctional Services in South Australia does not have a policy specific to younger prisoner cohorts, including those from the mainstream. Young people aged 18-25 years are treated no differently from more mature adults. Therefore, the absence of youth-specific program options means that young people have been enrolled for programs with more mature, often entrenched prisoner groups. Due to the impressionable nature of these young people, placements and rehabilitation programs within the mainstream units may lead to negative outcomes, rather than providing for opportunities to participate in pro-social, age and developmentally appropriate supports to reduce re-offending.

What we heard from families

We held two focus group sessions specifically targeting families consisting of parents and relatives of justice involved young people. Eight of the 12 participants were women and predominantly from South Sudanese communities. They shared their unique resettlement and acculturation challenges. They spoke at great length about their pre-migration experiences of disconnection from social, cultural, and economic contexts, as well as their post-migration challenges of having to readjust salient aspects of family life, interactions, and relationships. As indicated in Figure 3 below, these families considered several risk factors and challenges surrounding young people's violent and anti-social behaviours, emphasising changes in gender roles, family power dynamics, loss of parental confidence, mental health, and school-related challenges.



Views of families on young people’s offending behaviours and challenges

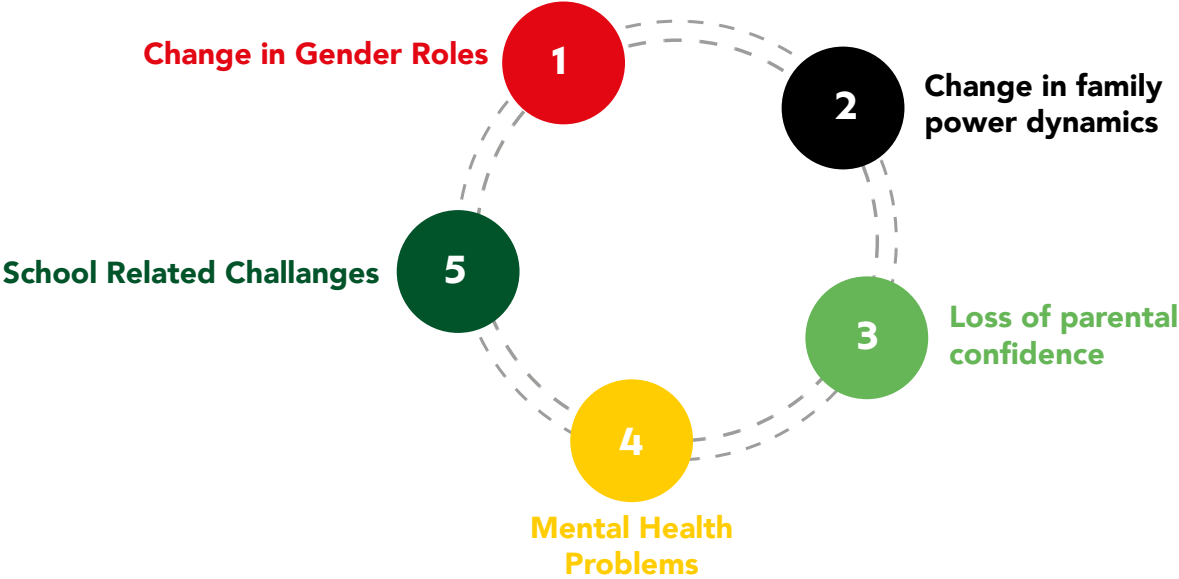


Figure 3. Themes from focus group discussions with families and relatives.

Change in gender role

Traditionally, African men represented their family within the public sphere and women dominated the private sphere with responsibility for running the home, caring for the children, the elderly, and others in need within the extended family network. However, migrating to Australia and being in a culture and society that is quite egalitarian has resulted in significant changes to roles and responsibilities for members of their families.

We heard that in some families, women and men had to swap roles, with women becoming the breadwinners and assuming more responsibility in the public sphere. This had become a source of tension within families, with men continuing to feel that their traditional roles as breadwinners and head of the household have diminished. As such, for some men unemployment resulted in feelings of reduced status, leading to some men to blame their wives for the loss of their status and consequently assuming a passive role in the family or limited parenting role. We heard many times that women were responsible for taking the children to school and bringing them back, adding further strain within the family unit and paving the way for poor supervision and guidance of children and young people.

“ Men and women must work to provide for their children here in Australia. This is different in Africa. Men work and women stay home to look after the children. We have problems in our communities right now. Some men cannot get a job to feel good about themselves, let alone helping the family. (51-year-old female).

Change in family power dynamics

We heard that many families experienced significant changes in responsibilities upon their settlement in Australia, partly because of the faster rate of acculturation and language acquisition of children and young people. The fact that children and young people had picked up English more quickly put parents with limited English language proficiency at a particular disadvantage.

“ Some of us here don't read and speak English very well. Sometimes we rely on our children to read and explain things. Our children see this differently and they think they know everything. They don't realise that we are still their parents, and we are in charge, but they don't listen.
(44-year-old female).

We heard that in dealing with social services, for example, children often became the family's representatives if parents or other family members had difficulty communicating in English. This situation gave children and young people responsibility and power within families, elevating their status to family spokespersons. Most families we spoke to saw this situation as a threat to their parental authority, leading to compromised parent-child relationships and subsequent intergenerational conflicts. What complicated the acculturation gap even further was parents' unhelpful approaches by putting pressure on children and young people to comply with their demands or by restricting their liberty and decision making; however, their approach rather resulted in increased family conflicts and placed young people at risk of leaving family homes and exposure to antisocial behaviours.

Loss of parental confidence

We heard the shift in power dynamics did not only make communications difficult between family members, but also damaged parental pride and confidence. Most families talked about loss of confidence in their parenting capacity. The primary reason given by these families was their inability to meet their children's needs due to lack of appropriate employment opportunities.

“ It takes a village to raise a child in Africa. It does not matter how much money you have. Here, you must fulfill your children's necessities at all levels. This is very challenging when you rely on Centrelink benefit to pay high rent, bills, transport, food, clothing, and everything. This causes a lot of stress on us and takes away our confidence as parents.
(39-year-old male).

Some families acknowledged that their frustration was reflected in greater marital conflicts. Mothers and fathers blamed each other for financial stress, social isolation, or loss of control over their children. A South Sudanese mother stated that the divorce rate was much higher in their communities because both parents were experiencing a high level of stress and did not have the support of their elders, or friends and extended families, to mediate their conflicts.

Mental health problems

We heard from families the extent to which both pre-migration and post-migration challenges played important roles in shaping family relationships. Common pre-migration experiences reported by families included gender-based violence, separation from family members (leaving family members behind in Africa), and not knowing or receiving information about them. As noted earlier, post-migration experiences for many families included isolation, poverty, conflict in values, and language barriers that impacted parenting styles and attitudes. Most families explained how the cumulative effects of pre-migration and post-migration experiences exposed them and their children to chronic trauma manifested in the form of emotional unavailability, poor parent-child relationship, emotional dysregulation, and a host of other mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and distress.

We heard alarming stories from families about their children's mental health states, commonly reporting several symptoms displayed by children and young people (e.g., somatic complaints, problems with sleeping, irritability, aggression, withdrawal, sadness, suicidal ideation, and suicide). These families acknowledged that their children suffered because of their poor mental health, but they did not know what they could do about it. They felt they had failed their children because they were unable to mediate the direct or the indirect effects of the external environment on them., especially problems at school such as conflict with peers and bullying.

Most of the families we spoke to told us several incidents of youth violence in homes, which involved physical violence (e.g., hitting, punching, kicking, use of weapons, threatening physical gestures), damage to property (e.g., breaking, or damaging property), emotional and verbal abuse (e.g., screaming, yelling, insults, intimidation, coercion, blaming, manipulation, threats against parents and other family members), and financial abuse (e.g., extortion, demanding money for drug and alcohol use). They often opted to not report these violent incidents to the police even when it was to their own detriment because of shame, guilt, and embarrassment for being unable to stop the violence in the first place. They also felt involving police could worsen their children's mental health and anger issues.

“ *The children know that you cannot discipline them the way we used to do back in Africa. They feel like they have more power than their parents. In school, teachers encourage them to report everything and even to call the police on us. It is easy for children to get away with bad behaviours and that is why they end up doing crimes.*
(51-year-old female).

“ *We have a different culture, and it is hard to fit in with everyone else. It is hard when you don't have a middle ground.*
(56-year-old female).

School related challenges

Most families we spoke to viewed formal schooling as a pathway to financial gain and upward mobility for their children; however, they felt the children's schooling was against their cultural childrearing practices and the ability to transmit important values to their children. They perceived that the mainstream schooling system undermined their traditional parental authority.

Whilst most families we spoke to recognised the differences in values and the need to work with these differences, they reported a sense of alienation from the school communities and missing out on their children's activities. Many conveyed a strong sense of disconnectedness between themselves and the other parents and teachers and talked about feeling of isolation from the school environment. This observation is important given that young people also reported lack of parental involvement as one of the major contributing factors to their disengagement from the school system. Thus, we again stress the importance of programs and services that promote the involvement of African South Australian parents in the school systems. Through these, parents can also learn important information about expectations, policies, and practices of the school. Their active involvement in the school systems can further assist in establishing trusting parent-teacher relationships and help them navigate issues relating to their children's education at the earliest opportunity. By contrast, when parents are unable to form important school networks and have limited involvement in their children's schooling, they are likely to feel uninformed, isolated from the support of teachers and other parents.

What we heard from community leaders and members

Much of what we heard from leaders and members of the various African-South Australian communities echoed the views of justice involved young people and families described in the forgoing sections of this report. However, most common themes among these focus group participants concerned the link between young people's offending behaviour and issues surrounding family violence, legal literacy, information literacy, and discrimination and racism.

Views of leaders' and members' of African South Austrlian communiites on factors that contribute to youth offending and associated challenges.

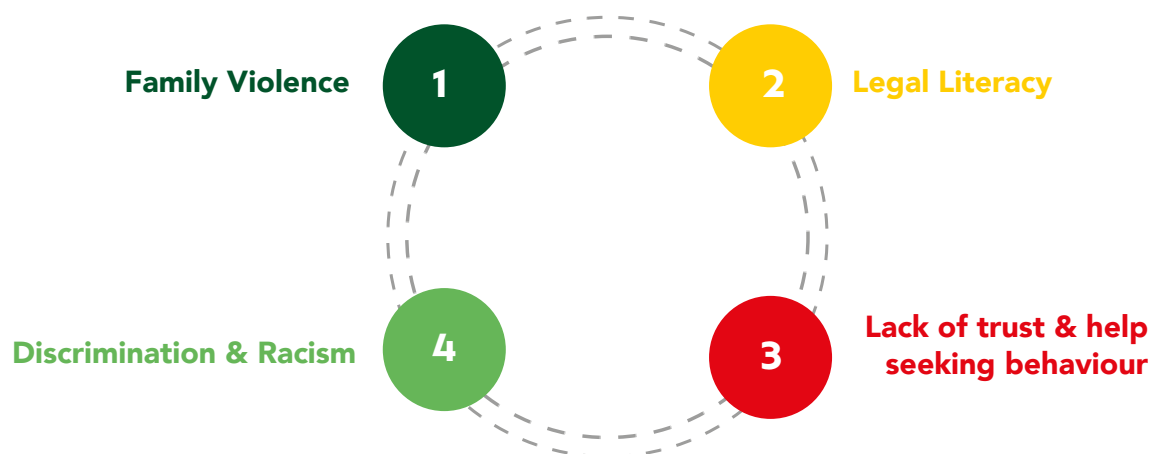


Figure 4. Themes from teh focus group discussions with leaders and members of African communities.

Family violence

Leaders and members of the African South Australians expressed deep concerns at the level of domestic violence with some sections of their communities. They noted that most justice involved young people commonly come from families affected by domestic violence. Victims were identified mostly as women and children, with men being perpetrators. However, there were concerns about violence perpetrated by young males against parents and extended family members. Focus group participants attributed domestic violence to several factors, including conflicts arising from changing gender roles, unemployment, financial stress, alcohol abuse, and mental illness. Moreover, incidents of underreported domestic violence were mentioned, primarily due to perceived cultural insensitivity of the legal response.

“ We know family violence is a major problem in pockets of our communities. It has broken families apart ...mothers could not control and raise children alone and that is why they are in trouble with the law. We need to stop this. But we could not do this without culturally sensitive services that will not further ostracise families
(Community Leader, 56-year-old male).



As this comment indicates, there were concerns that in some instances the involvement of legal and social services exacerbated problems within communities and contributed to the breakdown of families. This in turn was believed to contribute to uncertainties among some members of the communities' whether to report or not to report domestic violence incidents.

Focus group participants also commented on the availability of very limited or no options for men who wanted to address their domestic violence, including a lack of bilingual support workers. From the perspective of most focus group participants, an African-South Australian organisation should be equipped to play dominant role in the prevention of domestic violence, including culturally appropriate and sensitive support services for victims, design/co-design, and delivery of a treatment program for perpetrators.

“ We want to address domestic violence issues. We want men who abuse their families to face the legal consequences. At the same time, we want them to get education, take responsibility, and correct their behaviour. We want to do this in a culturally appropriate way. People who impart information and knowledge on these men should be authoritative, trusted, and respected figures in our communities
(Community Leader, 42-year-old male).

Overall, there was a consensus among the focus group participants that active participation of the African South Australian communities is critical for dealing with domestic violence issues. They were of the view that strong partnership ensures that specific sections of the communities are targeted for intervention and prevents perception of the broader African South Australians as “problem communities.” It was further emphasised that building trust in government services and criminal justice system should be an aspect of the domestic violence prevention strategies. For this, focus group participants indicated the need for culturally appropriate intervention that seeks to understand complex pre-migration and post-migration experiences of families and take a whole-of-community approach.

Legal literacy

Focus group participants reported low levels of legal literacy and representation within the African South Australian communities. This lack of knowledge meant that some African South Australians can quickly find themselves involved in a legal issue, leaving them feeling shocked, anxious, and confused. Several examples were provided where families had inadvertently broken the law without knowing they had done so. These comments highlighted the need for educating parents in childrearing practices here in Australia and increasing their understanding of laws governing these practices.

