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CONTEMPORARY YOUTH IN INDIA: PROSPECTS, PROBLEMS, AND PERSPECTIVES

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ABSTRACT

Dr. APJ. Abdul Kalam, former President of India (2002-2007) states that "the resource of the youth is an important building block for transforming India into a developed nation". Many psychologists, sociologists and educationists have tried to position young people in a society from their own perspective. Therefore, their understanding and perceptions differ depending on their field of interest, focus of study and standpoints. These perceptions of youth, however, influence policy making, youth work practice and services. This article strives to present an understanding of these varied perspectives and thus arrive at a holistic picture of the contemporary young person. This study targets the policy makers, researchers, educationists and practitioners to address the issues that affect the youth today and realise their full potential.

This article consist of five sections and the first section presents the development perspective is discussed keeping in mind the fact that this approach addresses the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes during adolescence which would ideally provide a platform for a better understanding of other perspectives. The second section examines the generational perspective which is primarily concerned with age related issues among young people. The third section deals with a study of the structural conflict perspective which rejects the concepts of previous approaches and focuses on issues related to class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and the like. The section four deals with the transitional perspective which focuses on young people's transition issues. Finally, the fifth section focusses on the constructive perspective that considers the youth as a special social category, constituted by society and different from the other categories of adulthood is discussed. Eventually, all these perspectives with their strengths and weakness will assist in understanding and evolving a new approach to youth work and to the contemporary young person.

KEYWORDS :*Youth, Contemporary youth, Development perspective, Generational perspective, structural conflict perspective, Transitional perspective and Constructive perspective*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary policy discourse about young people is frequently trapped in the dichotomous

paradigm of simplistically portraying them as either "a problem" or a "human resource". Dr. APJ. Abdul Kalam, former President of India (2002-2007) states that "the resource of the youth is an important building block for transforming India into a developed nation". India is the most populous democracy in the world and also has the world's largest youth population, with 70% below 35 years (Kingra, 2005, p. 127). According to 2011 Census, India's population is next only to China with its count of 1,210,193,422. India has 550 million youth including adolescents (Government of India, 2011, p. 3). It is estimated that by 2020, the average Indian will be only 29 years, compared with an average age of 37 years in China and the US, and 45 years in western Europe and Japan (DeSouza et al., 2009, p. xiv). Young people are the future of any nation and they contribute to the development of the country. This article aims to explore the prospects, problems, and perspectives of contemporary youth. This analysis will better enable the policy makers, researchers, educationists and practitioners to understand and to address the issues that affect the youth today and realise their full potential.

Today's youth live in a society that is in constant flux mired in a variety of prospects and problems that are characteristic of this age, often referred to as the "Micro-Chip Age". The never-heard-of-before developments in connectivity and communication brought in significantly by the internet revolution, the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic exchanges between countries and private sector enterprises, and the resultant economic booms and depressions, the strong desire to mimic the customs and habits of different cultures subverted and presented through movie flicks and cult magazines, and more importantly the craze for the latest available commodity that would make one look chic and polished are typical of this age. Subsequently, this becomes characteristic of the youth as well (Motcham, 2014).

However, in this promising scenario, certain hard-hitting and at times really depressing realities, both external and internal, play on the psyche of the youth and lead to a wide gamut of psychological, physical, and sociological pressures that take a toll on one's personality development. Poverty and misery in a time of plenty, addictions of various kinds including internet addiction, deplorable human rights violations, disaffections and depressions arising out of the non-fulfilment of the hype generated by the micro-chip reality are distinctive in this age. A greater understanding and knowledge on the present day youth is, therefore, of paramount importance for anyone who works for and with young people.

Around the world, the terms "youth", "adolescent", "teenager", and "young person" are used interchangeably, often meaning the same thing, only occasionally differentiated. Youth generally refers to a period of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood, but rather somewhere in-between (Webster's New World College Dictionary, 2004). The youth category, however, lacks clear definition and in some situations may be based on one's social circumstances rather than chronological age or cultural position. Related categories like adolescent, teenager, or young adult provide a greater degree of specificity concerning age, but they also vary in their application across contexts (Bucholtz, 2002). Youth also identifies a particular mind set or attitude, such as in "He is very youthful". The term youth is also related to being young (Konopka, 1973). It is also argued that the term 'youth' both as an idea and as a word denotes the position of a young person or groups of young people in society (Lalor et al., 2007). Selvam states that:

Youth is a stage in human development that lies between childhood and adulthood. However simple this definition may seem, it is valid nonetheless, because it brings out the relativity and vulnerability of youth. Youth as such exists only in relation to childhood and adulthood. And it is merely a passing stage. It is a sandwich phase whose separate identity is seldom recognized (Selvam, 2008, p. 206).

