The Maldives National University

Ministry of Youth, Sports and Community Empowerment

Disengagement of Maldivian Youth:

A Public Perception Study

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AGO: Attorney General's Office
BCC: Business Centre Corporation Limited
CBO: Community-based Society Organisations
FDGs: Focus Group Discussions
JJAct: Juvenile Justice Act
NGO: Non-governmental Organization
NYC: National Youth Council
PGO: Prosecutor General's Office
SME: Small and Medium Enterprises
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNODC: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
WDC: Women's Development Committee

Executive Summary

This study is based on the main objective of determining the percentage of youth who commit crimes and on the factors that lead them to be involved in those crimes. Furthermore, this study attempted to identify loopholes in law enforcement as well as the mechanisms established in place by law enforcement agencies, understand issues facing young people in atolls and urban areas leading to repeated offences, understand why youth are not engaged in income generating activities, and find out the consequences of youth unemployment, focusing on crime and deviant behaviour of youth. A mixed method design, including both qualitative and quantitative methods, was used for the study to achieve the objectives. In total, 4 interviews were conducted, 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) were held, and 1150 people responded to the quantitative survey. The results of the survey, interviews and the FGDs indicated a lack or shortage of employment opportunities, dysfunctional home environment, poor parenting, and loopholes in the justice system as the primary reasons for crimes and recidivism. It was evident from the study that these are the factors hindering a conducive and a productive environment for youth to engage in and develop their skills. The findings also highlighted the limited opportunities in the islands for young people when it comes to higher studies, employment options, and engaging in productive activities, as some of the main challenges that the youth are facing, which at times lead to repeat offences. The findings of this study have implications for policy makers, caregivers, parents, and communities to ensure that school leavers are prepared for skill-based jobs and/or including entrepreneurships, given career guidance and counselling, and are provided with opportunities to engage in leisure and sports activities in a conducive and supportive environment. The study points to the need for further research to investigate the issues and interests of youth and how younger people can be influenced to take initiatives, tackle challenges and to encourage youth participation.

1. Introduction

Studying youth behavior, especially with a focus on understanding risk factors for their participation in criminal offences, is important to plan future interventions to ensure a conducive society. Similar studies can provide means for understanding the realities and establishing mechanisms to assist youth engagement in productive activities (Benson et al., 1998; Wikström, 2007).

Studies conducted on youth involvement in crime,highlights a rapid increase in the number of minors and youth engaged in criminal behaviour including murder, gang violence, organised crime, and drug trafficking offences, globally (Loeber, 1990; Bakken, 1993; Broidy et al., 2003; McAra & McVie, 2018) as well as in the Maldives (Pawlak, 2014; Aboobakuru, 2016; Rasheed et al., 2019; Naz & Ibrahim, 2019). The factors associated with youth involvement in crime includes unemployment, a lack of proper career guidance, the lack of a supportive social and family environment, a shortage of opportunities for recreational activities and a proper mechanism not being in place for youth rehabilitation (Cherney, 2020; Pawlak et al., 2014; Ajufo, 2013)

Not much research has been conducted in the Maldives on youth involvement in crime and re-offence.Consequently,proper mechanisms have not been established to assist youth rehabilitation and engagement in productive activities.Thus, a study of this nature is importantin the Maldives, to understand the factors associated with youth involvement in crime, to formulate youth friendly policies and guidelines,and to establish mechanisms to provide youth with opportunities to rehabilitate and to participate in recreational, economic, and productive activitiesfor nation building.

This report presents findings from a research study carried out on the youth of the Maldives to determine the factors that lead youth to commit crimes and the issues that they face which leads to repeat offences.The proceeding sections of this report present an outline of the background of the study from the available literature in the Maldivian context,research objectives, scope, and methodology for this undertaking. This will be followed by the findings, discussions, and conclusions with implications and recommendations for policy makers, parents, caregivers, and to the society in general.

2. Background

The Maldives is an islandnation located in the Indian Ocean, 275 miles Southwest of India, comprising of approximately1190coral islands, of which about 200 are inhabited.The islands are smalland widely dispersed over an area of 90,000 squarekilometres.Maldives is made up of 1 percent land and 99 percentsea,with apopulation of approximately 400,000. The Maldivian government and its people have always placed a high emphasis on education, thus contributing to the high literacy rate of 98.9 percent and government subsidised school fees, textbooks and more recently, the introduction of a tuition fee free degree program for all Maldivians.

Nevertheless, there are geographical, social, cultural, and economic challenges in the Maldives that leads to youth delinquency.More specifically, the factors associated with youth delinquency in the Maldivian context, as highlighted by Aboobakuru, 2016; Rasheed et al., 2019; and Naz & Ibrahim, 2019 are: national circumstances in the country in terms of education, skills training, and work experience of youth; access to opportunities and participation; lack of skills for the labour market; unemployment; physical health and mental well-being; increasing participation in gang activities and violence; and loopholes in law enforcement mechanisms.

2.1 National circumstances of youth crimes in the country in terms ofEducation, Skills training, work experience of youth.

The ecological framework proposed by Pawlak et al. (2014), clarifies why the youth of a country are unable to realize their potential to function as productive citizens. According to the World Bank (2014), young Maldivians feel disenfranchised and excluded, and are perceived as idle and disconnected from the fabric of society. This perception seems not limited only to those who are at risk of exclusion, but by the majority of the youth in the country.

With the increased (or higher level of) access to information communication technologies, youth in the country are going through a flux of realisation that there is potential to explore newer ideals, values, and income earning opportunities and prospects. However, the country as a whole face the challenge of limited opportunities, lack of empowerment, community engagement, and coping mechanisms to follow rigid norms of behaviour and conservative values(World Bank, 2014). Pawlek et al. (2014) reports that youth in the Maldives are faced with issues relating to the lack of access to reproductive and sexual health education and services as well as unemployment and under employment issues.