“ I didn't know discipling children was wrong until I saw the Government removing them from the care of many families in our communities. They took them where they could do anything. Most of them are now homeless and doing crimes.
(46-year-old male).

“ Many people in our communities do not know leaving children home with older sisters and brothers is a child protection issue. I know many families in our communities have been regularly questioned and warned.
(29-year-old female).

In addition, there was a widespread concern among the focus group participants that lack of understanding of the criminal justice system can leave many African South Australians and justice involved young people in a very vulnerable position. They highlighted the link between low level of legal literacy and young people's poor compliance with court sanctions and their continued involvement with the criminal justice system. This problem was perceived to have been further compounded by a lack of accessible information about the role and expectations of courts, police, and legal services.

“ *The law is often written in English. Our communities are diverse and not everyone is literate. Translated legal brochures are rarely available, and even then, there are people who cannot read and write in their own native languages. We need to educate our young people, families and communities about their rights and responsibilities. This will guide them to do the right things and stand up for themselves when treated unfairly and inappropriately.*
(58-year-old male).

Lack of trust and help-seeking behaviour

Focus group participants were concerned that justice involved young people and their families have been isolated from the broader African South Australian and mainstream communities. Information literacy (“not knowing what is out there for them”) and lack of trust in service providers were noted.

“ *We know some families don't share their problems. They feel shamed and keep everything to themselves. Even when those who talk about family problems don't ask help from police and other services. They have trust issues*”
(39-year-old male)

This comment indicated that the most vulnerable members of African South Australian communities do not come forward for help because of trust issues and consequently appeared to be the least serviced group within the current government and non-government services. In other words, the concerns raised indicated that some families remained socially isolated from their communities and had only sporadic contact with the formal service system, even when they had resided in South Australia for a long period of time. These families often experience issues such as poor mental health and financial hardship, and do not always access services due to language barriers, cultural norms about help-seeking or because of a lack of knowledge about services. The suggestion by focus group participants was for government and non-government services, in collaboration with communities, to develop interventions that seek to address the multiple, complex, enduring issues of this population group.

Focus group participants further expressed concerns that current services are rather rigid and tailored to provide siloed responses. From their perspective, tackling youth crime requires a holistic intervention across the individual, family, community, and institutional levels. In other words, leaders and members of the African South Australian communities emphasised the need for integrated services that cut across both government and non-government portfolios. They were particularly keen to see a service delivery model akin to the recent Victorian-African Communities Action Plan, which recognised the unique needs of this population group, challenges, and opportunities for improvement in the areas of business, employment and training, health and wellbeing, inclusion and empowerment, leadership, cohesion, and connection.

“ When our young people gather, they are seen as a nuisance and regularly harassed by police or private security. We need to create a public space or a hub, where they can interact, engage in socially desirable activities, and access services they need.
(55-year-old male)

Leaders and members of the African-South Australian communities further highlighted the importance of a public space for young people, families, and communities. They noted that a key issue for young people of African backgrounds is access to youth-friendly public space.

Overall, leaders and members of the African South Australian communities highlighted the need for specific and integrated services that are culturally sensitive and flexible. For this, the recent Queensland Government initiative and the opening of the African Youth & Community Centres were seen as some of the best practice examples, where integrated services were made available under the umbrella of the Queensland African Communities Council, including domestic violence and women’s services, mental health counselling, supporting career and leadership development, advocacy, community services, mentoring and guidance to disconnected youth.

Discrimination and racism

We heard from leaders and members of the African South Australian communities about discrimination and racism. They felt that youth violence issues were taken out of context by media narratives. Whilst recognising that violent crimes reported in the media were shocking and should be reported on and become the subject of commentary, they expressed concerns about the context in which these crimes had been reported. They felt that the media portrayed African South Australian youth and their communities as “problem groups”, shifting the blame to communities, and thereby contributing to young people’s increased contact with the criminal justice system and subjecting other law-abiding members to scrutiny and surveillance.

“ It doesn’t matter whether you have a criminal background or what position you hold in your communities. If you are black, you are watched wherever you go. Even supermarket securities want to watch you closely. I personally feel anxious and unsafe wherever I go out these days.
(23-year-old female).

There was a common concern that racial profiling remained endemic since recent media narratives about “African Gangs” and manifested in the form of police discretionary actions based on racial characteristics of individuals. Leaders of the South Sudanese communities were particularly concerned about police stopping, searching, questioning about identity, friendship networks and intentions, requiring non-offending youth to ‘move-on’ without reasonable suspicion. With very few exceptions, interaction with police reported by justice involved young people, leaders and community members was negative.

We further heard concerns about the impact of racialised reporting of youth crimes on routine activities of the African South Australian communities throughout Adelaide. For example, in the wake of the murder of Mr Bol on 13 March 2022 by alleged young South Sudanese men in CBD of Adelaide, African South Australian communities were unable to hold scheduled functions. They told us that rented venues for their planned functions were cancelled by business owners in fear of a similar incident, highlighting the

unintended consequence of racialised discourses of crimes by media on ordinary law-abiding members of our communities.

The murder of Mr Bol was linked to the brawl involving South Sudanese young men outside the Nairobi Affair Lounge on Adelaide's Grenfell Street, a business owned by an African South Australian. Whilst the commission of heinous crimes by young people of all backgrounds around entertainment venues had been in the media spotlight from time to time, the owner of this business reported constant harassment and discriminatory measures following the incident.


“ *...new licence conditions were imposed on my business by the liquor licensing commissioner. SAPOL also started policing my business with such heightened intensity and frequency they essentially decimated the patronage of my business. They would come on the busiest nights of the week, park 2 to 3 cars right at the front of my bar, hang around for up to 3hrs at a time, turning away would-be customers. The frequency and visibility of their visits to my bar has ruined my business. No other licensed venue, to my knowledge has been subjected to such level of unfair scrutiny and policing after a single incident.*
(Business Owner).

Community leaders called for change, emphasising the importance of toning down racialised rhetoric around “African gangs.” They also felt that the creation of a special police taskforce was unnecessary as it has further ostracised, reinforced, and amplified perception of African South Australians as threats to the general community requiring a high level and emergency response.

Leaders and members of the African South Australian communities further expressed concerns about widespread race-based discrimination, resulting in poor mental health outcomes, psychological distress, anger, frustration, anxiety, alienation, and joblessness even among those who were not involved in the criminal justice system. We heard that although many African South Australians were employed, most had jobs that did not correspond to their educational qualifications and skills. They reported having settled for any job available to them in order to avoid unemployment. Whilst many reported high levels of dissatisfaction and lack of genuine equal opportunity in the labour market, they saw their current employment status as hugely important for their identity and dignity. However, they found the reality challenging and discouraging for their children.

“ *I am an electrical engineer working as a support worker. I encourage my children to focus on their education; but they often ask me why they should be educated to something they will never use.*
(44-year-old male)

Focus group participants further expressed concerns about a lack of diversity and representation in the workforce, particularly in schools, child protection, and criminal justice systems. They felt that these institutions generally tend to have frequent contacts with young offenders and their families. They were of the view that initiatives that will provide guidance, support, and training to assist potential applicants to successfully enter these domains of the workforce are critical.



“ *The police are trying, but it is like a drop in the ocean, and they could employ more Africans. Other agencies hardly opened their doors to Africans. When you ask for feedback after missing out on a job opportunity, they tell you the selection was based on merit, which is really a form of excluding others like us. Our people are often overlooked by even those organisations that work for multicultural communities. (33-year-old female).*

Such comments highlighted the importance of diversity and representation in tackling social issues like youth offending. Visibility of African South Australians in key service and program delivery areas were seen as protective factors because of positive role modelling and instilling hope and optimism in young people. It was also suggested that representation of African Australians would strengthen cultural competence of government and non-government services and young people's help seeking behaviour.

Community leaders and members further spoke about the importance promoting diversity within the business communities, much like the resettlement experiences of African Australians in Western Australia.

“ *Perth has transformed as a symbol multicultural “melting pot.” I have recently witnessed wonderful instances of successful integration of African migrants in the CBD of Perth. They were running small businesses, working in shops, convenient stores, delivering couriers, and much more. There was this positive vibe in the air, a sense of calmness, harmony, respect, trust, and it was extremely pleasing to witness such a relaxation in the faces of fellow African Australians in Perth. I hope someday we can learn from their experience. (58-year-old male).*

Community leaders and members clearly saw the notion of diversity as multifaced endeavour, including initiatives that encourage the business communities to open their doors, accept, acknowledge, and provide opportunities for African South Australians. As noted earlier, a logical place to begin is with public sectors, who can then lead by example. Indeed, whilst conducting this inquiry, we learnt about an exemplary initiative by the Department for Correctional Services, working closely with the African Communities Council to attract potential employees in custodial settings.

Views of non-government service providers

We held focus group discussion with 19 participants who represented non-government agencies and private practitioners (i.e., the Northern Area Community & Youth Services, Headspace, The Australian Migrant Resource Centre, Sonder, South Australian Council of Social Service, Anglicare, Legal Aid, and Multicultural Communities Council of SA). Participants were either directly or indirectly involved in the provision of services to members of the African South Australian communities. Despite the overlap with what other focus groups reported, non-government service providers identified several issues and practices across the communities that were adversely impacting on African-South Australian youth and their families. As presented in Figure 5, the main themes included, disengagement from school and unemployment, gaps in diversionary practices, punitive responses, and gaps in social services.

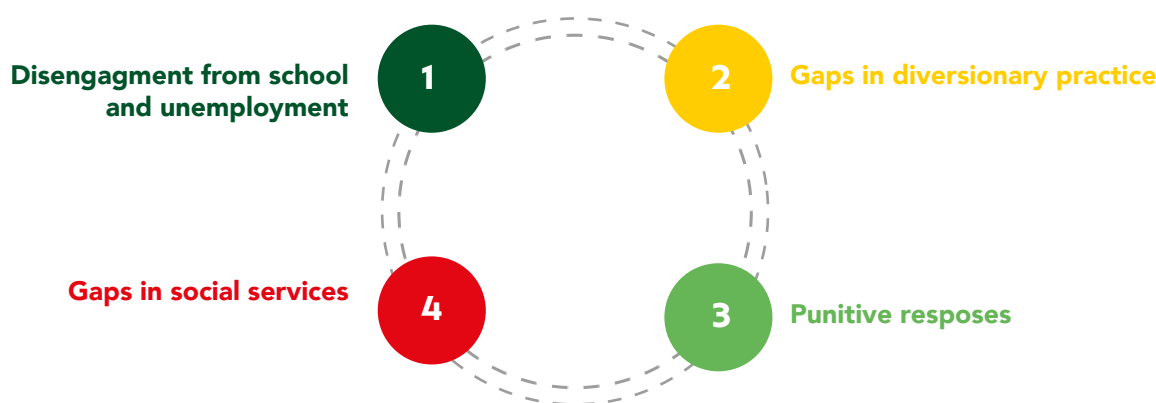


Figure 5. Themes from focus group discussions with leaders and members of African communities

Disengagement from school and unemployment

Providers of non-government services identified justice involved young people's disengagement from school and unemployment as leading causes of their offending behaviour. They noted that most young people of African backgrounds who accessed their services were "typically school dropouts," had "no vocational skills," and presented with poor employment prospects. Most of the justice involved young people reportedly experienced boredom because of lack of meaningful activities in their lives, resulting in their association with negative peers, substance abuse, and other problematic behaviours. Focus group participants partly attributed these problems to a lack of well-designed school-based prevention programs and services for at risk African South Australian children.

Focus group participants also spoke about the influence of labour market barriers on justice involved young people's low motivation for pro-social pursuits and how this contributed to risk of involvement in criminal activities and antisocial behaviours.

“ I have been to some schools, and they will need to be adequately resourced in order to become more culturally accessible. You hardly see people of African backgrounds as liaison or school engagement officers. Schools should not only focus on classroom activities, but also community engagement strategies and supporting staff in effectively working with migrant and refugee students and parents. At the moment, school-parent contact is largely crisis-focused and often related to disciplinary issues. Schools should always strive to engage parents positively and proactively” (Participant 3, Service Provider).

“ There are some employment support services that target school dropouts; however, these programs are held in isolation of any other intervention needs. When support systems don't communicate effectively, young people are more likely to disengage very quickly and revert to the default lifestyles that led them to crime. Another challenge is that employment programs focus on short-term interventions but young people from disadvantaged backgrounds face multiple barriers and require long-term approach to increase their chances of employability” (Participant 14, Service Provider).

Gaps in diversionary practices

Non-government service providers regarded diversionary practices (e.g., police cautioning options and referral to mental health services or substance abuse treatment) as some of the effective strategies in tackling young people's reoffending behaviour. They stated that diversionary measures can bring main stakeholders (i.e., police, service providers, young people, and families) and assist in education, harm minimisation, and reduction in risk of recidivism. However, they raised concerns that justice involved African South Australian youth were less likely to be dealt with through diversionary measures.

“*As a duty solicitor, I have seen kids being brought before the court, but there were instances where police charges were dismissed by magistrates. Police should have given these kids either a warning or released them on bail agreements*” (Participant, 18, Service Provider).

Thus, given the unique structural and acculturation challenges of justice involved young people of African backgrounds, focus group participants considered discretionary arrests and charges by police as detrimental and of little benefit in reducing recidivism. They emphasised the need for using formal criminal justice sanctioning as a last resort.

“*Young people of African background perceive a duty solicitor and the court process excessively formal and threatening. Unfortunately, we don't have the resources to help these young people in a culturally sensitive and appropriate ways*” (Participant 19, Service Provider).

Justice involved young people of African backgrounds were reportedly reluctant to have a parent or other adults who could be called on to be present during questioning by police. It was noted that lack of a stable address or family support meant they were likely to be refused bail and remanded in custody before and during trial, even for the relatively minor offences typically committed by African South Australian youth.