Youth work is an age specific activity that focuses on young people not simply because they are disaffected, disengaged, cause problems or have problems but because they are in the process of creating themselves and developing the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed for lifelong reflection, learning and growth (Young, 2006). In recent years, it has become increasingly clear that the experience of adolescence rates equally in importance to the first five years of childhood in its effect on later life (Smith, 1982).

Many psychologists, sociologists and educationists have tried to position young people in a society from their own perspective. Therefore, their understanding and perceptions differ depending on their field of interest, focus of study and standpoints. These perceptions of youth, however, influence policy making, youth work practice and services. This article strives to present an understanding of these varied perspectives and thus arrive at a holistic picture of the contemporary young person.

Part one presents the development perspective is discussed keeping in mind the fact that this approach addresses the physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes during adolescence which would ideally provide a platform for a better understanding of other perspectives. Part two is an examination of the generational perspective which is primarily concerned with age related issues among young people. Part three is a study of the structural conflict perspective which rejects the concepts of previous approaches and focuses on issues related to class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and the like. Part four deals with the transitional perspective which focuses on young people's transition issues. Finally, in part five, the constructive perspective that considers the youth as a special social category, constituted by society and different from the other categories of adulthood is discussed. Eventually, all these perspectives with their strengths and weakness will assist in understanding and evolving a new approach to youth work and to the contemporary young person.

1. The Developmental Perspective

The developmental perspective of young people is related to a field of psychology which deals with processes of physical, cognitive and socio-emotional changes that take place during adolescence. Growth and change are integral parts of adolescence. The developmental theorists try to make sense out of observations and seek to construct a story of the human journey from infancy through childhood to adulthood (Berger, 2005, p. 33).

The term adolescence comes from the Latin word 'adolescere', meaning "to grow" or "to grow to maturity". According to give first name and dates Jean? Piaget, this period includes mental, emotional, and social maturity as well as physical maturity. As he writes:

Psychologically, adolescence is the age when an individual becomes integrated into the society of adults, the age when the child no longer feels that he is below the level of his elders but equal, at least in right…This integration into adult society has many affective aspects, more or less linked with puberty…it also includes very profound intellectual changes…These intellectual transformations typical of the adolescent's thinking enable him not only to achieve his integration into the social relationships of adults, which is, in fact, the most general characteristic of this period of development (Hurlock, 2006, p. 222).

A look into the various changes a person goes through during adolescence will help in understanding the significance of this perspective.

I. 1. Physical Changes

Adolescents experience an increase in growth which involves rapid development of bones and

muscles. This begins in girls around the ages of 9-12 and in boys around the ages of 11-14. Growth also varies according to society, culture, environment, etc. Puberty is a period of rapid physical growth and sexual maturation that marks the end of childhood and the beginning of adolescence, producing adult size, shape and sexual potency. The forces of puberty are unleashed by a cascade of hormones that bring on numerous visible changes. Hormone is a natural chemical substances produced in the body that controls, coordinates and regulates and balance the working of organs and cells. Hormone imbalance can have great effect on the state of mind (Berger, 2005, p. 341).

During early adolescence, when physical changes are rapid, additional changes in attitudes and behaviour are also rapid. As physical changes slow down, so do attitudinal and behavioural changes. In response to these physical changes, adolescents begin to be treated in a new way by those around them. They may no longer be seen as just children, but as sexual beings to be protected or targeted. They face society's expectations of how young men and women "should" behave. Both adolescent boys and girls are known to spend hours concerned with their physical appearance. They want to "fit in" with their peers yet achieve their own unique style as well. Many adolescents experience dissatisfaction with their changing bodies. Weight gain is a natural part of puberty, which can be distressing in a culture that glorifies being thin (Pierno, 2007).

