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Chapter X

Migrant youth and social connectedness

Findings from the 2006 General Social Survey

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Introduction

Social connectedness refers to the social bonds, interactions and networks that come from close engagement with family and friends and active involvement and participation in social activities and community groups. Together with civic engagement, social connectedness is believed to contribute to the building of social capital and the development of a strong and active civil society (Putnam 1995). Research on migrant youth has also suggested that the social connectedness that comes from engagement with their family and community is an important form of social capital that can contribute to their adaptation to their new country of residence and their academic success (Zhou & Bankston 1994).

Previous studies examining migrant youth's social participation and connectedness in Australia have usually focused on their participation in education and the workforce. This is because the unavailability of more direct measures of social participation and social connectedness restricts researchers to examining participation in education and the workforce as proxy or indirect measures of social participation. Participation in education enables young people to become connected socially to a wider network of peers in a social community that is focused on learning, while

participation in the workforce allows young people to become connected to a wider social network of colleagues and co-workers in a workplace environment. Integration into the workforce is also seen as an important aspect of social connectedness, because it reduces the social isolation that those who are not employed may experience.

These studies have shown that some groups of migrant youth have higher participation rates in education than other groups and than Australian-born youth. High participation rates in education were observed among young people of the second generation whose parents were from countries such as China, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Vietnam (Khoo et al. 2002). However, unemployment rates were also high for some migrant youth, particularly those who were from China, Lebanon and Vietnam and living in low income suburbs in Sydney and Melbourne (Khoo & Birrell 2002). Migrant youth living in households where neither parent was employed were also at higher risk of unemployment. While these findings may provide some indications of migrant youth's social participation, they are based on indirect measures.

This chapter uses more direct measures of social participation and social and support networks to examine the social connectedness of migrant youth. It is based on recently available data on these indicators for a nationally representative sample of Australia's population. Specifically, it examines the social and support networks of migrant youth, their involvement and participation in various social and community groups and organisations, and their engagement in a variety of civic activities. The chapter also compares migrant youth with Australian-born youth on these measures of social connectedness.

Data and approach

The chapter is based on nationally representative data from the 2006 General Social Survey (GSS) conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The GSS collected information from 13,375 randomly selected households throughout Australia on a variety of issues, including social and support networks and social and community participation (ABS 2007). Information was obtained from one person aged 18 years and over in each household. Interviews were conducted by experienced ABS interviewers. Bilingual interviewers were used where the respondent might have had difficulty with the English language. The response rate was 86.5 per cent of households contacted.

Information was collected on the following measures of social and support networks and social and community participation.

Social and support networks

- Visited/visited by/went out with friends during the last three months

- Frequency of contact with family members and friends
- Engaged in social activity on the internet
- Has family member not living in the same household to whom person feels close and in whom he/she can confide, and number of such family members
- Has close friend and number of close friends in whom person can confide
- Ability to ask for small favours from someone
- Can get support from someone in times of crisis, and the sources of support

Social and community participation

- Attended a community event in the last six months
- Participated in a sports activity in the last twelve months
- Did unpaid volunteer work in last twelve months through an organisation
- Active involvement in various social activity groups in past twelve months
- Active involvement in various community groups in past twelve months
- Participation in civic activities such as signing a petition or taking part in a rally
- Feels able to have a say within the community on important issues

The youth population examined in this chapter includes persons aged 18–29 years in the survey. While ABS has defined young people as those aged 18–24 in previous analyses of data from the GSS (ABS 2006), I have decided to extend the youth age group to increase the number of migrant youth in the study. There were 2229 respondents in the survey aged 18–29 or 16.7 per cent of the total sample of 13,375. There were 54 young people in the survey who were long-term temporary residents, most likely overseas students or young people in Australia on working holiday visas. I have excluded them from the data analysis so that the study is focused on comparing migrant youth who are permanent residents or citizens of Australia with Australian-born youth. Of the 2175 young people remaining in the study, 1835 (84 per cent) were born in Australia and 340 (16 per cent) were born overseas: 113 in the main English-speaking countries (United Kingdom, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, United States and South Africa) and 227 in other (non-English-speaking) countries. Migrant youth from the main English-speaking (MES) countries are compared with those from non-English-speaking (Other) countries and with Australian-born youth on their social connectedness.