From the perspective of non-government focus group participants, inadequate legal services increased young people's vulnerability. They reported a severe underinvestment in legal services around diversionary schemes for African South Australian youth, and consequently emphasised the need for culturally competent and legally trained Youth workers (“not necessarily lawyers”).

“*We know that many children and young people have been interviewed by police without the presence and assistance of a supportive adult*” (Participant 13, Service Provider).

Punitive responses

Non-government focus group participants expressed concerns about the punitiveness of youth justice practices or marginal deterrence strategies on young people's offending behaviour. They pointed out that policies and practices have moved away from the care and control approaches of delivering youth justice to reliance on surveillance or compliance-based case management approaches, which led to increase in the arrest rates by police and non-compliance actions by Youth Justice.

Participants instead suggested strengths-based practices that seek to balance the care and control aspect of working with young people who commit offences. They noted that Youth Justice's primary

focus on young people and their behaviour cannot adequately address the broader structural issues that may be affecting them. Focus group participants further stated that the Youth Justice has become more like the adult correctional system, and that there has been limited attempt in developing cross-culturally appropriate strength-based rehabilitation approaches to young people of African descents.

“ The legislation [SA Young Offenders Act 1993] unfortunately separates the care and control aspects young people’s needs. The focus is on protecting the community and increasing young people’s accountability. Most crimes committed by these young people underpin maturity issues or are trauma related. Let us not forget, young people have important developmental needs, and their brain evolves well into their twenties. They should be cared for very carefully and not harshly. I could not really understand the rationale behind the narrow justice-based responses that pay little attention to the broad sociocultural and developmental context of youth crime”
(Participant 1, Service Provider).

Gaps in social services

Concern around a gap in social services was a recurring theme throughout our inquiry. Non-government service providers identified several post-migration stressors, linking these to risks of young people’s involvement with the criminal justice system. Shortage of affordable housing, for example, was one of the most significant problems noted.

“ Some families live in impoverished states and extremely crowded accommodations. They have financial stress, which contributes to conflict within the families. I have been to some of these houses and seen firsthand situations. It is because of accommodation that sometimes children gravitate toward external influences and find themselves in trouble. I am aware of young people who left home because of poor living conditions and ended up in trouble with the law. For girls, the consequence of leaving home carries even greater risk. I met grieving families who lost daughters from suicide after becoming pregnant”
(Participant 2, Service Provider).

Non-government focus group participants noted that whilst the above concern was not widespread among the African South Australian communities, it, nonetheless, affected and continued to affect a significant number of South Sudanese families. They noted the prevalence of mental illness, parent-child conflict, and family breakdowns within these families. These issues in turn were seen as contributing factors to reduced parental capacity, and the onset and development of children’s or young people’s challenging behaviours and involvement in the criminal justice system.

Focus group participants further expressed concern that current services operate in silos, rendering needs of young people and their families impossible to track.

“ It is hard to know what is out there for families and young people. Even the services that we know don’t connect and work together on common clients” (Participant 6, Service Provider).

It was further noted that most services overlook the importance of co-designing services and fail to consider culture, values, beliefs, and perspectives of services recipients, reducing their perceived effectiveness and appropriateness by those who attempt to seek help.

“ I think support services should consider the views of young people and communities, their cultures, values, and belief systems. Otherwise, people will have no trust and confidence. This is what we see right now with young people of African backgrounds and their families. Their help-seeking behaviour is something we need to consider and try to address” (Participant 10, Service Provider).

Overall, views of non-government service providers highlighted the need for integrated services, calling for action to address issues surrounding silos within the systems of government, and to improve coordination across services in different departments to ensure that the most vulnerable members of the African South Australian communities and young people are not being incarcerated as a result of failures to address their needs in a holistic and culturally appropriate way.



Views of government service providers

We held the last focus group session with 14 participants who represented government departments. By the time we held this focus group, responses to our discussion questions already reached saturation points (i.e., alternative themes were almost exhausted). Like all the other focus group participants, government services providers highlighted the role of individual, familial, community, and institutional level factors in young people’s offending and anti-social behaviour. They also recognised that many of the issues facing justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families related to issues associated with acculturation challenges

such as experiences of marginalisation, mental health, substance abuse, and poverty. In terms of intervention, the suggestions made by government service providers evolved around four major themes as presented in Figure 6 – connection with communities, co-designing services and programs, improvement in Youth Justice and Corrections interface, and cultural competence.

Views of government service providers on prevention and rehabilitation approaches to youth offending and associated challenges]

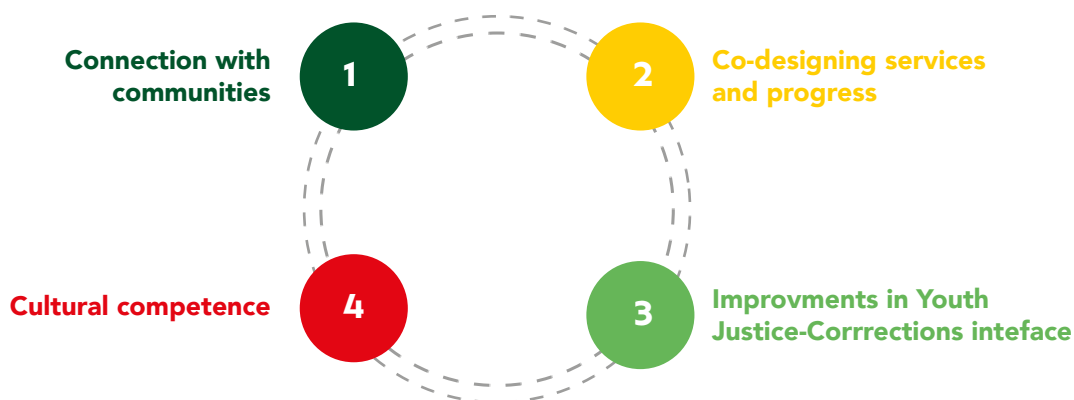


Figure 6. Themes from focus group discussions with government services providers.

Connection with communities

Justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families were generally considered “hard to reach groups” throughout our consultation process. Whilst the term “hard to reach” suggests an inherent reluctance of these groups to seek help, participants during this focus group discussion noted that this perception was indeed misleading and that there was a need for better strategies to connect with these community groups. Participants emphasised the importance of positive engagement strategies where service providers proactively seek ways to understand and work with these population groups in a culturally sensitive and engaging manner.

“ Without any doubts there are communities or sections of population that are not engaged fully in an active participatory citizenship process and fail to access services. They may experience language problems, difficulties in accessing information, they may think that service-providers do not care about them, do not listen or even are irrelevant to them. On the other hand, we know that many service-providers often have limited or ineffective interaction with the different stakeholders. They have limited knowledge of multicultural communities. Lack of resources and restricted funding arrangement further contribute to poor services” (Participant 3, Service Provider).

Participants clearly articulated the importance meaningful connection and engagement with justice involved young people, their families, and the broader African South Australian communities. Participants considered this approach as an important step preceding the co-designing of services and programs that they outlined in the next section.

Co-designing services and programs

Participants emphasised the importance of always keeping the focus on achieving the best outcomes for justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families and communities. They also spoke about the need for involving the broader African South Australian communities in determining what those 'best outcomes' might be, not simply accepting Government's pre-determined view of what they might be or what their needs are.

“ *Most services are inflexible and reflect only the perspective of funding organisation. I think it is time for a paradigm shift to establish a genuine partnership with communities. (Participant 13, Service Provider).*

This comment highlighted the need for organisational openness and readiness to work collaboratively and in partnership with young people, their families, and communities to prevent youth crime and ensure the safety of the South Australian community.

“ *I think we are gradually embracing the idea of co-designing services and we are working together across government departments and with service recipients. I think there is also an opportunity for improvement and for the justice system and other agencies to work closely with the African communities and address the challenges facing some of their young people and their families. (Participant 2, Service Provider).*

Whilst government service providers recognised the importance of co-designing services and programs, it was evident from the consultation with other stakeholders that allocation of adequate resources are yet to represent an important step in shifting the locus of control and possibilities for co-design of services with young people, families, and the broader African South Australian communities. For these to be realised, the responsibility rests on the South Australian Government to ensure that the most vulnerable members of these communities have access to the information, skills, capacities, and support to participate effectively in co-designing services. Merely opening possibilities for choice and participation will not necessarily lead to more personalised or effective services if this just means more “one-size-fits-all” services to choose from, or if participation remains restricted to consultation. Realising the real potential for co-designing programs may mean that we need to revisit more established concepts such as empowerment and self-determination. Nonetheless, we do not need to reinvent everything about how to work effectively with young people of African backgrounds and their families; however, incorporation of cultural knowledge, values, worldviews, genuinely inclusive policies, and practices are likely to produce better outcomes. Overall, it was highlighted throughout our consultation process that equal power distribution is a key principle for co-designing services and programs. Failure to address power imbalance between service providers and service users may lead to loss in trust in the service and the co-production approaches could become more harm than good.

Youth Justice-Corrections interface

Preparing young people for a life after detention, reintegration, and a life free from crime is a complex task. Rehabilitation is an aspect the Youth Justice services designed for this purpose. However, focus group participants noted that not all young people can desist from crime before turning 18 and some inevitably end up in the adult prison systems. This transition for young people of African backgrounds was described as “extremely alienating and traumatising.”

“ We try to support these young people while they are in Youth Detention Centre. We have seen counsellors and other support services building good rapport with them, but only to be abandoned when they enter or transfer to the adult prison system. I think there should be a mechanism for continuity this work, which would be more effective in terms of reducing their recidivism. Otherwise, they would simply get lost in the system without proper engagement and we have seen this happening for quite a few young people we have known” (Participant 4, Service Provider).

This concern highlighted the unique rehabilitation needs of young people of African backgrounds at a time of their transition into the adult prison system. From the perspective of participants, the age and background these young people are likely to limit their ability to navigate and better integrate in the adult correctional interventions and service systems. As such, they emphasised the need for contact and measurable collaboration between Youth Justice and Corrections as critically important in terms improving rehabilitation outcomes for justice involved young people of African backgrounds.

Cultural competence

There was a consensus among the focus group participants on the importance of cultural competence in working with African South Australians; however, comments varied. Some participants indicated that organisational policies/procedures are too broad and do not specifically focus on the service and intervention needs of minority group such as those from African South Australian communities. They also pointed out that there were no evaluation processes around the efficacy of services and programs accessed by these specific population groups.

“ Our organisation strongly focuses on culturally competent services for First Nations clients. I haven’t seen a similar approach for those from an African background. There is a general assumption that their service needs are no different from the mainstream clientele. We don’t really know whether their service needs are met effectively in a culturally competent way. We don’t have a standard for evaluating programs across different groups (Participant 1, Service Provider).

Despite this acknowledgement, there was a concern among some focus group participants. They noted that ensuring cultural competence across all minority groups may be impractical because of the heterogeneity of these populations.

“ What about other ethnic groups and how do we incorporate the different populations? How do we assess any individual and provide targeted services when all individuals have their own unique culture? I think this is a challenge” (Participant 4, Service Provider).

However, most focus group participants recognised the need for culturally specific social and criminal justice services and programs for those from African backgrounds, citing primarily their pre-migration trauma as refugees and their acculturation difficulties here in Australia relative to other minority groups. It was further noted that justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families tend to have low help-seeking behaviour; and therefore, they would require sensitive and culturally tailored service delivery approaches. For this, a whole of government cultural competence service delivery model was suggested.

“ I think we should expect our staff across governments to equip themselves with knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to effectively interact with clients of African backgrounds. They should have a good understanding of issues affecting these clients, like inequalities, language problems, mental health problems associated with their traumatic experiences. Practitioners should be able to reflect on their own sociocultural background and personal biases or tendency to stereotype. I guess, as organisations we are collectively responsible for developing a model of service and ensure that staff are regularly trained to improve on their cultural competence, especially focusing on communication skills to explore [cultural] perspectives” (Participant 7, Service Provider).



SURVEY RESULTS



To complement our focus group discussions and reach out the wider African-South Australian communities, we designed a survey in line with the overall inquiry themes (e.g., causes, and challenges, and potential solutions to young people’s violent and antisocial behaviours). A total of 84 participants completed our survey, of which 78 were from African South Australian communities and six participants were from various service providers. Excluding service providers from the analysis, 37% of those who completed the survey were from South Sudanese community, 17% from Ethiopia, 12% from Zimbabwe, and the rest (34%) were Liberian, Sierra Leone, Eritrea, Somalia, Nigeria, Congo, Kenya, Burundi, and South Africa. Participants ages ranged between 17 and 65 years, and the majority were males (73%). Approximately 58% were single, 36% were married, and 6% were in a de facto relationship. Almost 59% of African South Australians who participated in the survey had education at a Bachelor’s degree level or higher, 37% completed high school, and 4% had primary school education. In terms of work, 42% had fulltime, 21% part-time, and 15% casual employment. The rest (22%) were unemployed and actively seeking employment opportunities. Only 27% of those who participated in the survey owned their own houses, with the remaining 73% residing in rental accommodations or dependent on their parents and relatives. It is worth noting that approximately 15% (n=13) were young people who had a history of contact with some or all South Australian criminal justice systems (i.e., police, courts, Youth Justice, and Department for Correctional Services).

We asked survey respondents several questions under three broad domains: (1) risk factors that contributed to violent crimes and antisocial behaviours of young people of African origins; (2) challenges and barriers that exacerbate rather than alleviate young people’s offending; and (3) opportunities for rehabilitative and preventive services or interventions. Summary of findings from each of these domains is presented below.

Causes of youth violence and antisocial behaviours

Individual risk factors Broken families

As shown in Figure 7 below, survey respondents indicated substance abuse as the most significant risk factor for young people’s involvement in violence and antisocial behaviour. Survey respondents also believed that children and young people who experience neglect, abuse, bullying, racism, and marginalisation would be at increased risk of developing problematic behaviours such violence and antisocial behaviour. Survey respondents also considered other risk factors (i.e., early behavioural, and emotional problems, and poor cognitive development); however, they believed that these risk factors were less prominent relative to the other risk factors.