The available literature suggests that there is an increase in youth involvement in crime in the Maldives, especially drugs and gang related offenses (UNDP, 2019). A relatively recent speculation has emerged regarding youth involved in violent extremism in the Maldives. Youth radicalisation is a global phenomenon that culminates because of social, environmental, and individual factors. These include individual factors such as psychological issues, whether the family environment is supportive of extremist views and ideologies, and societal factors such as social exclusion and armed conflicts (Cherney, 2020). In the absence of most of these factors in the Maldives that usually contribute to such tendencies, a plausible explanation of this speculated trend could potentially be globalisation (UNDP, 2019).   While there are legislations to deal with such factors in the Maldives, they appear to be reactive as opposed to being preventive. The problem of youth offending cannot be studied in isolation of the problem of juvenile delinquency in the Maldives,as many of the causes of juvenile delinquency remain similar tothose of youth committing crimes. One of the many causes of juvenile offending

are familial neglect, especially whenthey come from broken homes (Basto-Pereira& Farrington,2022; Adam, 2021). Current family laws donot sufficiently addressthecare of children for whentheir parents are separated, and the children live with a parent that does not have sufficient means to support the financial needs of the child (Basto-Pereira & Farrington,2022; Adam, 2021).When looking at the juvenile justice system, even though diversionary philosophies were implicitprior to the enactment of the Juvenile Justice Act,the strong commitment towards diversion in the currentlaw enforcement of those provisions in letter and spirit remains a major challenge (UNODC, 2013).

One of the key roles that the law is expected to play is the rehabilitation of criminals, including youth offenders. The current laws do not recognise the importance of timely rehabilitation of young offenders. The growing prison population without timley rehabilitation is also a factor that contributes to the increased rates of recidivism (UNODC, 2013). However, the existing institutional arrangement fails to fully incorporate alternative forms of punishment, as opposed to incarceration (Qazi, 2014). In addition to this, the current laws do not progressively cater tochanging social attitude which is required for thesuccessful rehabilitation of the offenders (UNDP, 2019). Also, an effective system of alternative punishment and the lack of separate detention facilities for young children in conflict with the law remains a barrier for their effective rehabilitation and reintegration intothe society (UNODC, 2013). The new legal framework, Juvenile Justice Act (JJAct,18/19), conferexclusive jurisdiction with the Juvenile Court to deal with matters pertaining to children in conflict with the law. Studies have revealed that most of the children in conflict with the law have a history of substance abuse (Cherney, 2020; UNDP, 2019). Not much research has been done on the impact and trends of drugs offenses in the Maldives to evaluate the success and the changing nature of drug involvement (Qazi, 2021). The newly enacted Juvenile Court does not have jurisdiction to deal with drug related offenses and existing drug courts are not equipped to fully deal with all other needs of young children in conflict with the law. This creates a jurisdictional discord between the two courts. This highlights the lack of effective coordination between agencies.Lastly, the named institutions are mostly located in Male' and do not have much presence in the Islands.This is a major barrier to effectively curb the involvement of youth in crime (Qazi, 2021).

2.2 Access to opportunities and participation

A situational analysis of youth in the Maldives by Transparency Maldives (2015) explored the perceptions of youth in themes relating to housing, employment, education, health services, leadership, political participation, and barriers to accessing opportunities because of corruption. The report revealed that young government policy makers are recognizing the importance of youth and addressing issues more than before. However, in general, it wasalso evidenced that "young people are utilised to get things done and, in most cases, do not have a say in the decision-making process" (p. 4). The youth also expressed that even though various employment opportunities have increased for young people, it is evident that a multitude of forces, such ascorrupt practices, impact their ability to fully access, engage and utilise these opportunities (Transparency Maldives, 2015). Maldives Bureau of Statistics (2006), highlights that, "no growth and sustainable development could take place without the active and constructive participation of young people in the process of national development"

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the government's commitment to increase youth access to opportunities and participation has led to better infrastructural opportunities, inter-island transportation accessibility, entrepreneurial opportunity through Business Centre Corporation Limited (BCC) and Small and Medium Enterprises (SME) loan programs, the strengthening of regulatory frameworks such as amendments to the tourism act to provide access to transportation to visit home after duty, access to higher educational opportunities within the island or atoll, and 100 percent tuition fee free first degree programmes for youth in all higher education institutions in the Maldives(Ministry of Education & Ministry of Higher Education, 2019).

2.3 Lack of Skills for the labour market

In the Maldives, the youth are found to lack the required skill set for the job market (Aboobakuru, 2016). This is mainly due to the absenceof sufficient career guidance services, as well as the perceptions youth carry in terms

of expectations of what constitutes an acceptable job and pay, leading to limited support and encouragement for youth to be economically active (Pawlak et al., 2014). Job opportunities are especially limited in the atolls. The youth unemployment rate (labour force ages 15-24) is at 18.41%, whereit is higher among males (21.25%) and lower among females (13.05%). This in turn has created a national phenomenon which is referred to as "youth voluntary unemployment" (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2006). It is also observed that 24.7 % of youth are economically inactive (Maldives Bureau of Statistics, 2006).