I. 2. Cognitive Changes

Scientists once thought that the brain's key development ended within the first few years of life. Current findings, however, indicate that important brain regions undergo refinement through adolescence and at least into a person's twenties. During adolescence, brain connections and signalling mechanisms selectively change to meet the needs of the environment (Neuroscience, 2007). The area of brain growth during adolescence centres on the frontal lobe. This is the control centre for "executive functions" such as planning, impulse control and reasoning. During adolescence, there are changes involving the way the brain processes rewards and pleasure. As Steinberg explains: "Rewarding things feel more rewarding" (Pertler, 2006).

The physical changes in the brain are clearly related to young people's cognitive development, which refers to 'all those abilities associated with thinking and knowing' (Birch, 1997, p. 33). Piaget is mainly interested in the biological influences on "how we come to know." He believes that what distinguishes human beings from other animals is their ability to do "abstract symbolic reasoning." Piaget's views contrast with those of Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), who looked more to social interaction as the primary source of cognition and behaviour. This is somewhat similar to the distinctions made between Sigmund Freud dates and Erick Erikson dates in terms of the development of personality (Huitt, 2006).

I. 3. Socio-Emotional Changes

Traditionally, adolescence has been thought of as a period of "storm and stress", a time of heightened emotional tension resulting from the physical and glandular changes that are taking place (Hurlock, 2006, p. 229). In fact, most adolescents report feeling quite happy and self-confident, not unhappy or distressed (Diener and Diener, 1996). Moreover, and again contrary to prevailing views, most teenagers report that they enjoy relatively good relations with their parents. They agree with them on basic values, on future plans, and on many other matters (Bachman, 1987). However, they agree that there are frictions on certain issues, which is not uncommon in other types of social relationships.

Cognitive development equips the young person with greater insights, reasoning and analytical

skills that they apply to their emotional life (Lalor et al., 2007, p. 33). Adolescents must confront two major tasks: one is achieving autonomy from their parents; the second is forming an identity by creating an integral self that harmoniously combines different aspects of personality (American Psychological Association, 2002, p. 17).

During adolescence, the peer group often begins to replace the family as the adolescent's primary social focus. Peer groups are often established because of distinctions in dress, appearance, attitudes, hobbies, interests, and other characteristics that may appear profound or trivial to outsiders. Initially, peer groups are usually same-sex but typically become mixed at a later stage in adolescence. Friendships, infatuation, love and social success also play an important role in another key aspect of social development during adolescence, the quest for a personal identity. This is a key element in a famous theory of psychosocial development proposed by Erick Erikson (Robert, 2006, p. 333).

According to Erikson, exploration is at the heart of the adolescent transition. In his words, exploration is the identity crisis, although this type is not necessarily acute or severe. The remaking of personal identity, which is necessary to complete the transition, was said to be dependent on exploration. In a similar perspective, Grotevant (1987) has referred to exploration as the "work" of the identity process (Jeannie et al., 1995).

Within Erikson's framework, adolescence is one of the eight universal psychological stages in the life cycle, each of which has a particular psychological crisis associated with it. During the fifth psychosocial crisis (adolescence, from about 13 or 14 to about 20) the child, now an adolescent, learns to ask him/herself "Who am I?", "What am I really like?", "What do I want to become?" In other words, s/he seeks to establish a clear self-identity, to understand his/her unique traits and what is really important to him/her. According to Erikson, however, during adolescence it is crucial that these questions be answered effectively. If they are not, individuals may drift, uncertain of where they want to go or what they wish to accomplish. (Robert, 2006, p. 336).

As I have mentioned above, the adolescent experiences rapid physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development. In the field of youth work, problems arise when youth workers do not change their working style according to the needs of the young and the demands arising out of their contemporary era. Treating a teen as a young child – not taking into account his/her intellectual growth and ability to think through a situation in a way that was not previously possible can belittle the teen and cause conflict. S/he also seeks a lot of independence and support. Rather than dictating rules, a participatory approach builds confidence and mutual respect between the youth worker and the youth resulting in a sort of congeniality that benefits both, contributing to tremendous growth potential for the young person in question. Gauging correctly the emotional, cognitive and physical changes a young person goes through immensely increases the effectiveness of youth work.