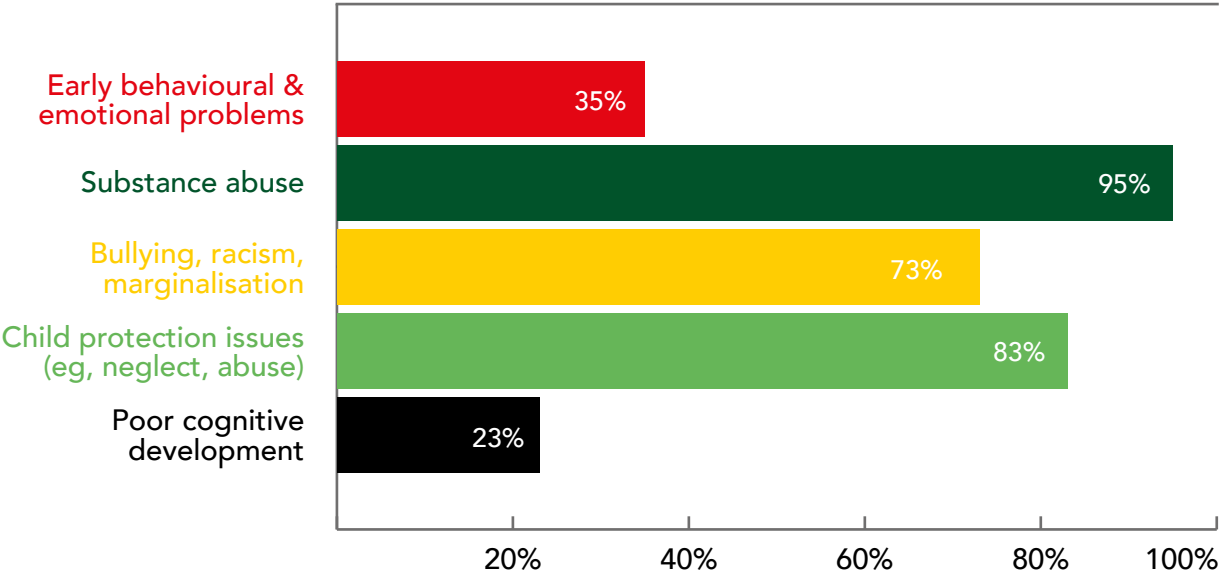


Figure 7. Individual risk factors reported by survey respondents.

Family-based risk factors

Survey respondents rated several family-related risk factors in relation to young people's violence and antisocial behaviours. As indicated in Figure 8, the most prominent of which included low level of positive parental involvement, family violence, and divorce.

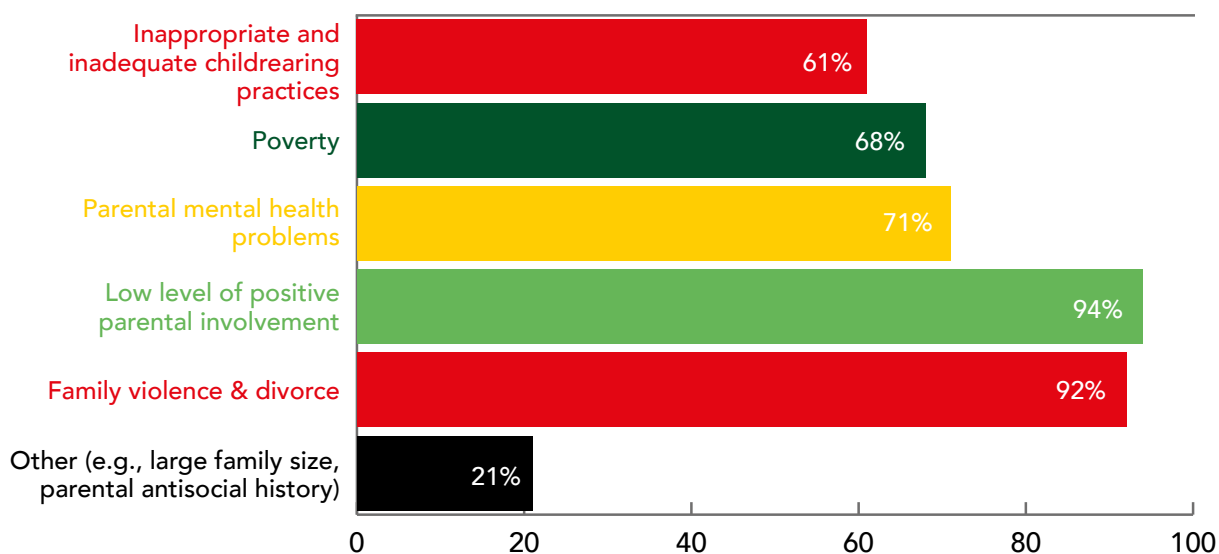


Figure 8. Family related risk factors reported by survey respondents.

Peer-related risk factors

Survey respondents indicated that young people who spend time with delinquent or risk-taking peers, and those who have less exposure to positive social opportunities were at greater risk of committing violent offences (see Figure 9 below). Survey respondents also considered that joining a gang or feuding group was likely to increase young people's propensity to commit violent offences and engage in other antisocial behaviours.

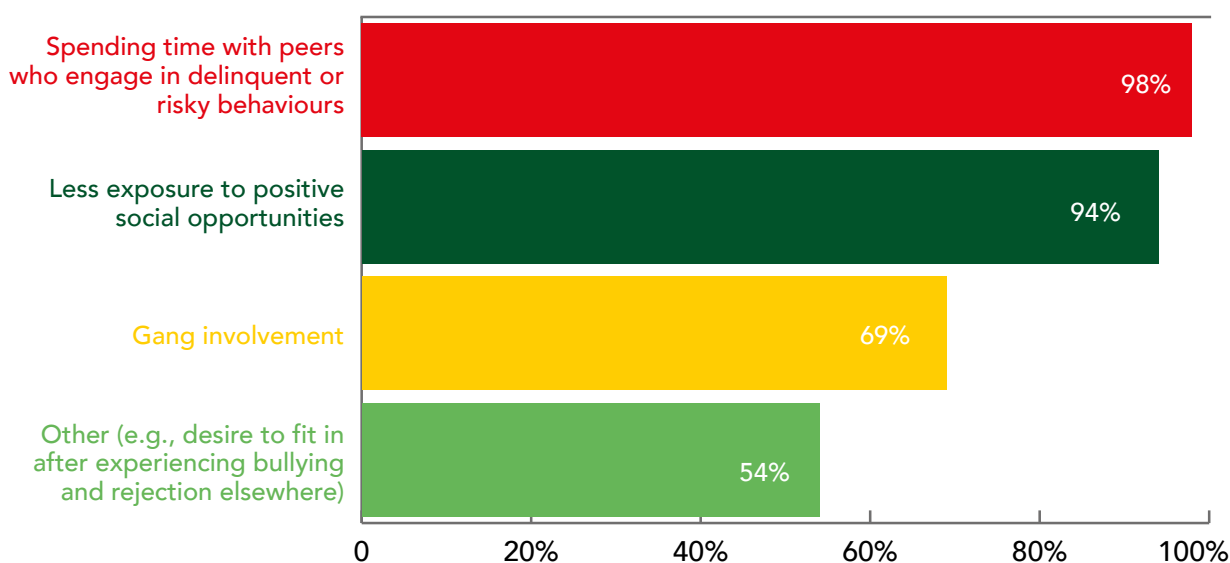


Figure 9. Peer related risk factors reported by survey respondents

School-related risk factors

Figure 10 shows respondents' ratings of key school-related risk factors in young people's offending behaviours. These included, among others, failure to involve parents in school activities, lack of cultural sensitivity and competence, and failure to address the social and emotional needs of children and young people.

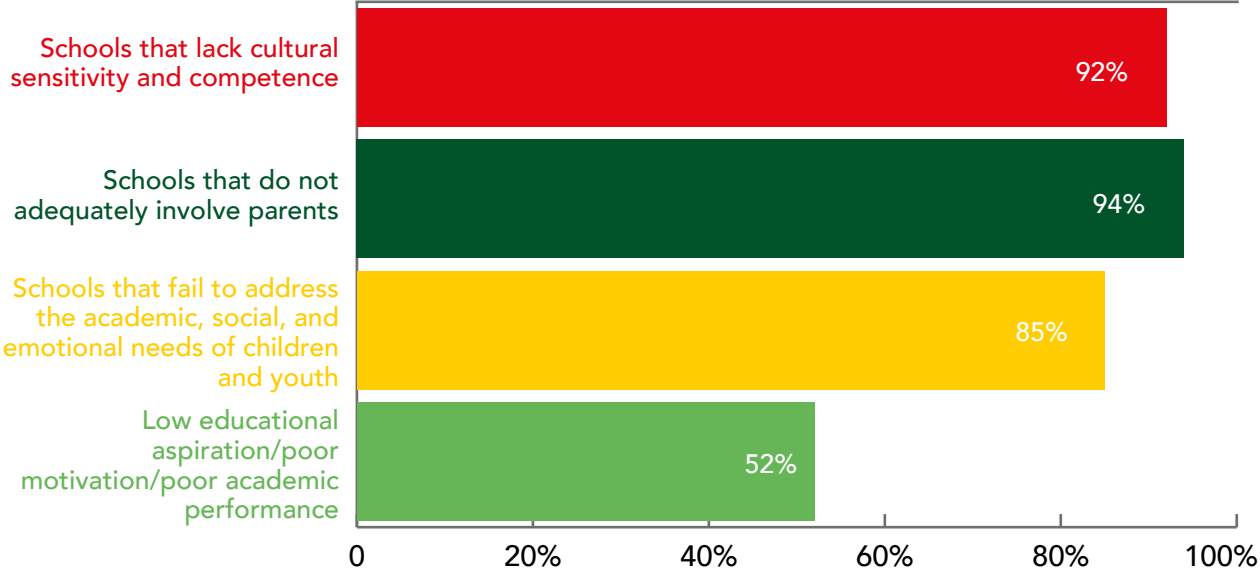


Figure 10. School related risk factors reported by survey respondents

Community/institutional risk factors

As shown in Figure 11, survey respondents indicated that a high level of police surveillance and racialised reporting of crimes can disproportionately increase the risk of African youth's involvement in the criminal justice system. Other significant risk factors identified by survey respondents includes social disorganisation of communities in which these young people live, absence of culturally inclusive services, and poverty.

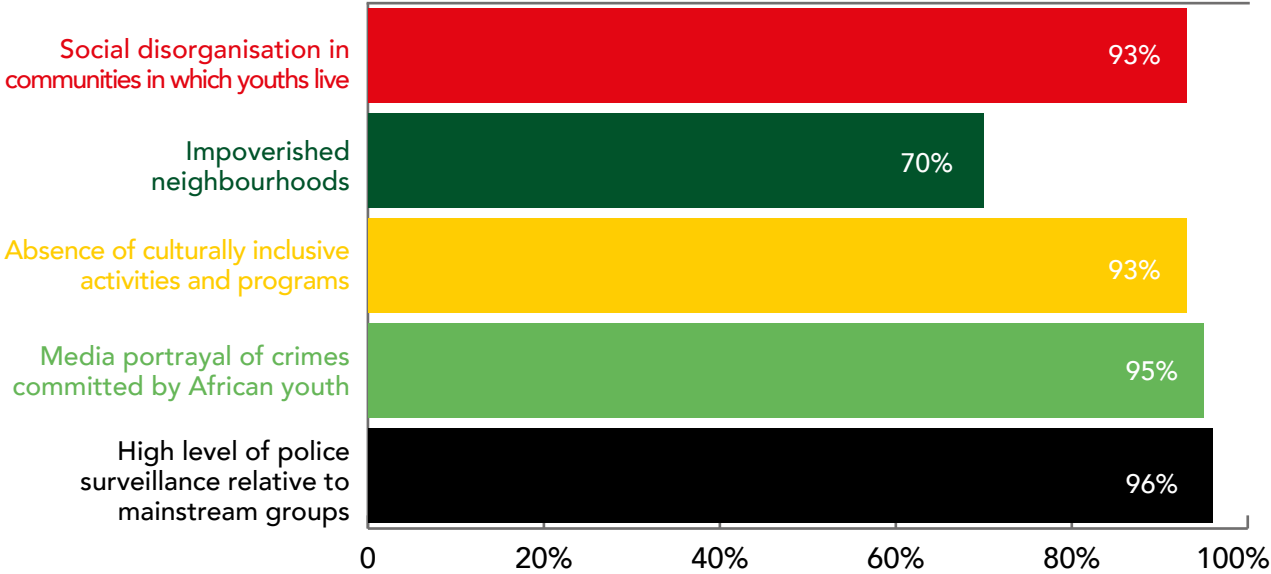


Figure 11. Community/institutional risk factors reported by survey respondents.

Challenges and barriers

Discrimination and racism

Survey respondents reported numerous experiences of discrimination and racism, which gave rise to inequalities and different forms of disadvantages. Approximately 98% of participants reported experiencing discrimination whilst seeking promotional opportunities, with 96% reporting their experiences of being closely watched or observed by security personnel whilst in shops or stores. The degrees of these experiences are indeed staggering and reflect the obvious institutionally embedded discriminatory experiences and realities of African South Australians irrespective of their involvement in the criminal justice system. As depicted in Figure 12, survey respondents reported other challenges involving rental accommodations, schools, child protection, and financial institutions. Provision of services and/or access to these services were reported to be discriminatory. These in turn were believed to have increased the vulnerability and susceptibility of some members of the African South Australian communities to a range of risk factors detailed earlier.