2.4 Implications of Youth Unemployment

Youth unemployment has many implications in establishing vibrant socioeconomic environments in many communities. There are several studies indicating the linkages between youth unemployment and deviant behaviour and crimes in societies (Ajufo,2013; Femi et al., 2015; O'Higgins, 2015; Fougèreet al., 2009). According to Ajufo (2013) and Femi et al. (2015), the impact of youth unemployment is both global and national in terms of increasein violence, crime, drug abuse and political unrest and instability. The prevalence of the implications of youth unemployment, associated with deviant behaviour, violence, crime, and unemployed youth is cross-cutting across several countries, despite socioeconomic status. This is evident in European countries, where the crime rate has increased among unemployed youth (Fougere et al., 2009;O'Higgins, 2015). In Nigeria, for instance, unemployment among youth has become a major driving force in pervasive patterns of militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, resistiveness and socially delinquent behaviours (Ajufo, 2013). In the Maldives, youth unemployment is associated with socially deviant behaviours such as drug use and gang-related violence (World Bank, 2014). Moreover, in an early study undertaken by the Asian Foundation (2012) assessing the situations of gangs in Male',revealed that gang violence was more brutal and frequent particularly due to smaller communities wherepeople can be easily located. Unfavourable living conditions and challenges to housing, coupled withunemployment can also cause adverse environments for young people to engage in anti-social behaviour, crime, and drug use in the Maldives (UNDP, 2010).

In the Maldives, 43 percent of the youth labour force between the ages 15 to 24 was found to be unemployed in 2012 (HIES, 2012). While the unemployment rate for youth is higher than the overall unemployment, there is a greater difference observed among males (UNFPA, 2017). Unemployment itself can make individuals become highly frustrated and fester in negativity, which then creates the ideal environment for crimes to thrive. For instance, individuals can become desperate while they remain idle, thus driving themselves to deviant behaviour (Ajufo, 2013; Femi et al., 2015). In the Maldives, it was found that the rate of unemployment among drug users was very high compared with the general population, withmost drug users beingyounger people (UNODC, 2013). This indicates that youth in the Maldives are at risk of deviant behaviour, especially if they are unemployed or in a situation where they are facing economic constraints. The same situation was evident where youth found it difficult to find suitable employment that would offer favourable salaries tomeet their standard of living (Transparency Maldives, 2015). The frustration experienced by youth to find adequate means of income and employment can also create circumstances of drug use, creating a vicious cycle (UNODC, 2013). Moreover, when individuals are unemployed, they are highly dependent on their family and friends. The perception of being an additional burden on family and friends can leave young people in low spirits; feeling demotivated and can have a negative outlook regarding their future. Similarly, in the Maldives, unemployed youth often experience a state of dependency and feel marginalised (Sabharwa&Salie, 2012).The increase of crime in society does not only affect the youth of the country, but it also reduces the sense of security and safety in the community, causing psychological harm to families, friends and the society at large (Ajufo, 2013; Femi et al., 2015). According to UNDP (2019), the presence of gangs was seen by the public as a serious problem, and although violence typically occurred within or between gangs, people reported having experienced socially deviant crimes such as robbery. Furthermore, UNDP (2019) reportedseveral women experienced harassment by gang members. As a result, this can cause the general population to isolate themselves from young people, further stigmatising the youth of the country.

2.4.1 Unemployment as a Driving Factor for Crime and Deviant Behaviour

As Ajufo (2013) highlighted, crime can result due to unemployment.And as unemployed young people become withdrawn fromsociety, their productivity to the labour force seems to decline. The study assessing gang violence in Male' (Naaz et al., 2012) indicated that young people may join gangs for various reasons, such as to feel a sense of belonging, protection, identity, economic reasons, drugs, bullying at school, or family issues. Similarfindings are echoed where family issues, drug use, forming brotherhoods and the need to prove masculinity are associated with gang membership (World Bank, 2014; UNDP, 2019).

A shortageof socio-economic opportunities is one of the primary drivers that isconducive to violent extremism (UNDP, 2016). In the Maldives,the prevalence of drugs, gangs, confrontational politics, and unemployment has stirred up disillusioned young men, leaving an opportunity for recruiters to preach and target vulnerable groups in the community (Bateman, 2021). Crime is costly, not only to the individual, but also tosocieties. It can have long-term consequences in terms of marginalisation and stigmatisation of the youth, as well as the presence of a criminal history, which will interfere in theirfuture job prospects (Ajufo, 2013). Society in general mayhave negative perceptions towards young people who are unemployed and may not be too keen in involving young people in societal and public affairs of the country. Due to these reasons, implementing corrective and preventative measures are crucial asthe issue of unemployment can be quite risky and pose a threat to the economy and livelihood of the nation(Holzmann &Jørgensen, 2001).

2.5 Physical Health and Mental Well being

Poor physical and mental health, as well as not being able to access care, may be a stressful experience which can be associated with consequences that promote unlawful behaviour (Kort-Butler, 2015; Farrington, et al., 2015; Vaughn et al.,2014). A positive association between general health status, chronic health conditions, and somatic complaints, and delinquency was reported by Junger (2001). Risky behaviour in adolescence has also been linked to poorer physical health conditions in adulthood (Hair et al., 2009; Reingle et al., 2012). Results of a meta-analysis determined that chronic health conditions ranging from headaches to major illnesses were associated with internalising as well as externalising behavioural problems (Reingle et al., 2012).

A link has also been found between physical health complaints and negative emotions. Adolescents with health complications may feel thattheir lives are more restricted or limited and may become more reckless and less constrained in their behaviourin an attempt to live their lives to the fullest (Suris et al., 2008). Hence, people who experience frequent health problems develop higher levels of negative emotions and low constraints,creating a higher risk ofthem adopting illegitimate coping mechanisms, such as drug abuse.

Pawlek et al. (2014) reports that youth in the Maldives are faced with issues relating to a lack of access to reproductive and sexual health education and services.It has come to surface that the subject of sexual and reproductive health among youth, particularly those who are unmarried, remains a 'taboo and sensitive topic' (Pawlak etal., 2014). Access to mental health counselling, as well as rehabilitation services, are also found to be limited and inadequate (MoH, 2022).

To rectify this, access to mental health services were strengthened, and the first mental health department was established in Male' in 2019 (Maldives Independent, 2019). Further, access to mental health services throughinsurance coverage and mental health centres in clinics and hospitals have been introduced in different regions of the Maldives (MoH, 2022).