II. Generation Perspective

Age criterion is another possible way of defining youth (Selvam, 2008). Even this has its intricacies. The United Nations defines youth as a person aged between 15 and 24 years. The Commonwealth defines youth as one aged between 15 and 29. In western usage, the category of youth is elastic, for example Galambos and Kolaric (1994) distinguish between 'young adolescents' (10-14), 'teens' (15-19), and 'young adults' (20-24) (Tyyska 2005). The generational theorists accept that young people, by virtue of their age alone, are inherently different from children on the one hand and adults on the other; that these differences are in themselves of great significance for individuals and for society (Lalor et al. 2007: 44). Youth as a particular age category may be influenced by different cultural assumptions. These assumptions lead to the understanding that young people manifest themselves in

a distinctive youth culture with its own roles, values and behavior pattern. From the functionalist perspective, youth culture despite its frequent apparent 'unruliness' and 'rebelliousness' serves a number of 'important positive functions' both for young people and for society as a whole (Parsons, 1972, p. 146).

S.N. Eisenstadt (1956) in 'From Generation to Generation' makes the point that young people have to go through a process before they are considered to be adult. This process is most commonly labeled 'socialization'. To be adult in our society means, that we know certain ways of behaving, values and moral rules. Young people therefore need to successfully learn how to be adults. Eisenstadt points out that in modern industrial societies there is a growing gap between the world of the child and that of the adult. This gap is a kind of limbo period where the necessary skills and abilities needed for adult life in a modern technological society are acquired. According to this view, youth culture serves an important function for modern society as it is the means, developed by young people themselves, to pass from childhood to adolescence (CYMA, 2003).

In 1968, Allen argued that the concept of youth needed to be reassessed. She pointed out that "it is not the relations between ages that create change or stability in society, but change in society which explains relations between different ages". Twenty years later, Jones argued that 'it is misleading to emphasise the qualities or otherwise of Youth per se, since the young are neither a homogeneous group nor a static one' (Wyn and White, 1997). The strength of this theory is that it emphasizes the necessity of functions within society. All components of society must have a function in order to survive (Ferrante, 1988). The positive functions of ostensibly problematic youth culture encourage young people to be creative and innovative. This perspective helps young people to conform and conformity is necessary for social stability (Lalor et al., 2007, p. 44).

The main weakness of this perspective is that it is very conservative by nature and it seems to justify problematic aspects of society such as poverty and social inequality as simply a part of life (Ferrante, 1988). This perspective is a form of ageism which oppresses young people because they are young. As such, it shares a number of common features with other forms of oppression in the sense that ageism is:

- Systematic and structured;
- Based on stereotypes, prejudices and misconceptions;
- Operates at personal, cultural, and structural levels;
- Leads to adverse representation of and discrimination against young people;
- Acts to exclude young people from aspects of social, political and economic life;
- Is underpinned by an ideology based on the inherent 'inferiority' of young people because of their age (Young, 2006, p. 58).

III. Structural Conflict Perspective

In contrast to the generational theory, conflict theory renounces the notion that society is relatively harmonious. Conflict theory emphasizes individual or group ability to exercise influence over others in producing social order. This theory was founded by Karl Marx, and later developed by theorists including Max Weber (Devlin, 2009). Conflict theorists reject the idea of viewing youth as a homogenous group, focusing instead on the basis of class factor.

We would argue, in the sense that it is (conventionally) aimed at ...that there can be no 'sociology of youth'- it is a misleading quest for a holy grail that does not exist. Youth as concept is unthinkable. Even youth as a social category does not make much empirical sense. Youth as a single,

homogeneous group does not exist (Hall et al., 1976, p. 18).

According to this perspective, the lives and experiences of young people (youth sub-culture) reflect the social structures of inequality in relation to class, gender, culture and ethnicity. The striking thing about contemporary society is not its value consensus or social order but the fact that its entire social structure reflects and sustains pervasive conflict and inequality. This theory shows how conflict, rather than cooperation and cohesion, is the catalyst of social change and societal growth (Lalor et al., 2007, p. 45).

In the 1970s, 'sub-culture' was explored by a group of sociologists from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham University, UK. In 1976, they published a collection of essays under the title Resistance Through Rituals (Hall and Jefferson 1975). The basic argument of the book is that British society is divided by class and various youth cultures need to be seen in that light. The book argues that sub-cultures act as places where working class young people can create 'cultural' space for themselves over and against the dominant middle-class culture. From this perspective youth sub-cultures can be seen as a set of rituals which are designed to show in a symbolic way the stresses experienced by young people in modern society (Churches Youth Ministry Association (CYMA), 2003).