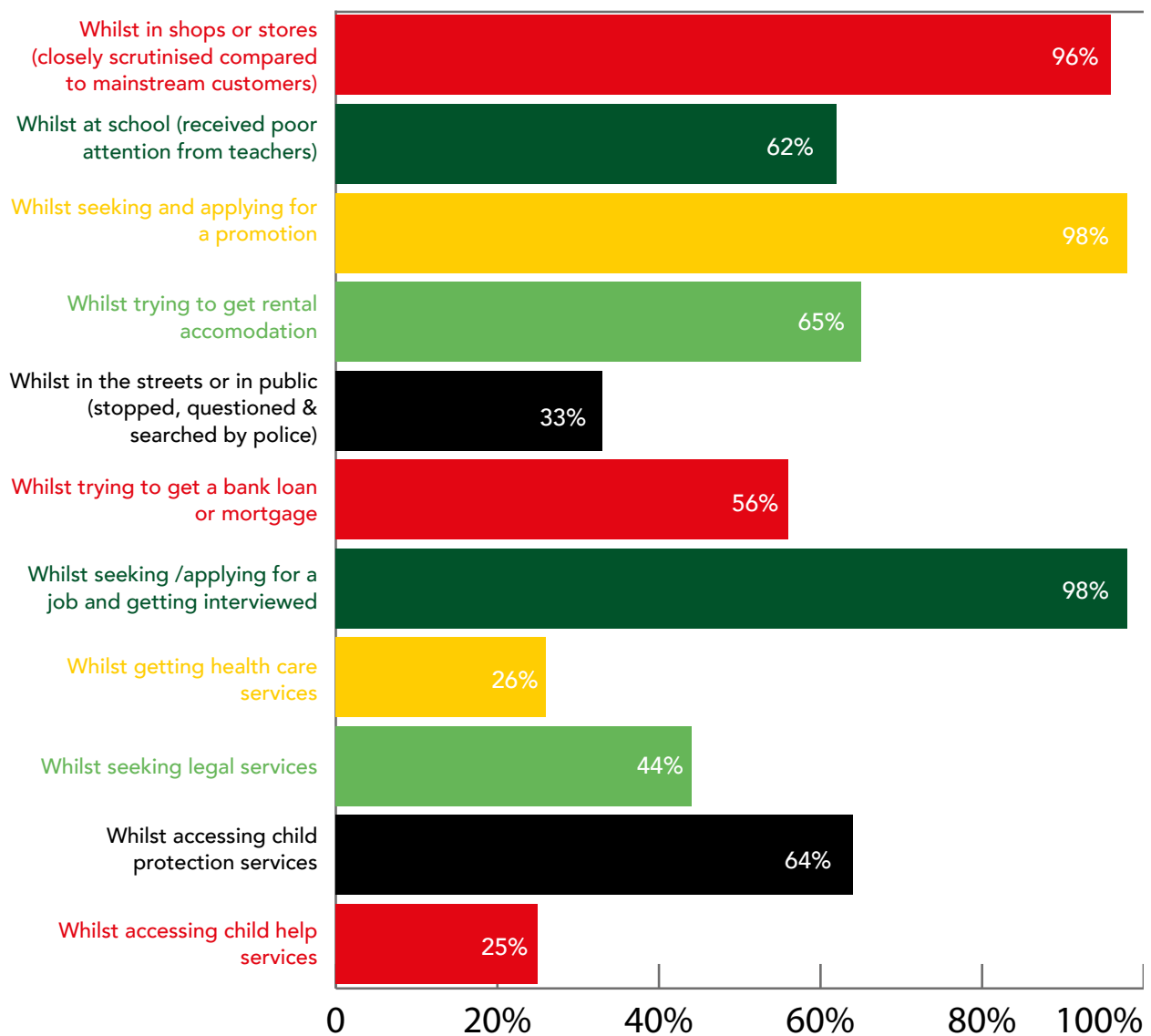


Figure 12: Participants personal experiences of discrimination and racism.

Legal and information literacy

Survey respondents were asked about their knowledge, understanding, trust, and confidence in accessing social and legal services. As shown in Figure 13, participants reported low perceived trust in the criminal justice system because of lack of understanding and knowledge. They also reported low confidence in seeking help from the broader mainstream social services. A significant number of survey respondents further indicated their limited ability in articulating their rights and responsibilities under the law, highlighting the challenges involved when dealing with both the criminal justice system and other social services.

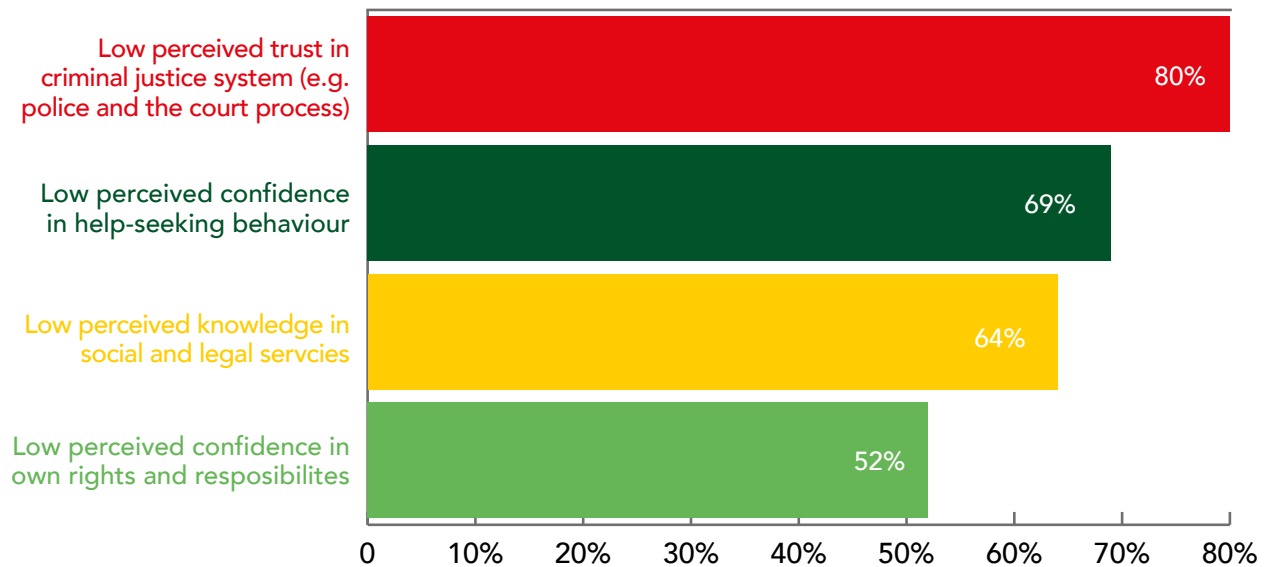


Figure 13. Perceived trust and information literacy challenges reported by participants.

Services, programs, and interventions

Individual level approaches

Survey respondents identified and proposed several individual level intervention approaches that can help justice involved young people to stop reoffending and prevent others from engaging in future offending behaviour. These interventions, among others, included instilling positive attitudes, values and beliefs in young peoples, helping them acquire adaptive coping, emotion regulation and problem-solving skills, helping them develop a positive self-concept, involving them in religious and club activities, teaching them social skills, and fostering their healthy psychological development from an early age. As indicated in Figure 14, participants rated very highly all these intervention strategies.

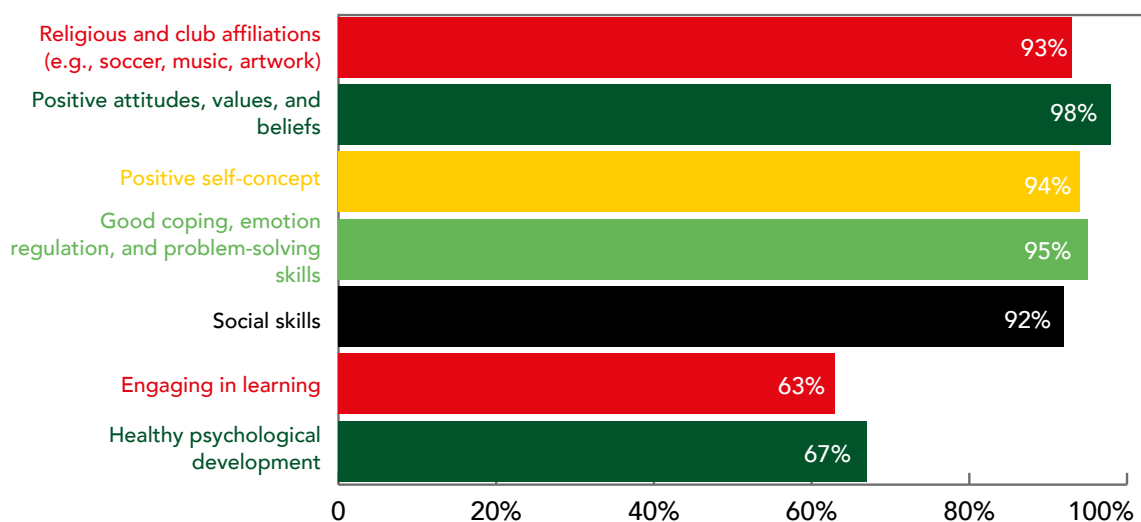


Figure 14. Individual level intervention strategies proposed by survey participants.

Family level interventions

Survey respondents identified and proposed several intervention strategies that could be implemented at family level to reduce youth offending and prevent others from entering the criminal justice system. As shown in Figure 15, some of the strategies rated very highly by survey respondents included ensuring adequate parental supervision, stability of the family unit, engaging in parent-children shared activities, and managing behavioural problems constructively.

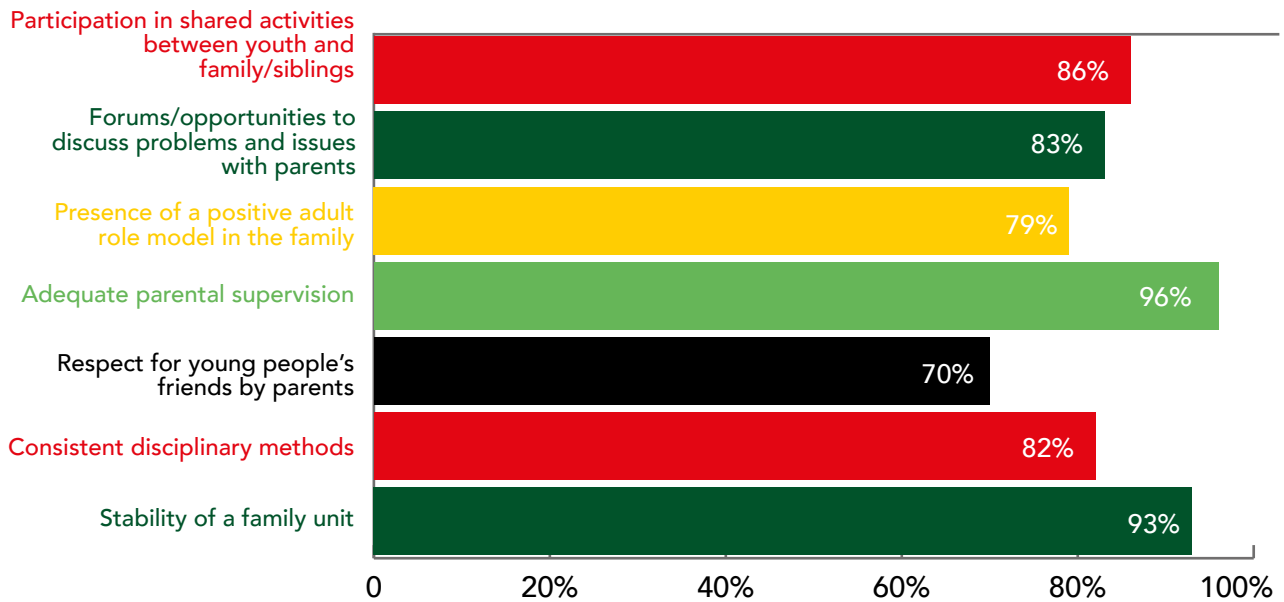


Figure 15. Family level intervention strategies proposed by survey participants.

Peer level interventions

Survey respondents considered helping young people develop positive friendship circles and educating them to engage in safe recreational pursuits as important intervention strategies. They rated these strategies very highly along with other approaches as indicated in the Figure 16.

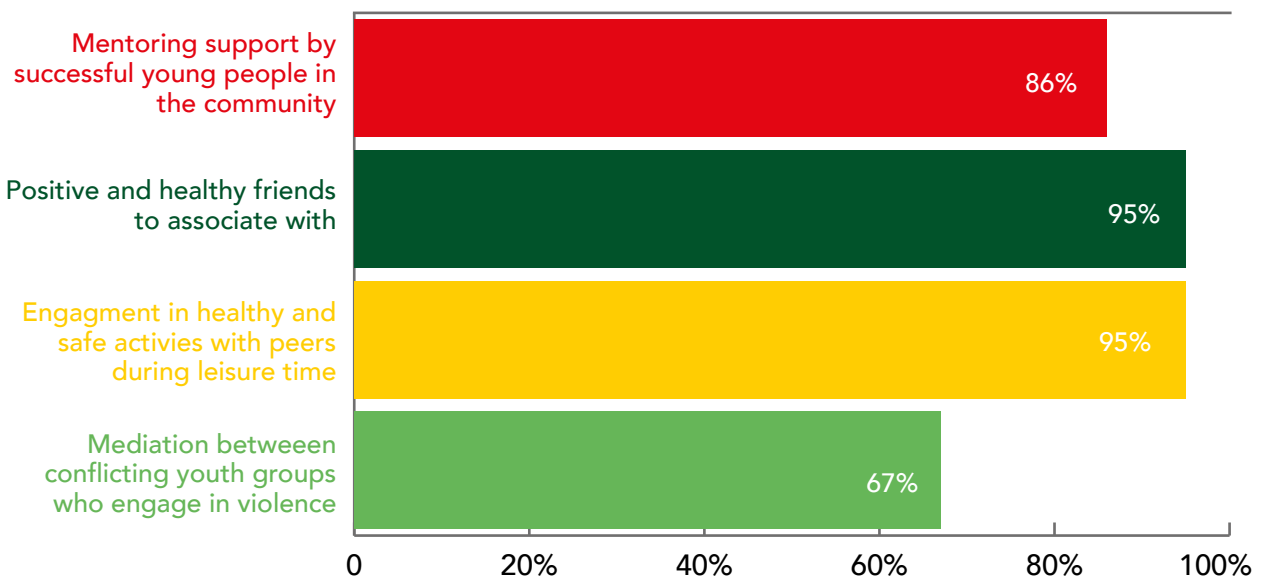


Figure 16. Peer level intervention strategies proposed by survey participants

School/community level interventions

Survey respondents identified several interventions strategies at school and community level to reduce justice involved young people’s recidivism and antisocial behaviours. As indicated in Figure 17, they rated highly those approaches that they considered to be useful in tackling youth offend and antisocial behaviours. Some of these strategies included involvement of parents in school activities, and policies and practices that ensure inclusiveness, equity, safe learning environment, and social and emotional wellbeing.