2.5.1 Unemployment and Negative Health Consequences

Youth unemployment results in negative health consequences, both physical and psychological. Unemployment is associated with unhappiness, as there is a fear regarding job insecurity (O'Higgins, 2015; Fougere et al., 2009). Engaging in criminal activity, deviant behaviour and drug consumption can affect the psychological

well-being of Maldivian youth (World Bank, 2014). Young people who are unemployed can have low self-esteem and diminished attitudes and behaviour towards law and order in society. The distressing situation of unemployment can result in social isolation. Other negative behaviours include internet addiction, harmful substance abuse, excessive sleeping patterns, family problems and violent tendencies (Ayyildiz, 2019). Moreover, young people involved in gang activity are unable to go to certain neighbourhoods and sometimes college, due to fear of being attacked (Naaz et al., 2012). This consequently leads to the marginalisation of youth and results in negative physical and mental health outcomes of this population.In a country such as the Maldives where mental health and drug rehabilitation services are limited, particularly in outer islands (UNDP, 2019) it can be hard for unemployed youth to get the support and assistance they require to effectively deal with their adverse circumstances. This will consequently result in negative physical and mental health outcomes causingyouth tobecome vulnerable members of their communities.

Youth unemployment has adverse socioeconomic impact. Engagement in criminal activity and deviant behaviour because of unemployment is prevalent and universal across the globe. This situation remains a prominent issue in the Maldives.

2.6 Increasing participation in gang activities and violence

It is evident that muchof the youths in the Maldives are joining gangs to belong and form brotherhoods leading to unemployment and drug use (Aboobakuru, 2016). Due to the high levels of divorce and broken familiesin the Maldives, young people look to outside of traditional family structures for the support and protection that gangs can provide. This in turn leads to further issues, such as youth being incarcerated for drug or criminal offenses.This thenbecomes challenging to reintegrate these young men and women back into the fabric of society and for them to find jobs(Naaz et al., 2012)

2.7 Challenges in law enforcement mechanisms

The vision of the first National Youth Policy (2003) highlights the importance of creating equal opportunities, civic engagement, and youth development in the country. The policy priorityareas include: (1) education and training, (2) housing, (3) employment, (4) sports and recreation, (4) civic engagement, (6) health and well-being, (7) offences and crimes, (8) sustainable development and environment and (9) youth empowerment. The strategic framework for youth development (2005) was initiated by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 2005, and focuses on developing holistic youth, gender-inclusive national youth policies, skills development, capacity building and institutional strengthening, youth advocacy and dissemination of information.

The Strategic Action Plan of 2019 -2023– restates that the most serious issues facing the young people in the Maldives include drug and alcohol abuse, lack of employment opportunities, dysfunctional families, negligence, and the lack of good educational, employment and recreational opportunities. It also highlights the vulnerabilities faced by the youth, such as their involvement in criminal gangs and theviolence driven by extremist ideologies. The strategic plan also further indicates prioritisation areas such as increasing youth access to health, employment and economic opportunities, education and increasing youth representation in decision making (The President's Office, 2019).

The National Youth Council (NYC)previously performed the role of coordinating youth affairs forthe Minister of Human Resources. Then, the Youth and Sports Ministry and the National Youth Council were appointed by the Minister,whichdoes not include NGOs or any other youth associations. The National Youth Council has remainedactive since 2012,and the Youth Billis drafted and is in the process of being submitted to the Parliament (The President's Office, 2021).

In summary, not much research has been conducted on theyouth of the Maldives. Evidence from available literature on youth delinquency studies, globally, highlights that youth crimes are associated with lack of access and opportunities to participate in educational, recreational activities as well as unemployment and mental well-being which in-turn may lead to increased participation in gang activities and violence. Therefore, it is timely that a study of this nature be conducted in the Maldives to identify the factors that lead youth to commit crimes and the issues that they face which leads to repeat offences.

3. Objectives

The purposes of the study were to:

- determine the percentage of youth who commit crimes and the factors that lead them to be involved
- understand issues facing young people in atolls and urban areas leading them to repeated offences
- identify loopholes in law enforcement areas or mechanisms
- determine why young men and women are not engaged in income generating activities (study their attitudes/perspectives)
- find out the consequences of youth unemployment, focusing on crime and deviant behaviour of youth
- recognise the impact of lifestyle on youth mental and physical wellbeing (factors may include spirituality, self-care, sleep, exercise, eating habits, relationships etc.) and
- establish how they spend their leisure time.

4. Scope And Significance

The study was targeted at all youth in the Maldives and the scope was limited to the selected islands. The study intended to inform further government intervention measures to enable accessibility and educational, recreational and employment opportunities for youth. The study may also be of use to communities, non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CSOs) in informing them of the wider impact of the factors leading to youth crimes and measures that can be taken to enhance youth engagement in sustainable and developmental activities.

5. Research Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative research methodologieswere employed to collect data for the study.

5.1 Quantitative Part of the Study (Public Perception Survey)

In the quantitative phase, the research team conducted a perception survey of the population above 18 years of age in the selected regions using a pre-tested questionnaire, and analysedthe data disaggregated by age group, geographical location, vulnerability, and other relevant variables.

5.1.1 Sampling

A cross-sectional survey design was employed to collect data for the quantitative part of the study. A multistage cluster sampling was used to select the required sample size for this study. Three main clusters were selected based on high access, medium access, and low access (based on accessibility of transport, police presence and other services). Cluster sampling was used as it is difficult to attaina complete list of the members of a population and a simple random sample may produce a list of participants so widely scattered across the islands that surveying them would be far too expensive. Hence, for logistical purposes, a cluster sampling was used for this target group of respondents.