A limitation of the data is that it is not possible to examine the migrant youth by their country or region of origin because of the small sample size, but only according to whether they are from English-speaking or non-

English-speaking countries, as pre-coded by ABS in the confidentialised unit record dataset released to researchers for analysis. Although data on visa category were also collected in the survey, the number of migrants interviewed for the survey who had arrived on humanitarian visas was too small for them to be identified separately in the confidentialised unit record dataset. Hence it was not possible to examine migrant youth by their visa category of migration in this chapter.

Migrant youth and their social connectedness

Table 1 shows the characteristics of the youth sample aged 18–29 by birthplace. The proportions of males and females were about equal, although the MES group had a higher percentage of males than the other groups. About half were aged 18–24 and half were aged 25–29. There was not much difference in household composition among the three birthplace groups.

Youth from the non-MES countries were more likely to be studying full time than youth from MES countries or Australia. They were also more likely to have degree qualifications while the MES and Australian-born youth were more likely to have technical or vocational qualifications. Migrant youth from MES countries had the highest labour force participation rate and the lowest unemployment rate among the three groups shown, while young people from non-MES countries had the lowest labour force participation rate and the highest unemployment rate. The latter's higher unemployment rate was likely to be related to a higher percentage of recent arrivals and a small percentage who did not speak English well, which would have hindered their employment. Most of the young migrants from MES countries had migrated as dependants, most likely with their parents – so they might have been more likely to have had some of their education in Australia. A greater percentage of the young migrants from other countries had been the primary migrant and possibly older at the time of migration compared with their peers from MES countries.

Social and support networks

Comparisons of the youth's social and support networks by their birthplace are shown in Table 2. Over 90 per cent had visited, or been visited by, their friends in the three months before the survey, but the percentage for migrant youth from non-English-speaking countries was still significantly lower than for the other two groups. Youth from the non-MES countries were also less likely to have gone out with friends for outdoor activities compared with the other two groups. All three groups of young people indicated similar levels of social activity on the internet, with the percentage slightly higher for migrant youth from non-MES countries.

Young people from non-MES countries also reported lower frequency of face-to-face contact with family and friends. More than 20 per cent indicated that they had contact only once a month or less compared with 12

per cent of young people from MES countries and 13 per cent of Australian-born youth.

Almost all the migrant youth – 99 per cent from MES countries and 96 per cent from non-MES countries – had a support network comprising at least one family member living in a different household and/or a close friend in whom they could confide. This is a very positive finding. Young people from non-MES countries were more likely to indicate having either an ex-household family member or a friend but not both, compared with youth from MES countries and Australian-born youth. The other measures of support network also show that while most youth from non-MES countries could get some support in times of crisis or were able to ask for small favours, the percentage that could do so was lower than for Australian-born youth or migrant youth from MES countries. Youth from non-MES countries also had fewer non-household family members and friends to whom they felt close and in whom they could confide.

The non-MES group was examined further to see if their access to support networks varied by their demographic or human capital characteristics. Access to support networks was found to be correlated with employment status, but not with other characteristics. Migrant youth who were employed were more likely than those who were not employed to have a friend or family member in whom they could confide; they were also better able to get support in times of crisis and to ask for small favours (Figure 1). Young men from non-MES countries were less likely than young women to have an ex-household member that they felt close to and in whom they could confide. It would appear that young men from non-MES countries who were not employed were at particular risk of feeling socially isolated from their relatives.

Both family members and friends were important sources of support for migrant youth in times of crisis. Migrant youth from non-MES countries were less likely to ask a neighbour or a work colleague for support than Australian-born youth or migrant youth from MES countries. However, there was no difference between them and other young people in feeling able to approach non-government organisations (NGOs) or government agencies for assistance, although only a small minority indicated that they would seek assistance from NGOs or government agencies.

Social and community participation

Most measures of social and community participation show little difference between migrant youth and Australian-born youth (Table 3). The exceptions were participation in religious groups and ethnic/multicultural clubs and attendance at sporting events. Youth from non-MES countries were much more likely than those from MES countries and Australian-born youth to be actively involved in religious groups and ethnic/multicultural clubs and less likely to attend sporting events.