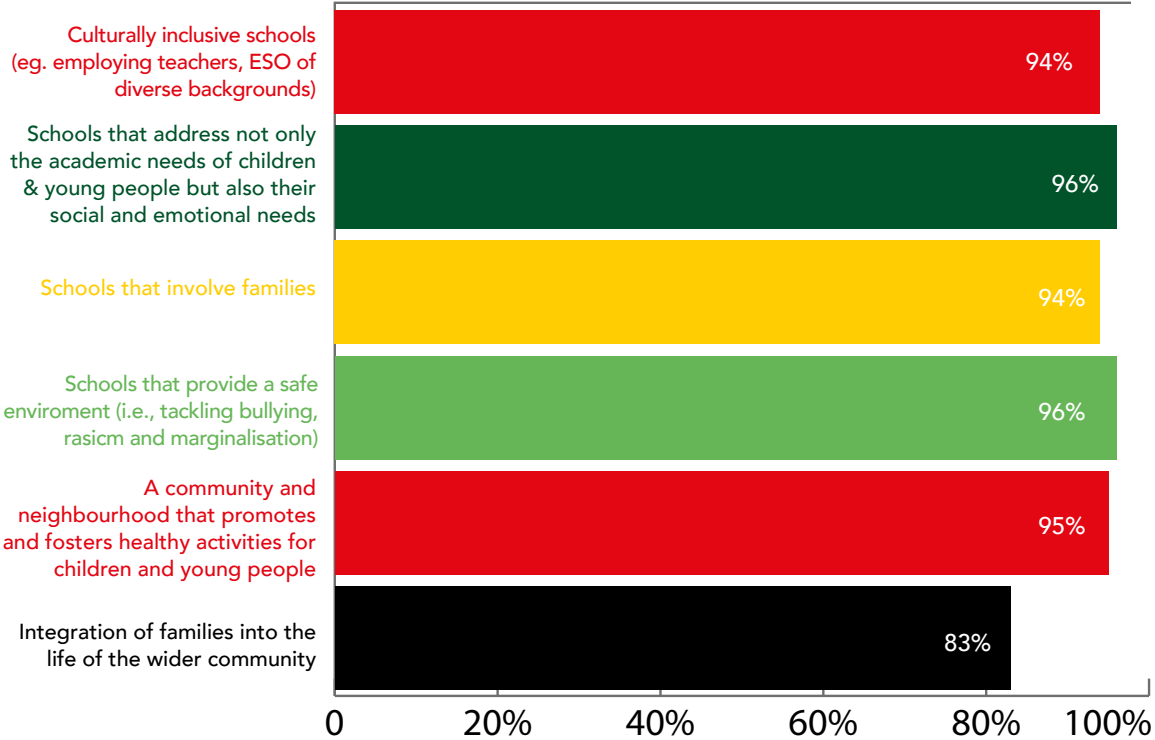


Figure 17. School/community level interventions identified and proposed by survey participants.



Institutional level interventions

Survey respondents also considered interventions at institutional level. They identified several important institutional level responses for justice involved young people's offending and antisocial behaviours. As indicated in Figure 18, some of the approaches that they recommended and rated highly include, ensuring that implementation of cross-cultural policies and procedures are tangible and accountable, consultation with the African South Australian communities on issues that affect them, and building partnership with young people, families, and communities to co-design culturally appropriate interventions.

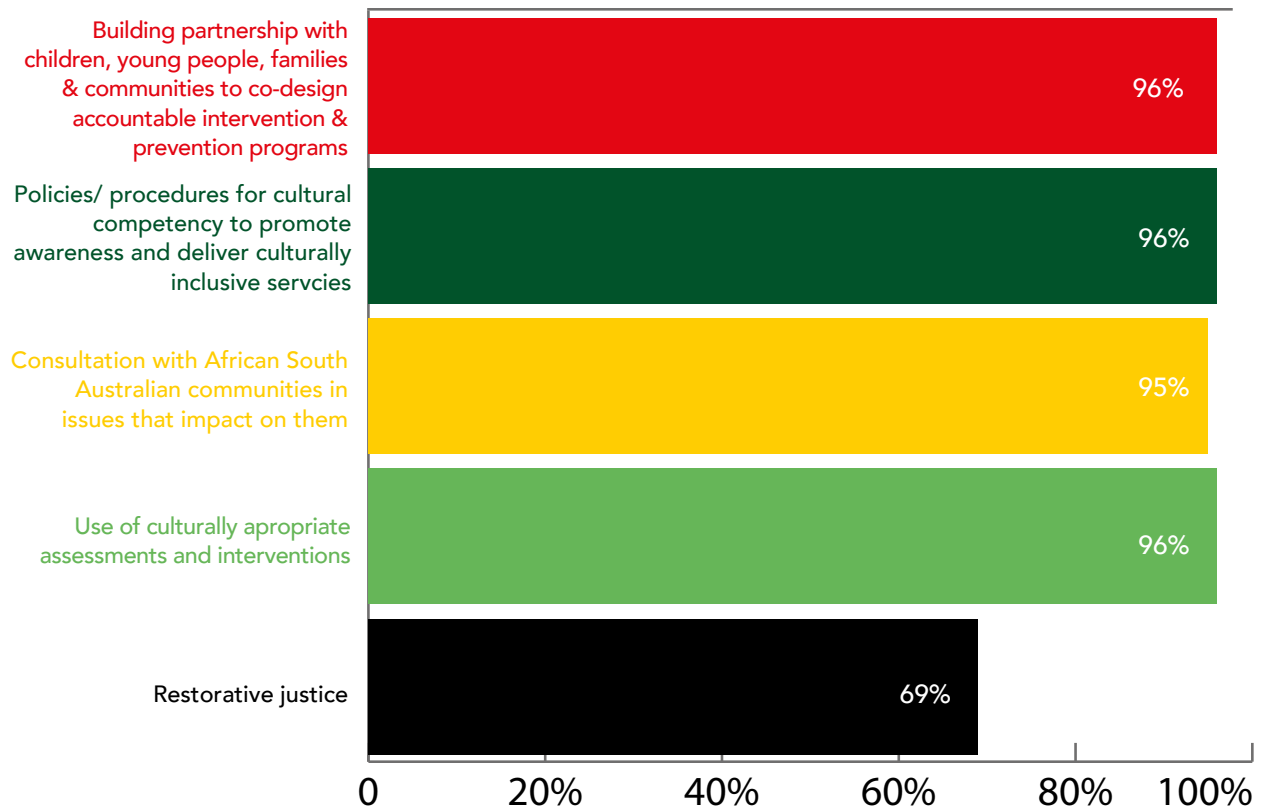


Figure 18. Institutional level intervention strategies proposed by survey participants



DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Themes from the focus group discussions and survey results revealed several causes, challenges, and potential solutions to violence and antisocial behaviours committed by African South Australian youth. We have presented these findings within the context of the socio-ecological conceptual framework as depicted in Figure 19. We used this framework to explain our findings and implications of these findings for prevention and intervention approaches at the individual, familial/relational, community/organisational, and structural or societal levels. The overlapping rings in the Figure illustrate how factors at one level influence factors at another level.

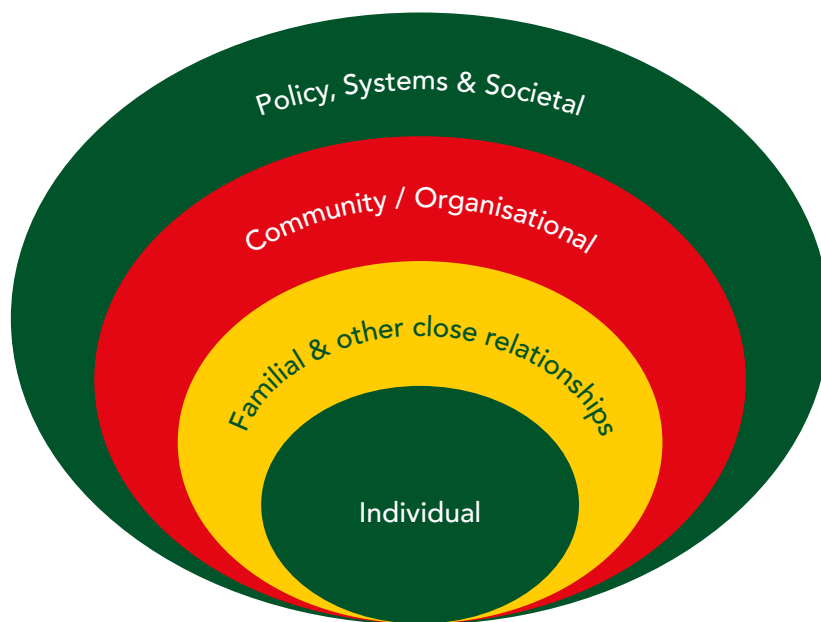


Figure 19. The socio-ecological model of risk factors, challenges, intervention & prevention approaches to African South Australian youth violence and antisocial behaviours.

Preventive Actions and Key Recommendations

There was a consensus during our inquiry that establishing strong partnership with the African South Australian communities was a key preventive measure to youth violence and antisocial behaviours. It was further noted that most services tend to overlook the importance of co-designing services and fail to consider culture, values, beliefs, and perspectives of services recipients, reducing their perceived effectiveness and appropriateness by those who attempt to seek help.

Recommendation 1

The South Australian Government empower the African Communities Council of South (ACCSA) with adequate funding and resources. As a peak body, ACCSA continues to advocate and play crucial advocacy and advisory role for all matters involving the African South Australian communities. This work is primarily undertaken on voluntary capacities by both members and non-members of the African South Australian communities. Funding ACCSA appropriately and adequately enables the development and implementation of culturally responsive government policies and intervention programs.

It was evident from our findings that justice involved African South Australian youth typically come from neighbourhoods and communities characterised by entrenched socioeconomic disadvantages where opportunities for prosocial pursuits or activities and interactions with

others are limited. Research indicated that youth offending can be tackled by addressing these underlying risk factors through the justice reinvestment strategy. Justice reinvestment empowers communities experiencing disadvantage to find local solutions to economic and social risk factors behind offending. It focuses on the wellbeing of children and young people and intervenes early in their lives to help prevent crime from happening, and to help avoid children and young people getting caught in a pattern of offending behaviour.

Recommendation 2

The South Australian Government consider developing an African Communities Action Plan like that developed in Victoria to address structural disadvantages and enable their participation in the social, economic, and cultural spheres and reach their full potential.

In terms of prevention, the need for improved community and organisational settings was highlighted (e.g., by creating safe places where young people live, learn, work, and play) and by addressing other conditions that give rise to violence in communities (e.g., neighbourhood poverty, residential segregation, and instability). Participants specifically highlighted that a youth-friendly public space in these communities are critically lacking. Young people reportedly attempted to utilise common public places to connect and socialise; however, such gatherings have been constantly monitored, interrupted, and viewed negatively or suspiciously, leading to regular harassment by police and private security personnel. Young people reportedly attempted to utilise common public places to connect and socialise; however, such gatherings have been constantly monitored, interrupted, and viewed negatively or suspiciously, leading to regular harassment by police and private security personnel.

Recommendation 3

Invest in community centres starting in the north of Adelaide based on an Africa Village model. Such initiatives are currently showing promising results in Queensland. Young people and community members can go to these centres to access information and services which address their needs, including counselling, cultural activities, referral service, life skills, mentoring, and recreational activities.

For African South Australian youth to thrive, succeed, and lead a socially desirable and fulfilling life, supportive relationships are crucial. Focus group participants emphasised the importance of addressing issues surrounding information literacy and barriers to essential services. They told us that parents of justice involved young people and those at risk of being involved would need to be equipped with knowledge and understanding of services available to them. They highlighted the need for culturally tailored programs that enable parents to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing relationship with their children and engage in positive and supportive interactions. Focus group participants further noted that at risk parents or families would benefit from programs that help them understand the context of appropriate discipline, boundaries, and developmentally appropriate limits of childrearing practices in Australia, and help on how to implement these practices best.

Focus group participants also emphasised the need for substantial support systems for parents in times of hardship, such as a positive network of support (e.g., friends, family) or access to resources (e.g., housing, food, and transportation), and accessible intervention for mental health

problems, substance abuse, and family violence. However, focus group participants expressed considerable concerns that current services operate in silos, rendering needs of young people and their families impossible to track. It is noteworthy that making current services accessible to the most disadvantaged members of our communities requires genuine partnership and collaboration with our peak organisation, ACCSA. Merely opening possibilities for choice and participation will not necessarily lead to more effective services if this just means more “one-size-fits-all” services to choose from, or if participation remains restricted to consultation.

Recommendation 4

Re-allocate resources from the current silos-based allocation of funds across both government and non-government agencies to an integrated and more accessible model of service delivery for justice involved African South Australians, their families, and other at-risk members of the communities. These groups have very low help-seeking behaviour and most are disadvantaged within their communities and have been excluded from many opportunities that others access relatively easily. They cannot competently and confidently navigate services in similar ways to other migrants, and consequently, they have become the least serviced and connected groups across the current government and non-government service delivery modalities.

Recommendation 5

In line with Recommendation 3 and within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, fund the development and implementation of education programs for justice involved young people, families, and other at-risk members of the communities to improve their information literacy and help-seeking behaviour. The education should focus on aspects of life in a new cultural context, including language skills, gender relations and expectations, gender and work, rights, responsibilities, and legal services.

Recommendation 6

Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop culturally sensitive and responsive interventions that enhance family relationships, connectedness, and wellbeing. These interventions should seek to build on social support, family hardiness, and problem-solving communication.