In the first stage, the three regions or clusters selected were
1)   Central and Greater Male'
2)   North and North Central
3)   South and South Central

5.1.2Sample size

The sample sizes for the respondents were determined using a statistical approach with a 95% confidence interval and 5% error. As per the research team's calculation, the sample for each cluster is shown in the table below.

Table 1: Sample cluster

Greater male and central	384
North and north central	383
South and south central	383
Total	1150

In the second stage of cluster sampling, a group of big and small islands were chosen from each cluster and the sample size for each cluster was derived by stratified sampling. As the population in some islands were very large compared to the smaller islands, disproportionate stratified sampling had to be applied to gain a reliable number of samples from the small islands. This sampling method is also applied to gain the required number of samples needed for statistical analysis. The sample sizes were derived prior to data collection as shown below:

Table 2. Sample size

Sample Size			
Island	Female	Male	Total
Male'	67	67	134
Hulhumale	30	30	60
Villimale	25	25	50
Kulhudhuffushi	81	82	163
Nolhivaranfaru	50	50	100
Manadhoo	30	30	60
Maafaru	30	30	60
Mulah	25	25	50
Kudahuvadhoo	20	20	40
Maaemboodhoo	17	18	35
Gan	17	18	35
Thinadhoo	30	30	60
Hoandehdhoo	20	20	40
Fuvahmulah	35	35	70
Hithadhoo	31	32	63
Hulhudhoomeedhoo	20	20	40
Huraa	25	25	50
Total			**1150**

5.1.3 Data Collection and selection of the participants

Systematic sampling was used to select households from each island. In this regard, one participant waschosen from every other household untilthe required sample size was achieved from each island.

5.1.4 Data Collection: Procedure for Call-backs and Refusals

1. Individuals were selected using a systematic sampling technique.
2. If the individual chosen based on the above sampling method is not available at the time, then the enumerator was instructed to call back.
3. If the individual chosen based on the above sampling method was not available at all or refused to participate, then the enumerator was informed to choose another individual as a replacement.

5.1.5 Research tool

A questionnaire was used as the key instrument for primary data collection in this study. A questionnaire enables quantitative data to be collected in a standardized way so that the data is internally consistent and coherent for analysis. Hence, a comprehensive design process was followed in getting a proper questionnaire designed by the research team. The components to be collected, such as the key indicators, were identifiers, background characteristics, indicators for disaggregating data, outcome indicators, and impact indicators. Outcome and impact indicators include:

• Percentage of youths who commit crimes and the factors that lead them to be involved.
• Issues facing young people in atolls and urban areas leading to repeated offences
• Loopholes in law enforcement areas or mechanisms

- Reasons why young men and women are not engaged in income generating activities
- Consequences of youth unemployment, focusing on crime and deviant behaviour of youth
- Impact of lifestyle on youth mental and physical wellbeing (factors include spirituality, self-care, sleep, exercise, eating habits, relationships etc.)
- The way youth spend their leisure time

In addition, the questionnairewasdesigned with the target respondents in mind byconsidering their educational level and experiences. The language used and the context of the questions were framed in such a way that they were all familiar to the respondents. It is noted that the pilot questionnaire was used as a base for designing the final questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in English and then translated to Dhivehi. It was ensured that the duration to fill the questionnaire did not take more than 30 minutes. The questionnairewas first piloted among a small sample of respondents by the research team. The data collected during pilot testing was analysed at item level to fine tune the final questionnaire by the research team.

 The pilot testing enabled:
1. To identify if the enumerators understood the questionnaire properly
2. To identify if the public understood the questions properly
3. To identify if the sampling method and design capture the required data

Pilot testing was carried out in Male'. The research team developed soft copies of the final questionnaires which were downloaded onto tablets or phones with the aid of Google forms which were used for such data collection.

5.1.5 Enumerators Selection

All enumerators were over 18 years of age and had completed their secondary education. The enumerators worked in pairs for safety and security, as well as quality assurance purposes. Enumerators were students oftheMaldives National University (MNU), Women's Development Committee (WDC) members, and council members. The research team from the MNUtrained the enumerators and supervised the data collectionprocess. The total number of enumerators selected for each island is shown in the table below.

Table 3. Number of enumerators

Island	Sample Size	Enumerators
Male'	134	14
Hulhumale	60	6
Villimale	50	5
Kulhudhuffushi	163	17
Nolhivaranfaru	100	10
Manadhoo	60	6
Maafaru	60	6
Mulah	50	5
Kudahuvadhoo	40	4
Maaemboodhoo	35	4
Gan	35	3
Thinadhoo	60	6
Hoandehdhoo	40	4
Fuvahmulah	70	7
Hithadhoo	63	6
Hulhudhoomeedhoo	40	4
Huraa	50	5

5.1.6 Enumerator Training

Training of supervisors and enumerators were carried out in Male' as well as in the islands.
The training included:

- How to select individuals for the survey
- How to address call backs
- How to address refusals
- Use of fixed wording at the beginning of data collection
- Strict adherence to NO NAME [of participant] policy
- Consent and confidentiality of the participants

During training, a practice run of the data collection process was carried out. In addition, personal security issues were highlighted and how to deal with such problems wereaddressed. The training also included directions on how to fill the enumerators' parts at the end of the questionnaire. During training, an emphasis was made on the importance of maintaining the privacy of the participants, as well as the enumerators,during data collection.Since it was an investigator led (enumerated) data collection exercise, the enumerators were instructed to fill the questionnaires instead of the participants.

5.1.7 Data Entry and Data Cleaning

The data from the completed questionnaires wasuploaded and captured through an automated process. The data then underwent a process of data checking to ensure that invalid data was eliminated.