The percentage of youth from non-MES countries who had done volunteer work through an organisation in the twelve months before the survey was lower than for Australian-born youth but higher than for youth from MES countries; however, the differences were not large enough to be statistically significant (Table 3). A recent study of older migrants in Melbourne based on 2006 census data had found that the rate of volunteering was lower among migrants aged 25–64 from non-MES countries than for migrants from MES countries or people born in Australia (Healy 2007).²¹ The 2006 GSS also shows that there was also not much difference between migrant and Australian-born youth in the main reasons for volunteering, with similar proportions indicating wanting to help others or the community, to do something worthwhile and for personal satisfaction. The only difference was that a higher percentage of youth from non-MES countries (29 per cent) had volunteered because of their religious belief compared with youth from MES countries (23 per cent) or Australian-born youth (9 per cent).

The measures of participation in civic activities show that youth from non-MES countries were less likely to engage in these activities than youth from MES countries and Australian-born youth (Table 3). However, there was no difference between migrant youth and Australian-born youth in their response to the question about their ability to have a say in the community on important issues. About one in four young people in all three birthplace groups felt that they could have a say in the community all or most of the time, and another one in four felt they could have a say some of the time, but about 50 per cent in all three birthplace groups felt that they had a voice in the community on important issues little/none of the time.

Conclusion and further research

The 2006 General Social Survey shows that most migrant youth have good social and support networks, although youth from non-English-speaking countries are less well socially connected compared with other migrant youth and Australian-born youth. Youth from MES countries are quite similar to Australian-born youth on most indicators of social connectedness. Migrant youth's social connectedness appears to be correlated with employment – youth from non-MES countries who are employed are more likely to have wider social and support networks than those who are not employed.

Friends are particularly important sources of support for migrant youth, more so than family members for some young migrants. There was no

21. When migrants of all ages (18+) are considered, the 2006 GSS did show that migrants from non-MES countries had a significantly lower rate of volunteering compared with the Australian-born population and migrants from MES countries. The largest difference was observed in the age group 40–49, and the smallest difference among young people (those under age 30).

difference between youth from non-English-speaking countries and other young people in feeling able to approach government agencies and NGOs for assistance, although few young people from all three birthplace groups nominated community groups or government agencies as sources of support. People, particularly family members and friends, are more important sources of support than groups and institutions to both migrant and Australian-born youth.

The findings suggest that efforts to increase the social connectedness of migrant youth from non-MES countries need to come from within the family rather than from government agencies or NGOs. A significant minority of young people from non-MES countries, greater than the percentage among migrant youth from MES countries and Australian-born youth, are not able to obtain support from their family members in times of crisis. This is a concerning situation. The social isolation from family and friends experienced by this small minority of youth of non-MES background can have implications for their mental health and wellbeing and affect their educational outcomes. Studies of second-generation ethnic youth in the United States have suggested the importance of family and community resources in contributing to better education outcomes and adaptation (Portes 1994; Zhou & Bankston 1994). While it is sometimes believed that migrants from non-MES countries have strong family ties, the current findings indicate that these young migrants seem less able to call on family members for support in times of crisis than Australian-born youth or migrant youth from MES countries. It may be of interest to investigate whether intergenerational differences between migrant youth from non-MES countries and older family members are likely to have contributed to this situation. There have been anecdotal references to intergenerational conflict in some migrant communities in relation to issues such as social relationships, partnering outside the ethnic group and parents' expectations on a range of issues, including education, language maintenance and observance of cultural or religious traditions. More research on the dynamics of intergenerational relationships in migrant families of different ethnic backgrounds is clearly needed and will be helpful in developing initiatives to assist migrant youth and their families in addressing any intergenerational differences.

The correlation between employment and stronger support networks for migrant youth suggests the importance of employment for young people's social connectedness. The correlation does not necessarily indicate any causal effect and it is possible that an external set of factors or characteristics of migrant youth is correlated with both employment and stronger support networks. Further research is needed to examine this issue. Nonetheless efforts to improve migrant youth's employment opportunities may have positive implications for their social connectedness.