Recommendation 7

Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop a positive parenting skills and support system for fathers. We heard from most justice involved African South Australian young people that their fathers were absent in their lives and struggled with changing gender roles, self-concept, and confidence as father figures.

Recommendation 8

Within the context of an integrated model of services or suite of programs, develop culturally sensitive and accessible alcohol abuse and mental health services for at risk African South Australian youth, families, other members of the communities.

Recommendation 9

Fund and invest in the development of culturally responsive domestic violence intervention program within the African South Australian communities. Our findings indicated that domestic violence was one of the leading causes of family breakdowns, conflict within families, and young people's risk of involvement in the criminal justice system. We also heard during the focus group discussions that a significant number of women were 'suffering in silence' due to cultural beliefs in the authority of husbands over wives, in conjunction with a range of other cultural and structural reasons to not disclose violence from their male partners. Thus, the intervention program should not only aim to address men's violence at home, but also wraparound services to support victims and prevent risk of continued harm.

Recommendation 10

Fund and invest in a family safety framework, like MAPS (Multi Agency Protection Service), to protect vulnerable families from domestic violence and youth violence in the home. We heard that young people's violence at home is a serious problem within some families, it remains unaddressed and under-resourced, especially in comparison to young people's violence in the public sphere and street-based violence. We heard that these young people experience high levels of comorbid mental health issues, drug and alcohol use, anger issues, and trauma. We further heard that under-reporting is common as a result of a lack of community acknowledgement and understanding, parental guilt, denial, self-blame, stigma, shame, and not wanting their children to be subjected to a criminal response.

Recommendation 11

Whilst most of justice involved African South Australian youth are male, we heard from families that young girls have increasingly engaged in suicidal and self-harming behaviours further increasing the strain on at-risk groups within the communities. Fund a research project to explore and understand these issues in depth, with the aim to develop and implement appropriate prevention and intervention programs.

Our inquiry uncovered ongoing experiences both direct and indirect racial discrimination and everyday forms of racism among the broader African South Australian communities. Both focus group participants and survey respondents reported widely prevalent experiences of discrimination and racism, which gave rise to inequalities and different forms of disadvantages. Approximately 98% of participants reported experiencing discrimination whilst seeking promotional opportunities, with 96% reporting their experiences of being closely watched or observed by security personnel whilst in shops or stores. The degrees of these experiences are indeed staggering and reflect the obvious structurally embedded discriminatory experiences and realities of African South Australians irrespective of their involvement in the criminal justice systems.

Recommendation 12

We call upon the South Australian Government to seek and promote bipartisan commitment to implement well-coordinated, long-term, and properly-resourced anti-discrimination policies that ensures the full participation of African South Australians across both public and private spheres.

Recommendation 13

We call upon the Australian Government to establish independent body to pursue complaints from members of the African South Australian communities about perceived and actual experiences injustices due to their interactions with the criminal justice system and other institutions. This independent body should be mandated to receive, investigate, and monitor complaints about situations in which African South Australians' access to basic services and other opportunities are systematically denied or hindered, and work towards a change in practice.

Recommendation 14

There is a general concern that media portrayal of African South Australian youth and their communities as “problem groups” contributes to young people’s increased contact with the criminal justice system. We heard that racialised reporting of youth crime shifted the blame to communities, subjecting other law-abiding members to scrutiny and surveillance. Therefore, we call upon the South Australian Government to implement initiatives that improve attitudes and perceptions that are hard-to-legislate-against discrimination (e.g., tackling racialised reporting of crime that perpetuates stereotypes).

Individual-level risk factors and intervention approaches

Our findings indicated that several individual level risk factors were associated with antisocial behaviours and violence committed by justice involved African South Australian youth. These risk factors included, among others, gender, age, ethnicity, temperament, attitudes supportive of challenging behaviours, risk-taking behaviour, early experiences of adversity and trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence), disrupted behavioural, social, and emotional development, racism, marginalisation, and associated senses of resentment, frustration, hopelessness, and sense of alienation. Some of these risk factors (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity) are not modifiable through intervention, however, we found these personal characteristics useful in identifying the unique challenges, and intervention needs of at-risk groups in our communities. For example, we found that most justice involved African South Australian youth were of South Sudanese backgrounds, males under the age of 25, and that they also reported extensive experiences of marginalisation and exclusion because of their ethnic backgrounds.

The other individual risk factors (e.g., substance abuse, attitudes, risk taking behaviour) are dynamic or changeable in nature, and therefore, amenable to interventions. During our focus group discussions, we gained considerable insight into the intervention and treatment modalities of current approaches. For example, we have learned that the dominant Youth Justice and adult correctional practices in South Australia and elsewhere underpin the prevention and treatment of such dynamic risk factors. However, there is extensive evidence

showing that risk-based interventions tend to conceive justice involved young people in terms of their weaknesses, problems, deficits, and pathologies¹. When risk-based approaches are applied to ethnic and minority population groups as a dominant strategy, they oversimplify complex social, situational, cultural, structural challenges, and reduce ethnic minorities intervention needs simply into bundles of risks². Such concerns were apparent from participants narratives during the focus group discussions, highlighting over-reliance of current approaches on deficit or risk-based assessment, case management, and intervention strategies across both the Youth Justice and adult correctional systems. It is also worth noting that current intervention approaches focus attention and resources narrowly on “one size fits all” modality, which contributes to increased recidivism³. Thus, there has been limited effort in co-designing culturally relevant programs and services to represent the worldviews, perceptions, experiences, and values of justice involved African South Australian youth. Although we had heard about isolated instances where culturally tailored services were encouraged, we found no evidence to substantiate that these services or programs were conceptually valid and empirically supported in terms of cultural contents.

Therefore, our findings indicated that intervention programs and services for justice involved African South Australian youth cannot be fashioned by merely combining existing treatment resources within the framework of problems and deficits (e.g., intervention to address substance abuse, attitudinal issues, risk-taking behaviour, violence, and anger). This does not mean that risk-based approaches are irrelevant, but rather imply the need for balancing current practices with strengths-based approaches that encourage positive youth development by focusing on protective factors and building new social assets for youth. It is about engaging justice involved African South Australian youth in ways that recognise the presence of trauma symptoms and acknowledge the role that trauma has played in their lives. In this case, understanding and treating trauma should be the first step in helping justice involved African South Australian youth.

From the perspective of focus group participants, interventions should not only be tailored to manage and prevent risk, but also to approach trauma-related experiences sensitively and to build positive self-concept, social skills, collaboration, empathy, trust, acceptance, empowerment, hope, optimism, self-efficacy, inner strength, or resilience to overcome challenges. This assertion is in line with research that shows the role of strength-based interventions in young people’s post-traumatic growth, positive behavioural, and cognitive changes⁴. This means that working with justice involved young people from the perspective of strengths increases the likelihood of positive outcomes and enhances their ability to regulate emotions and actions, solve problems adaptively, connect, and interact with others positively. Thus, there was a consensus among focus group participants that the current intervention approaches, which dominantly focus on addressing risk factors are insufficient. Participants highlighted the need and importance of augmenting the current risk-focused interventions with both trauma informed and strengths-based approaches to tackle the causes of young people’s offending behaviours, and build prosocial skills.

1 A. Robinson 2015, *'The Resilience Motif: Implications for Youth Justice'*.

2 K. Haines & S. Case, 2015. *Positive Youth Justice: Children first, offenders second*.

3 T. Ward, 2006. *Promoting human goods and reducing risk*.

4 S. Lewis, 2014. *Learning from Success and Failure*

Recommendation 15

Develop trauma-informed interventions tailored to the unique challenges and experiences of justice involved African South Australians. This will offer the opportunity for healing and recovery from traumatic experiences, and consequently help to reduce the likelihood of engaging in violence and anti-social behaviour.

Recommendation 16

To prevent violence and antisocial behaviours of justice involved African South Australian youth, develop a suite of evidence-based interventions that aim to:

- build on their strengths and help them make positive changes instead of focusing dominantly on problems and risks.
- help young people develop based on their positive attributes rather than focusing on the negative attributes; or identifying what young people excel at or something that they like to do, and using these to develop their reintegration plan and goals.
- capitalise on what they take an interest in—sports, vocational area, art, and so on.
- support and reinforce prosocial activities or involvement in several domains—school, family, community. This could include helping them identify or discover prosocial pursuits they did not even know they were interested in.

Familial/relational risk factors and intervention approaches

Findings from our focus group discussions and survey results identified two domains of relational risk factors associated with antisocial behaviour and violence committed by justice involved African South Australian youth. The first relates to family-level risk factors. We heard from participants how conflicts arising from changes in gender roles, intergenerational differences, family power dynamic, domestic violence, divorce or broken families, loss of parental confidence, mental health problems, inappropriate/inadequate childrearing practices, and low level of positive parental involvement can increase young people's vulnerability to problematic behaviours. Family factors were clearly influential and shaped justice involved young people's behaviour and developmental journey; however, the nature of family-related issues reported by focus group participants cannot be seen in isolation from the acculturation challenges and socio-economic disadvantages outlined throughout this report. It is also worth noting here that our findings refer to only a small, but gradually increasing number of young people and families who have been stuck in the revolving door of the criminal justice system. For this, targeted rehabilitation or intervention strategies are critically needed as well as preventive services and programs detailed earlier to stop other at-risk groups from entering the criminal justice system.

Another relational risk factor identified during the focus group discussion was peer influence. Justice involved African South Australians spoke how easy it was to get caught up in behaviours that they would never have considered by themselves, including school dropout, substance abuse, violence, and antisocial behaviours. Due to their young age, they were not always equipped with experience and skills to resist negative peer influence. Peer pressure was, thus, one of the strongest offending risk factors reported by African South Australian youth, which

was primarily learned and reinforced through intimate personal groups and association. From the perspective of intervention, children and young people can benefit from association with prosocial peers, mentors, and role models.

Recommendation 17

Appropriately consult with justice involved African South Australian youth, families and relevant community leaders in the design and development of intervention programs to stimulate change in their attitudes and behaviour.

Recommendation 18

Justice involved African South Australian youth represent a hard-to-reach population group. Therefore, both government and non-government service providers should invest in programs that promote trust, positive friendships, and connections.

Community/Organisational level risk factors and intervention approaches

Outside the immediate family and peers, we explored community, institutional or organisational level risk factors associated with youth violence and antisocial behaviours. We found that the ways in which justice involved young people of African backgrounds and their families interacted with certain institutional settings such as schools and criminal justice systems influenced their risk of engagement in violence and/or antisocial behaviours. For example, justice involved young people who participated in our focus group discussions commonly reported low academic achievement, low commitment to school, poor parent-school relationships, and challenging classroom settings (e.g., experiences of racism, discrimination, and bullying). They attributed some of these risk factors to the onset and development of their offending behaviours. Indeed, these findings are consistent with research, particularly with what has been commonly known as the “school-to-prison pipeline” or “school-prison nexus”⁵ that characterises minority populations. The “school-to-prison pipeline” phenomenon was reported as being highly prevalent among the South Sudanese communities, and to a lesser and significant degree within other African South Australian communities. Focus group participants further attributed this phenomenon to inadequate resources in schools, a lack of cross-cultural competence, and low tolerance to disciplinary problems, which have reportedly placed some young people on an accelerated path to juvenile justice contact, and ultimately their involvement with the adult criminal justice system. Thus, the importance of adequate school resources cannot be underestimated. Schools should always be equipped and resourced adequately to strive, involve parents positively and proactively, create inclusive environment, implement culturally competent programs to engage at risk young people of African backgrounds, tackle discrimination and racism, and provide a safe learning environment.

5 A. Heitzeg, 2009. *Education Or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and The School to Prison Pipeline*

Recommendation 19

Develop justice reinvestment strategies to tackle the causes of crime and address entrenched disadvantages. Recent years have seen drastic increase in the amount funding that goes toward incarcerating youth and adults. There has also been a rise in the cost of living and decline in funding for basic social services such as affordable housing, education, employment opportunities, culturally safe and sensitive counselling venues. We heard during the focus group discussions that disinvestment in these areas disproportionately impacted justice involved African South Australian youth, their families, and other at-risk members of communities. Therefore, reinvestment in these areas is a principal strategy in achieving community safety.

Recommendation 20

Invest in African South Australian children's early years to prevent harm and reduce the probability of later offending. The early years of life is a critical period for children's healthy development, and can shape the way children learn, develop, and form meaningful relationships. Any support they receive at this stage of their life, including prevention of discrimination and racism at school, has long lasting effects and influence on their mental and physical health, social adjustment, and educational achievement.

Recommendation 21

Invest in helping justice involved young people of African backgrounds to stay engaged or re-engage in education and training. African South Australian youth who have been involved in youth justice have experienced disrupted education or disengagement. Initiatives that help these vulnerable young people to maintain or reengage with education and training can help steer them away from anti-social behaviour and set them up for a more positive future. For a maximum impact, this initiative should be integrated and comprehensively coordinated, including promotion of young people's health and wellbeing, mentoring, collaborating with families and communities, providing flexible learning options and extra assistance at school.

We also found that differential treatment of African South Australian youth by the criminal justice systems had contributed to incidents of disproportionate arrests, criminal charges, and convictions. For example, participants reported being stopped and searched in public places, which they perceived as discriminatory and unfair. They felt that they were targeted, stating that oversurveillance of their neighbourhoods and lack of appropriate entertainment venues increased the likelihood of their arrests and charges laid on them compared to other justice involved young people from the mainstream population. They expressed considerable concerns, highlighting the consistent and pervasive power differentials and how police arrived at disproportionately punitive outcomes when dealing with members of the African South Australian communities. Our findings further indicated that justice involved African South Australian youth and their families had limited knowledge of the legal system and court processes, which increased the likelihood of disproportionate and tougher sanctions.