5.2 Qualitative Part of the Study

Qualitative in-depth interviewing i.e., individual as well as focus group interviews, were conducted to collect data from the Island Council Offices, the Juvenile Justice Unit (JJU), Maldives Police Services, Schools, Courts, Ministry of Youth, Prosecutor General's Office (PGO), Attorney General's Office (AGO), and other relevant stakeholders who havebeen involved in justice issues.
A total of 3 focus group interviews and 4 individual interviews were conducted. Purposive sampling was used for this group as the research team trusts that the selected participants would be a more representative sample,whocan providemore accurate and informed input forthe study. The composition of the focus groups is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Sampling unit for the qualitative component

Male' Focus Group	
YMinistry of Youth, Sports & Community Empowerment	2
Police	2
Justice Agencies (JJU, AGO, PGO)	4
National Drugs Agency	2
Local Island Focus Groups	
Gaazee (Judge) / Lawyers	1
Council Members	4
Civilians	2
Teachers	2

To determine the factors that lead them to be involved,the following aspects were further explored through the qualitative part of the study:

- Issues facing young people in atolls and urban areas leading to repeat offences
- Loopholes in law enforcement areas or mechanisms
- Reasons why young men and women are not engaged in income generating activities (study their attitudes/perspectives)
- The consequences of youth unemployment, focusing on crime and deviant behaviour of youth
- The impact of lifestyle on youth mental and physical wellbeing (factors may include spirituality, self-care, sleep, exercise, eating habits, relationships etc.)
- The way youth spend their leisure time

5.2.2 Data Analysis

Different types of analyses were carried out on the collected data to extract patterns in different groups, such as age, income, geographic location, and other variables. The analysis was done to map out the perceptions of the respondents, and to understand the issues faced by young people that lead to offend or repeat offences in the atolls and urban areas. Advanced statistical methods were used to confirm these patterns and differences using SPSS (Statistical Package for social Sciences), version 25). For the qualitative analysis, different themes were generated, and the themes were then coded.

6. Findings And Discussion

6.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Most (31.6%) of the respondents were from the age group 26-30 years and 25.5% of the respondents were 18-25 years (Figure 1). There was an almost equal representation of gender with 54.6% female and 45.4% male participants. (Figure 2). As calculated in the methodology section, the responses were equally distributed throughout the three clusters chosen (north and north central, central, and south and south central) (Figure 3). Most of the participants (64.7%) were married, 25.5% were never married and 8.3% were divorced (Figure 4). Most (34.6%) of the participants had completed secondary schooling, 13.2% had basic education and 4.4% had no formal education (Figure 5). As shown in figure 6, 22.1% of the respondents have stated that they were studying at the time of the survey.
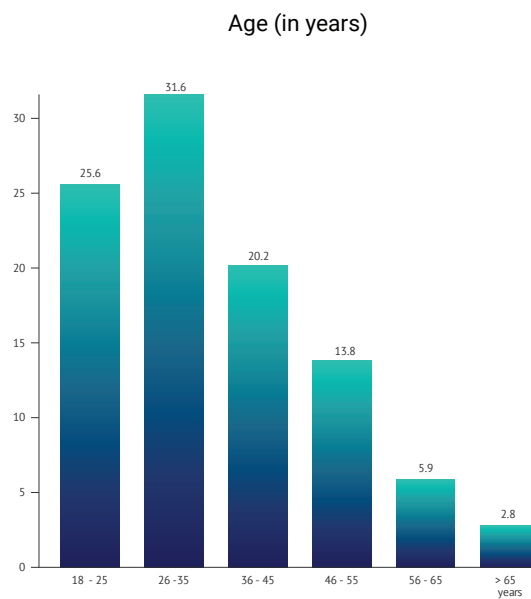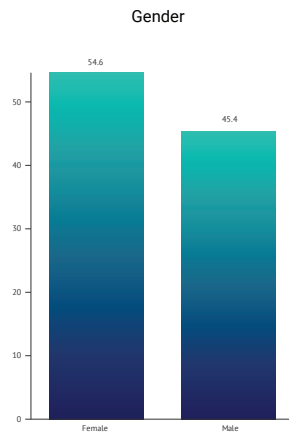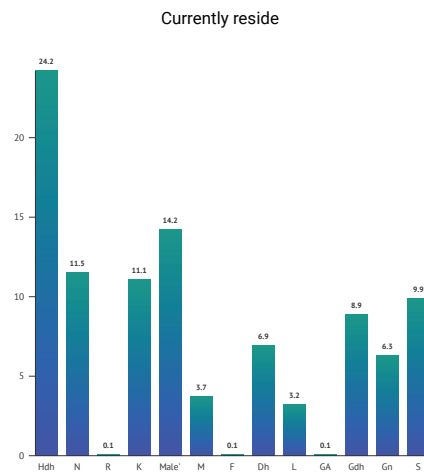

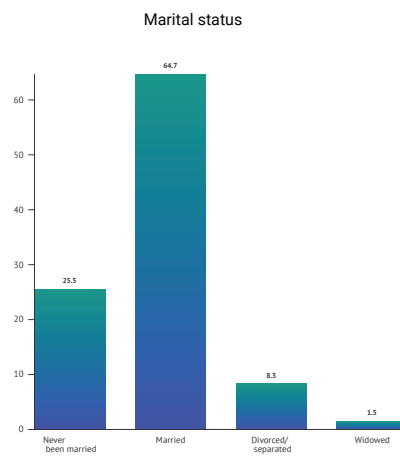Figure 1. Age (in years)

Gender

Figure 2. Gender

Currently reside

Figure 3. Currently reside

Marital status

Figure 4. Marital status

What is your highest educational qualification
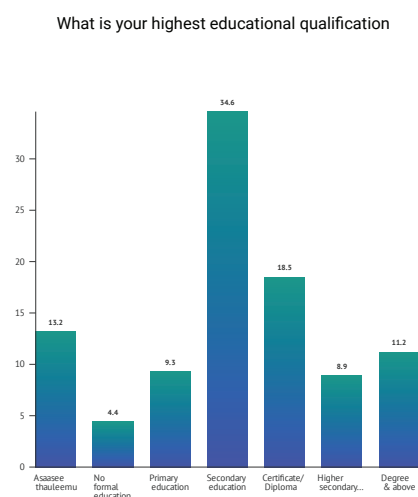
Figure 5.Highest educational qualification