There is no difference between migrant youth from non-English-speaking countries and other youth in participation in most community groups and in feeling able to have a say in the community on important issues, although participation rates were low and only half of the young people

surveyed felt that they had voice in the community. Migrant youth from non-English-speaking countries are less likely to be involved in sports activity groups and civic activities. Instead they are more likely to participate in religious groups and ethnic/multicultural clubs compared with youth from MES countries and Australian-born youth, although their level of participation in these groups is similar to that of older migrants from non-MES countries. These findings indicate that there is scope to encourage young people – both overseas-born and Australian-born – to become more involved in their community. Perhaps parents and community groups themselves can play a more active role in this. Parents can set role models by being more actively involved in social and community groups and more socially connected themselves. Community groups may also need to be more proactive in promoting themselves to both Australian and migrant youth through raising their profile in schools and at community events.

The data do not allow us to differentiate the youth from non-MES countries by specific country or region of origin to see if youth from particular countries or regions indicate less social connectedness than others. Surveys with much larger samples of migrants are needed for an examination of this issue. In the meantime, any effort to improve the social connectedness of migrant youth should focus on all youth of non-English-speaking backgrounds, irrespective of their geographic origin.

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Table 1: Characteristics of respondents aged 18-29 years in the 2006 General Social Survey by birthplace

	Born overseas		Born in Australia	Total
	MES	Other		
	%	%	%	%
Sex				
Male	55.8	49.3	46.9	47.6
Female	44.2	50.7	53.1	52.4
Age				
18-19	14.2	12.3	13.5	13.4
20-24	34.5	30.8	40.6	39.3
25-29	51.3	56.8	45.9	47.3
Household composition				
One family household	69.9	68.7	72.0	71.5
Two or more family household	6.2	5.7	5.8	5.8
Group household	10.6	12.3	9.3	9.7
Lone person household	13.3	13.2	12.9	12.9
Enrolled in education				
Full time	14.2	26.0	12.4	13.9
Part time	8.0	10.1	14.2	13.5
Not studying	77.9	63.9	73.4	72.6
Qualifications				
Degree	16.8	36.6	16.3	18.4
Other qualifications	44.3	23.4	36.4	35.5
No post-school qualifications	38.9	40.1	47.3	46.1
English proficiency				
Speaks English well	100.0	96.0	100.0	99.3
Speaks English well not well	0	4.0	0.0	0.7
Labour force participation rate				
Unemployment rate	4.9	14.7	6.2	7.0
Year of arrival				
Before 1986	21.2	18.1	na	-
1986-90	28.3	17.6	na	-
1991-2000	24.8	34.8	na	-
2001-06	25.7	29.5	na	-

Arrived after 1985				
Primary migrant	16.7	39.5	na	-
Dependent	83.3	60.5	na	-
Number*	113	227	1835	2175

*Excluding oversea-born youth who are temporary residents
 MES = main English speaking countries (New Zealand, UK, Ireland, Canada, USA, South Africa)
 Source: ABS, 2006 General Social Survey Basic Confidentialised Unit Record File.

Table 2: Social and support networks of migrant and Australian youth aged 18-29 years, by birthplace, 2006 General Social Survey

Measures of social and support networks	Bom overseas		Bom in Australia	Total
	MES	Other		
	%	%	%	%
Social activity during the last 3 months				
1. Visited/visited by friends**	96	91	96	96
2. Went out with friends - outdoor activities**	94	82	87	87
3. Went out with friends - indoor activities	86	80	84	84
4. Spent time in internet social activity	29	37	33	33
Frequency of face to face contact with family/friends*				
Everyday	32	25	30	30
At least once a week	57	54	57	57
At least once a month	9	13	10	10
At least once in 3 months	3	7	3	3
No recent contact	0	1	0	0
Has ex-household family member feels close to and can confide in*	93	85	90	90
Number of ex-household family members can confide in*				
None	7	15	10	10
1-2	35	42	35	35
3-4	34	26	33	32
5+	24	17	23	23
Has close friends, can confide in*	95	86	93	92
Number of friends can confide in**				
None	4	12	7	8
1-2	28	34	29	30
3-4	40	36	34	34
5+	27	18	29	28

Type of support network*				
Has ex-hh. family member + friend, can confide in	89	77	85	85
Has ex-hh. family member only	4	8	5	5
Has friend only	6	11	7	7
Has neither	1	4	3	3
Able to ask for small favours**	95	88	96	95
Can get support in times of crisis**	96	90	97	96
Sources of support in times of crisis				
Friend**	83	70	78	77
Neighbour**	17	10	22	20
Family member**	83	67	87	85
Work colleague**	34	21	34	32
Community, charity	12	15	11	11
Local council	4	5	4	4
Health, legal, financial institution	6	6	8	7