The strength of this perspective lies in its 'realistic' approach which recognizes the inevitability of class conflict and every other type of social relation based on hierarchical power structures. Despite the negative realities of power structures, conflict is seen as a catalyst for growth and eventual social change (Ferrante, 1988). Class shaped cultures and resistance in sociological behaviour are manifested in ways of dressing, putting graffiti on walls, body piercing, etc. Thereby, they assist in identifying the inequality that exists in society. This perspective creates an opportunity to look at socially marginalised young people from different backgrounds of class, ethnicity and cultures (Devlin, 2009).

The main weakness of this theory is that it overemphasises the tensions and divisions between classes and other groups in society (Ferrante, 1988) as well as its tendency to focus on economic factors as the driving force behind all human motivation. While factors such as gender and race are acknowledged, the greatest significance is given to class.

IV. Transitional Perspective

Young people who grew up in the 1990s in the industrialised world are fundamentally different from those of the 1950s. It is important to ask this key question: What are the circumstances under which particular groups of young people make transitions to adulthood? (Wyn and White, 1997). Young people have always had to make the transition from childhood and adolescence to adulthood, in all places and all times. Virtually every society has some way of recognizing the transition to adulthood: sometimes with a formal ritual expressly for that purpose, sometimes by designating marriage or the birth of the first child as the defining marker of adult status, sometimes by making legal distinctions that mark a certain age as the dividing line between childhood and adulthood (Arnett, 2005).

The transition from adolescence into adulthood is often a difficult and challenging period. This approach can be dated back to the 1970s and early 80s with policy relating to unemployment and youth training, resulting in numerous studies specifically on the 'transition from school to work' (TSW). Now the perspective has changed because there are many decisions which young people have to make in a rapidly changing world with many pathways and numerous uncertainties. Many traditional features and values of the society in which their parents grew up are under threat or have changed (Devlin, 2009).

Galland (1995) states that research from this view has moved beyond a concern with transition

from school to work alone to exploring a variety of other aspects of young people's progression into adulthood, in particular, the relationship between the two principal 'axes' of tradition, the public and the private. Youth in the transitional stage passes through various shifts; for example, school to work, rural to urban, family home to independent living with partners, and so on. Today, it is also clear that transitions are much less unidirectional and definitive and much more reversible and provisional (Lalor et al., 2007).

Adolescents face a range of developmental issues. Havighurst (1952) suggested that two important areas included work and relationships. Levinson (1978) focused on changing relationships and on exploration, while Erikson (1968) commented on intimacy and commitment to goals. Super (1963) indicated that exploring and crystallizing vocational choice are important to older adolescents and to young adults. What seems evident is that older adolescents and young adults enter transitions with the goal of becoming independently functioning adults, as they strive to meet evolving personal and career related needs. Escalating changes in the labour market and post-secondary education opportunities mean that adolescents are now confronted with the challenge of meeting their personal and career needs when neither can offer certainty or a sense of personal control (William et al., 1995).

The strength of this perspective is that modern society offers many choices to young people and is not limited to scope and age – for example, adults of all ages can return to education. The weakness of this perspective is that vulnerable youth face transitions made particularly challenging by stressful life events, emotional trauma, poverty, homelessness, discrimination, and destructive experiences in the juvenile justice system as well as a number of other difficult circumstances.

V. Constructionist Perspective

The constructionist views, on the position of young people in society sometimes overlap with other perspectives mentioned above. Their primary interest is in the way in which the youth stage has been actively constructed by social and economic changes during the Industrial age (Lalor et al., 2007). The British sociologist Frank Musgrove (1964) echoed the same position when he commented that 'the adolescent was invented at the same time as the steam engine'. What he meant was that a new stage in life had effectively been created (constructed) by the process of social and economic changes (Devlin, 2009). It is clear that youth, as a transition to adulthood, has meaning only in relation to the specific circumstances of social, political and economic conditions (Wyn and White, 1997).