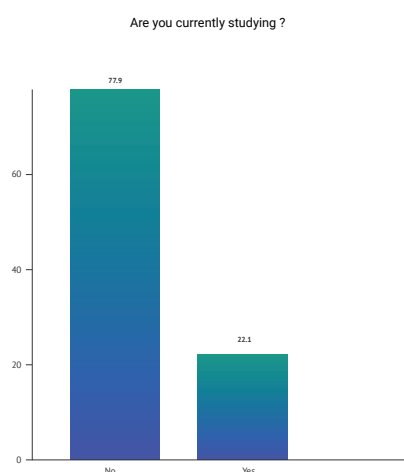Are you currently studying ?

Figure 6. Currently studying

6.2 Issues faced by young people that may lead to offences

6.2.1 Relationship of parents

The analysis showed that the participantsrespondedpositively to the question asked on family relationships. As shown in Figure 7, more than 50% strongly agreedand 28.7% agreed with the statement that their parents loved and cared for each other . Most (44.9%)of the participants strongly agreed and 34.2% agreed that their parents managed stressful situations well (Figure 8).As shown in figure 9, 34.8% of the respondents agreed and 24.8% strongly agreed with the statement that their parents have little or no conflict . The majority (76.6%) of the participants either agreed or strongly agreed that their parents trust each other (Figure 10). Majority of the respondents stated that 77.2% either strongly agreed or strongly disagreedwith the statement (Figure 11). Similar answers were given when asked whether their parent communicated well (Figure 12).

My parents loved and cared for each other
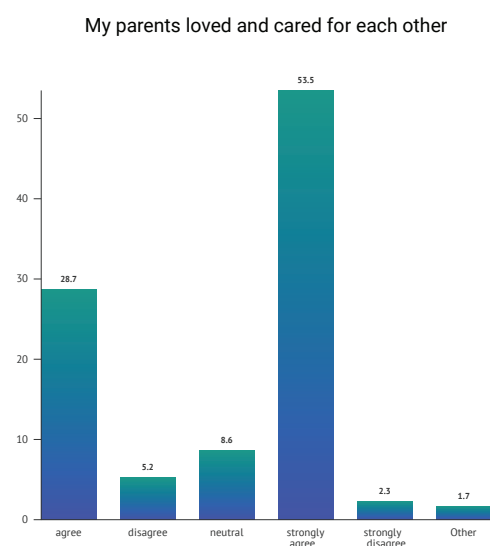
Figure 7. Parents loved and cared for each other

My parents managed stressful situations well
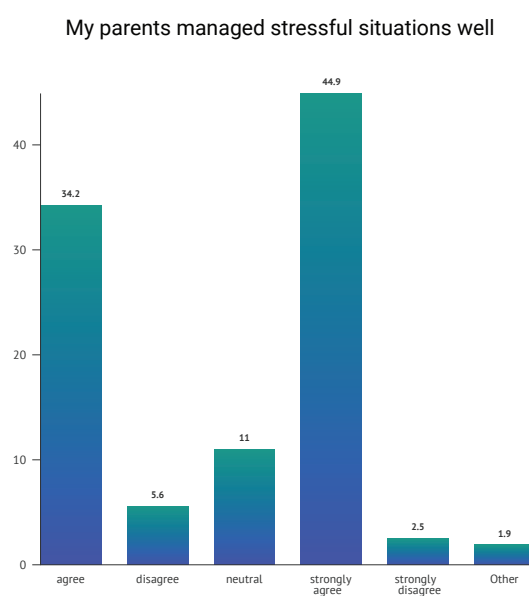

Figure 8. Parents managed stressful situations well

My parents had little or no conflict
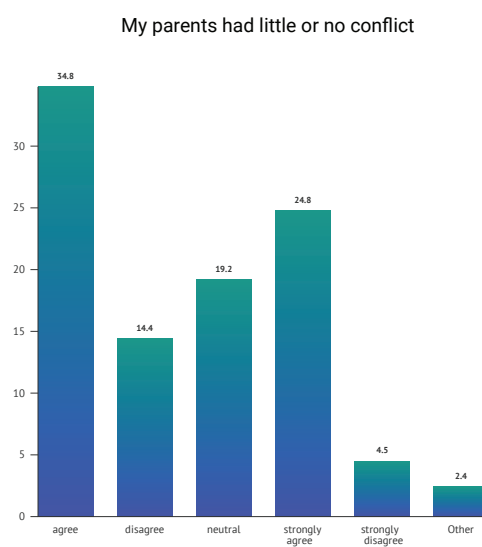

Figure 9. My parents had little or no conflict

My parents trusted each other
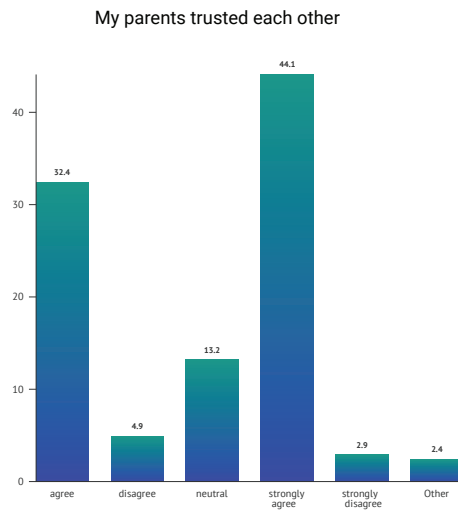
Figure 10. My parents trusted each other