**chi square $p < .01$; *chi square $p < .05$
 MES = main English speaking countries (New Zealand, UK, Ireland, Canada, USA, South Africa)
 Source: ABS, 2006 General Social Survey Basic Confidentialised Unit Record File

Table 3: Social and community participation of migrant and Australian youth aged 18-29 years, by birthplace, 2006 General Social Survey

Type of participation	Bom overseas		Bom in Australia	Total
	MES	Other		
	%	%	%	%
Attended community event in last 6 months	73	64	71	70
Attended sporting event in last 12 months**	73	64	72	69
Participated in sports/physical recreational activity in the last 12 months	73	67	71	71
Did unpaid volunteer work through an organisation in the last 12 months	23	27	31	30
Active involvement in past 12 months in the following social activity groups:				
Sport/physical recreation group**	44	33	43	42
Arts/heritage group	7	7	7	7
Crafts/hobby group	3	4	6	6
Religious/spiritual group/organisation**	13	27	13	14
Ethnic/multicultural club**	4	15	3	4
Social clubs	22	16	22	22

Active involvement in past 12 months in the following community groups:				
Service clubs	6	1	3	3
Welfare organization	5	9	5	5
Educational and training	15	15	12	12
Panreting/youth/children's group	13	7	10	10
Health promotion	4	6	6	6
Emergency services	3	2	4	4
International development/aid	5	5	3	4
Participation in the following civic activities:				
Written a letter to local council*	8	3	8	7
Signed a petition**	25	14	25	24
Attended a protest march/rally/meeting*	9	3	5	5
Feels able to have a say within community on important issues:				
All/most of the time	19	22	26	25
Some of the time	25	27	27	27
Little/none of the time	56	50	47	48

**chi square p<.01
 * chi square p<.05
 MES = main English speaking countries (New Zealand, UK, Ireland, Canada, USA, South Africa)
 Source: ABS, 2006 General Social Survey Basic Confidentialised Unit Record File.

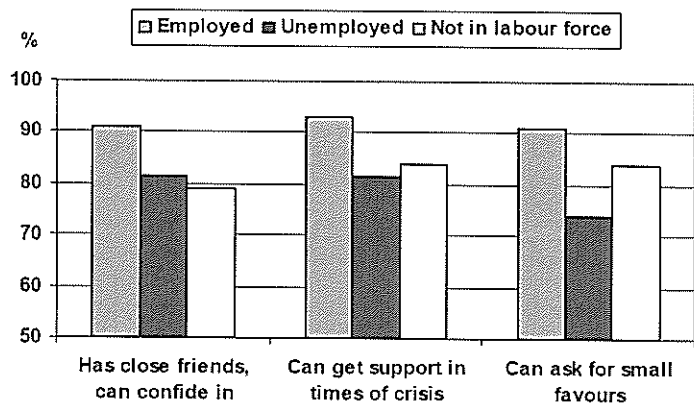


Figure 1: Migrant youth from non-English-speaking countries: measures of support networks by labour force status

Source: ABS, 2006 General Social Survey, Basic Confidentialised Unit Record File.

Chapter XI

Take a closer look

Engaging Australian Lebanese young people and their families in a process of self-determination

Monique P Toobey

Introduction

The Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) is a community-based organisation that advocates for the needs of young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. In supporting young people, CMY combines policy development and direct service delivery within a community development framework. In December 2006, CMY initiated a twelve-month service oriented project 'Take a Closer Look' to explore further the serious concerns held by youth and family support workers in Melbourne's North, pertaining to the social disengagement of second-generation Australian Lebanese (AL) young people. An action-based research model drove the planning of the project, and a series of consultations with service providers, young people and families revealed the services that needed to be delivered. The consultations identified specific problems experienced by AL young people and their families and highlighted pervasive service gaps. Culturally appropriate interventions that fostered youth engagement, community participation and family connectedness are now being trialled as part of the project. More specifically this project aimed to facilitate the development of a DVD produced with young people about their experiences within their