Therefore, another critical area for intervention relates to criminal justice systems. First, daily lived experiences of justice involved African South Australian youth entailed a lack of trust and confidence in police, a theme which was consistent with national and international research about police officers' discretionary behaviour and implicit bias when dealing with individuals from minority ethnic backgrounds. Such biases result in officers connecting people to stereotypes based on identity characteristics rather than actual behaviours. As noted earlier, research has shown that predominantly people of colour are subject to higher rates of police-initiated contact regardless of actual local crime rates, resulting in over-policing of lower-level crime and behaviours. There is a clear need for training and education initiatives for police and those working in the justice system. We believe that positive benefits would be gained from commitment to increase awareness of issues facing African South Australian communities more broadly by maintaining good community relations. Of particular importance is the need to build understanding about the pre-migration experiences of young people and their families, as well as the need for police to appreciate the key differences between different African South Australian communities. We noted some encouraging trend at the present time in the employment of African descent in the police force, which is a positive step to improving the policing of young people. Overall, what we have learned from this inquiry is that trust can be a barrier; but with commitment to ethical and sensitive policing, effective and fair law enforcement can be delivered. It is also important to note that research shows that youth policing strategies must be culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of different social groups⁶. Ignoring cultural differences can lead to inappropriate policing of African South Australians.

Recommendation 22

Invest in programs that improve interaction between the police and African South Australian youth, especially those from South Sudanese backgrounds. This could involve enhancing current programs or developing new ones that engage young people in community policing initiatives, recreational programs, and crime prevention activities.

Recommendation 23

Police undertake compulsory professional development training about cultural sensitivity and norms of African South Australian communities to improve their cultural competency and duties without bias. This training should be delivered in partnership with or by African South Australian educators and should aim to include acculturation challenges associated with pre-and post-migration challenges such as trauma, discrimination, and racism.

Recommendation 24

Ensure police practice guidelines require minimal use of discretionary stops and searches, strongly promote police cautioning, bail agreements, early intervention, and referrals for less serious or first time African South Australian young offenders. Research has demonstrated that young people who are diverted from the formal justice system re-offend less than those who attend court.

6 Payne et al. (2009), *Developing a Citywide Youth Violence Prevention Plan*.

Recommendation 25

Police should involve families, community leaders, and other relevant agencies in addressing problem behaviours and in identifying and preventing crime.

Our findings have further implications for legal services, courts, juvenile justice, and the adult correctional system. We heard from justice involved youth and their families about the complexity of court systems, their limited legal literacy, inadequate legal services, lack of representation in courts, and perceived discrimination. We found that diversionary schemes are commonly of limited use when African South Australian youth appear before courts. We heard from service providers about chronic shortages of resources in these areas, implying the need for targeted funding to deliver a fair and equitable justice. They highlighted that appropriate funding would ensure that parents and families or communities play a central role in critical decisions that impact their children and young people. Importantly, it was noted that a young person's parents and family should not only be invited, but also encouraged to participate in juvenile court diversion, detention, and other community-based order hearings.

Recommendation 26

Courts implement culturally responsive restorative justice approaches to reduce reoffending and enhance community safety.

Recommendation 27

Courts should develop a diversionary scheme for African-South Australian youth, ensuring meaningful involvement of families and representatives of relevant communities.

Recommendation 28

Fund and establish a legal service specific to support at risk African South Australian youth, families, and other vulnerable members of the communities. It was particularly noted that many justice involved young people appear before courts unrepresented and lacked insight into the importance of representation in courts.

With respect to both Youth Justice and adult correctional system, services and interventions predominantly focus on criminogenic programs, and risk management (e.g., compliance with electronic conditions, and curfews). These are important risk management approaches. However, research has demonstrated that the most effective interventions are those that seek to balance risk-based approaches with strengths-based interventions that promote self-efficacy, resilience, hope and optimism in young people. Research also indicates that intervention programs and services have limited efficacy when they do not consider the values, beliefs, and attitudes of culturally diverse groups⁷. It is, thus, fundamentally important for both Youth Justice and adult correctional systems to articulate the unique rehabilitation needs of justice involved African South Australian youth at policy and practice level.

⁷ Jeffrey A. Butts et al., 2010. *Framing Justice Interventions Using the Concepts of Positive Youth Development*

It is worth noting here that the 2021-2022 Youth Justice statistics in South Australia identified 509 justices involved young people, of which 4.5% (n=23) were of African ancestral origin. The total adult correctional population in 2022 was 3133, with those from African ancestral origins accounting for 1.8% (n=56), of which 89% were under the age of 25 years old. The overall number of justices involved African South Australian youth is, thus, small enough to provide targeted, intensive intervention, and adequate post-release support.

Recommendation 29

Provide intensive wrap-around supervision programs that offer an array of services tailored to the specific needs of justice involved African South Australian young people. These programs should encourage and facilitate positive youth development and supervision programs that allow young people to remain at home and continue in their schooling.

Recommendation 30

Provide adequate post-supervision and post-release support. We heard that young people are often released from detention and completed community-based sanctions without adequate support or links. This has reportedly contributed to their isolation and disconnectedness, increasing their risk of recidivism. Thus, post-release and post-supervision support such as mentoring, engagement with education and employment, and access to other social services are fundamentally necessary to prevent reoffending.

Recommendation 31

Ensure that justice involved young people, parents, families, and communities have meaningful partnership and participation in the development and implementation of Youth Justice rehabilitation and reintegration services.

Recommendation 32

Ensure adequate transitional planning and continuity of intervention work when justice involved African South Australian young people are transferred to adult correctional systems. The age and background of these young people are likely to limit their ability to navigate and better integrate in the adult correctional interventions and service systems. We heard during the focus group discussions that young people of African backgrounds experienced considerable adjustment problems upon entering the adult correctional systems, and unable to comprehend mainstream intervention programs. Therefore, where there is an established working alliance or rapport with young people prior to leaving the Youth Justice, arrangement that ensures the continuity this work is critically important and enhances young people's prospect of successful rehabilitation.

Societal/structural risk factors and intervention approaches

In addition to individual, family, and community/organisational level risk factors, our inquiry identified societal and structural barriers associated with the likelihood of young people's involvement in the criminal justice system. A common theme was the view that young people's violence and antisocial behaviours were linked to macro-level political, economic, and social disadvantages and inequalities. It was pointed out that justice involved young people and other at-risk groups across the African South Australian communities relatively experience greater social isolation and resource deprivation, which result in the fostering of challenging behaviours. Indeed, our findings were consistent with the extensive national and international research that demonstrates the correlation between structural disadvantages of minority youth and offending behaviour⁸, primarily driven by resentment, frustration, hopelessness, marginalisation, and sense of alienation that the structural disadvantages and inequalities create. We also heard from focus group participants how crimes committed by African South Australian youth were further intensified by public and media discourses, which commonly appear to have taken on racialised tones, as though crimes were solely committed by people of specific racial backgrounds. This reportedly continues to perpetuate negative stereotypes, perceptions of exaggerated criminality, and indiscriminate law enforcement responses within sections of the African South Australian communities.

There was also a common perception that laws, policies, procedures, and citizenship rights often underpin universal principles and rarely articulate structural barriers and disadvantages of minority groups. For example, focus group participants, including justice involved youth, spoke about challenges surrounding labour force and how the notion of a merit-based selection process for employment was rarely accurate based on their experiences, and they considered this to be more of a myth than a fact. They reported both overt and covert forms of discrimination and racism whilst seeking employment, promotion, and in trying to access public or private services. This is not to say that everyone experiences racism and discrimination in the same way, and all the time. Rather our findings highlighted the presence of structural forms of disadvantages that have heightened the risk of some young people getting involved in the criminal justice system, which by extension have impacted on our communities as whole. For example, as noted in this report, racialised media coverage of crimes committed by African South Australian youth in recent times have generated stereotypical and discriminatory treatment of law-abiding members of our communities.

Macro-level interventions should, thus, focus on government policies and strategic directions that aim to address disadvantages and inequalities. In this case, our findings indicated key policy and strategic level interventions that can prevent and address violence and antisocial behaviours of youth.

8 Jeffery T. Ulmer et al., 2012. *Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Structural Disadvantage and Crime*.



Recommendation 33

Ensure legal and citizenship rights (e.g., eliminate discretionary or arbitrary treatment of African South Australian youth by police).

Recommendation 34

Reduce poverty by increasing participation of at-risk youth, families, and community members in the labour market.

Recommendation 35

Improve information literacy to ensure access to key areas of services, especially in education, housing, health, and welfare sectors.

Recommendation 36

The South Australian Government work with relevant departments and non-government service providers to ensure measurable and accountable cross-cultural competence. This should include the following:

- Employing African South Australians in key service delivery domains such schools, health, child protection, and criminal justice systems.
- developing effective and targeted strategies to address discrimination, prejudice and racism experienced by African South Australians
- involving African South Australian communities as genuine partners in the development and delivery of services, programs and education initiatives for their communities
- provision of information and education programs on the backgrounds, culture and diversity of African South Australian communities, including pre- and post-migration aculturation challenges to assist service providers and other stakeholders
- engaging and supporting African South Australian communities to develop initiatives to address particular areas of concern they have identified (e.g., trauma, family violence, youth violence in homes).

Recommendation 37

The South Australian Government to promote and invest in schemes that encourage opportunities for African South Australians within the business communities.

Recommendation 38

The South Australian Government invest in research to develop, pilot, and evaluate a whole-of-government early prevention programs that address the underlying drivers of violence and antisocial behaviours by African South Australian youth.

Recommendation 39

The South Australian Government work with relevant departments to ensure that recommendations made throughout this report are genuinely considered and actioned.



CONCLUSION



CONCLUSION

The overarching objective of this project was to inquire into the causes, challenges, and potential solutions to violence and antisocial behaviours committed by African South Australian youth. The inquiry was based on focus group consultations including justice involved young people, their families, leaders, and members of the African South Australian communities as well as both government and non-government stakeholders. Survey questions were also administered to obtain additional information from those who were not part of the focus group discussions, but nonetheless were willing to put their views and perspectives forward by participating in the survey.

Themes from the focus group discussions and survey results revealed several risk factors associated with young people's violence and antisocial behaviours. This included: (1) individual risk factors (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, temperament, attitudes supportive of offending behaviours, risk-taking behaviour, early experiences of adversity and trauma such as abuse, neglect, and witnessing violence, disrupted behavioural, social, and emotional development), (2) familial and relational risk factors (e.g., changes in gender roles, intergenerational differences, family power dynamic, domestic violence, divorce or broken families, loss of parental confidence, mental health problems, inappropriate/inadequate childrearing, and low level of positive parental involvement), (3) community/organisational risk factors (e.g., impoverished neighbourhoods, challenging school settings such as experiences of racism, discrimination, and bullying), and (4) societal/structural risk factors (e.g., macro-level political, economic, and social disadvantages and inequalities).

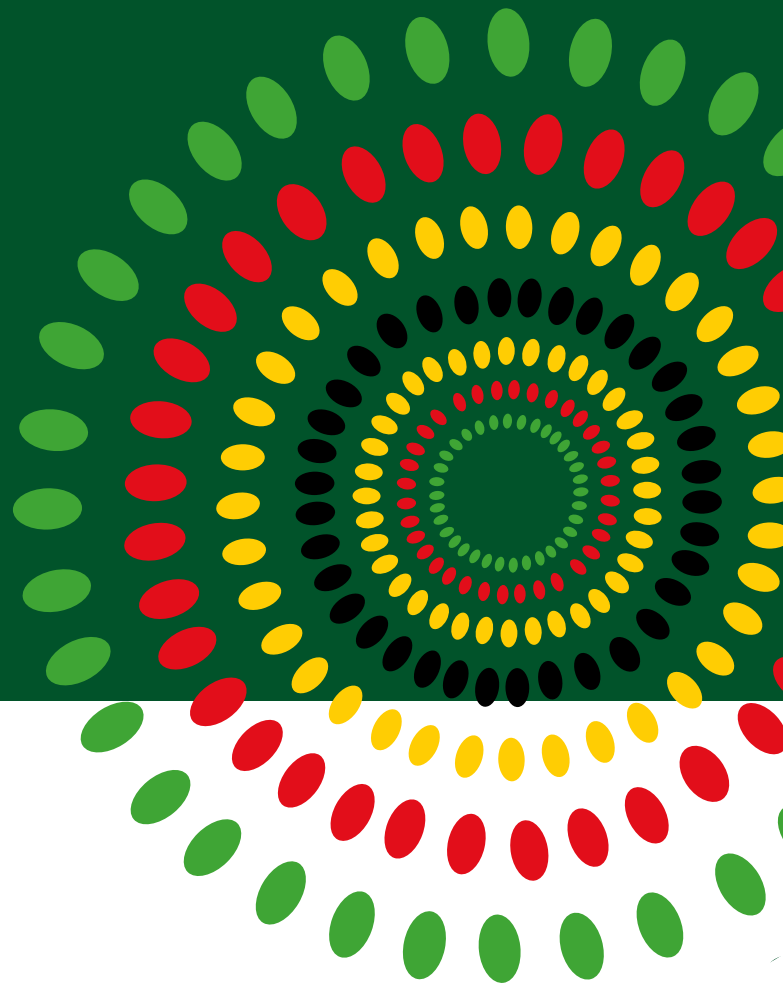
Findings of focus group discussions and survey results indicated the need for multifaceted intervention and prevention strategies consistent with the socio-ecological conceptual framework. At the individual level, the need and importance of augmenting risk-focused interventions with both trauma informed and strengths-based approaches were highlighted. At the familial/relational level, programs that can encourage and promote parental understanding of appropriate disciplining methods, boundary setting, developmentally appropriate childrearing practice, access to resources or services (e.g., housing, mental), positive association with prosocial peers, mentors, and role models were emphasised. At community/institutional level, the need for community and organisational settings that can create safe places where young people live, learn, work, and play were highlighted. Addressing other conditions that give rise to violence in communities (e.g., neighbourhood poverty, residential segregation, and instability) were also considered pivotal. At the societal and structural level, ensuring legal and citizenship rights, improvement in the working relationships among the criminal justice agencies, enforcement of cultural competence, reduction of poverty, improvement in information and legal literacy, and tackling racialised reporting of crime were considered effective interventions and preventive strategies.

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ACCSA

 23 Coglin Street Adelaide, SA, Australia 5000

 (08) 8410 3905

 admin@accsainc.org.au

 accsainc.org.au

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