Negative perceptions of adolescents have been prevalent throughout history. Literature has, from the 19th century onwards, repeatedly referred to youth as "disorderly" and "disobedient." As Burton states:

It must be confessed that an irreverent, unruly spirit has come to be a prevalent, an outrageous evil among the young people of our land. . . . Some of the good old people make facetious complaint on this. . . . "There is as much family government now as there used to be in our young days," they said, "only it has changed hands" (CYMA, 2003).

It is clear from the above statement that socio-cultural, political, economic and ideological factors, as well as mass media stereotypes, influence perceptions of youth.

In the constructive perspective, positive stereotyping is important. Youth is considered here to be vulnerable, idealistic, and at the same time an energetic social resource. Negative stereotypes not only affect how adults see young people, they influence how young people see themselves. Constructionism holds that learning can happen most effectively when people are actively making things in the real world. In today's context, the idea that youth constitutes a significant and distinct category is inevitably reinforced by popular media. The media plays a great role in positioning young

people in the society (Jeannie et al., 1995).

The strength of this perspective is that young people individually and collectively learn to formulate or construct their own knowledge and understanding based on their experiences. They also learn to construct their own identities through exercising 'agency' i.e. making choices about the kind of life they want to live. Social construction has led to the emergence of professionals concerned with young people's education, welfare and development (Lalor et al., 2007).

The weakness of this perspective is that modern media presents images of young people which tend to be stereotypical and distorted, focussing predominately on certain types of young people or certain aspects of young people. In the process of finding their own identity, young people may be left trapped and helpless and effectively forced to participate in a medium like internet constructed web-based identities and other unhelpful forms of subculture (Devlin 2009). Constructive concepts like 'taste', 'fashion' and 'lifestyle' have been described as 'the key sources of (contemporary) social differentiation' (Pakulski and Waters, 1996, p. 121).

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that young people are one of the greatest assets in the world today, as in any age. When ignited, the minds of the young are possibly one of the greatest resources of the earth. If these young minds are enabled to live and work with an indomitable spirit, a prosperous, equal and just world is attainable (Kalam and Rajan, 2003). Writing this essay helped me to consider and to analyse the various factors that influence and mould a person in the most critical phase of his/her life and growth: his/her youth. I agree with Delvin (2009), who states that each perspective is like a set of lenses through which one can understand 'Youth', in contemporary society. Depending on the choice, one's attention will be drawn to some features rather than others. However, the best possible understanding would emerge only through the fact that it is not one or two perspectives that define a young person but a conglomeration of all the perspectives and that too only through a critical sieving of what each perspective has in store for effective youth work.

For instance, the developmental and sociological perceptions of youth can affect the policy related to young people. Where young people are considered more like children, as a potential problem, as being in danger, or at a vulnerable age, they require protection policy. If youth policy is based on the narrower and more adult point of view, there seems to be a tendency to regard youth as a resource. The two concepts: 'youth as resource versus youth as a problem' lead to two different youth policies. When youth is considered to be a social resource, the development, the growth and the promotion of these resources become the major aim of national youth policy (Roger, 2008). There has been increasing attention given to the positive aspects and strengths of adolescents over the past two decades in the human development, social work, and related fields. However, the image of "youth as problems" is still dominant in public discourse, professional work, and social science (Cheon, 2008).

Social development, both global and local, and the existing living-conditions of young people and their responses to the challenges, raise major issues that need to be addressed from a sociological youth perspective. As the life conditions of young people are affected by various issues and vistas arising out of increased globalization and networking, sociology needs to develop analyses, theories and concepts that address these changes. Today's young people live in a multi-cultural society, resulting in greater cultural enrichment, new social divisions, problems and racisms. Globally, young people's lives are marked by structural inequalities that prevent them from attaining the rights of full civil, political, and social citizenship.

Understanding the prospects and problems of contemporary youth, therefore, lies at the heart of effective youth work. The designation of 'Youth' provides a focus for young people's experience as 'young people' thereby enabling them to confront adverse conditions such as stereotypes of ageism, inequality, individualism, etc., and thereby creating the possibility for collective action (Young, 2006, p. 58). In the field of youth work, a greater knowledge and understanding of youth is of paramount importance not only for policy making but also for a greater involvement of the young in nation-building and to raise their social consciousness. Today's Youth Policies should be based on comprehensive knowledge and a well-researched understanding of young people's experiences, needs and expectations.

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