My parents enjoyed the company of each other
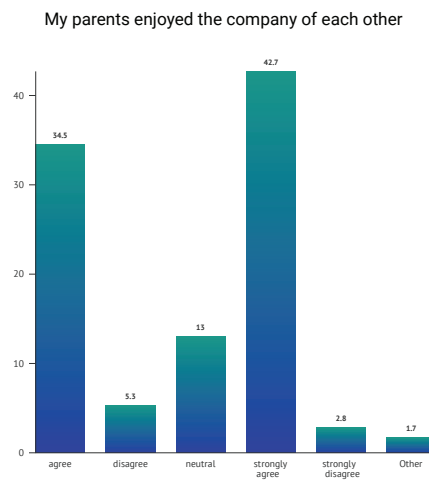
Figure 11. My parents enjoyed the company of each other

My parents communicated well
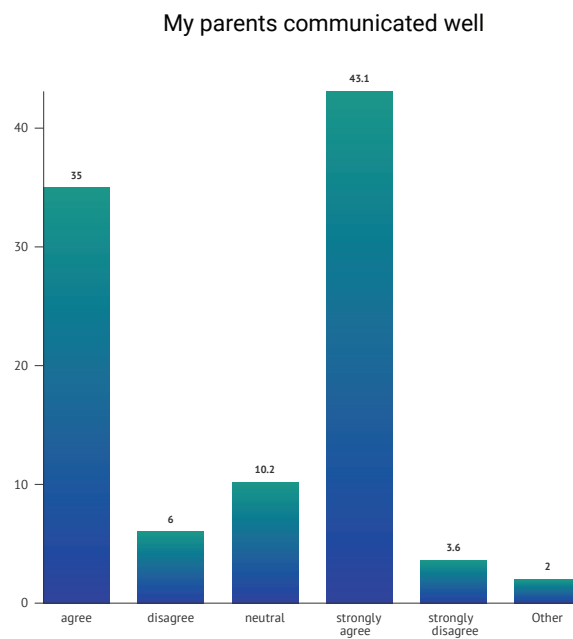
Figure 12. My parents communicated well

6.2.2 Parenting style

As shown in figure 13, 62.3% of the participants responded that their parents' have a disciplinary parenting style where therules are clear and the reasons behind them are explained. 16.5% of the participants said that their parents use a strict discipline style with little negotiation, where punishment is common.

More than 80% of the participants responded positively when asked whether they felt loved as a child (Figure 14) and a similar percentage said that they had a safe childhood, free from any form of abuse or violence (Figure 15).More than 80% of the participants said that they have a good relationship with friends and a similar percentage of people said they are social (Figures 16 and 17). When they were asked whether they often have conflict with family or colleagues, more than 80% disagreed or strongly disagreed withthe statement (Figures 18 and 19).

Which of the following most closely describe your parents' parenting styles

Figure 13. Which of the following most closely describe your parents' parenting styles

I felt loved and protected as a child
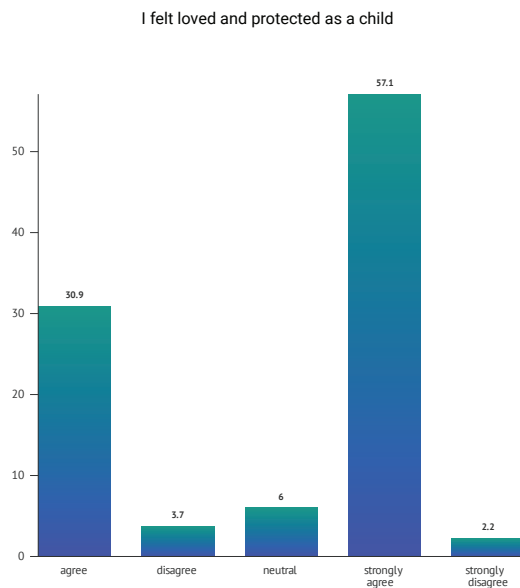
Figure 14. I felt loved and protected as a child

I had a safe childhood free from any forms of abuse / violence
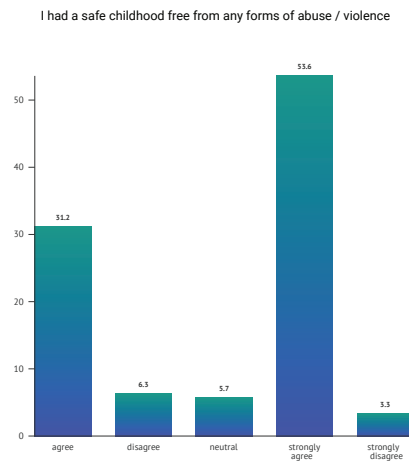
Figure 15. I had a safe childhood

I have good relationship with friends

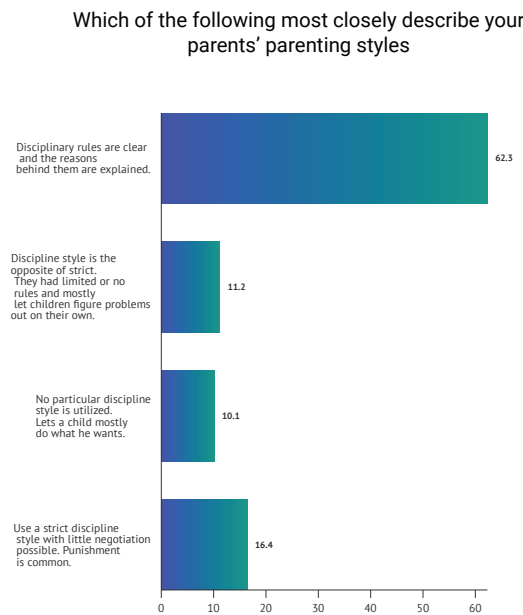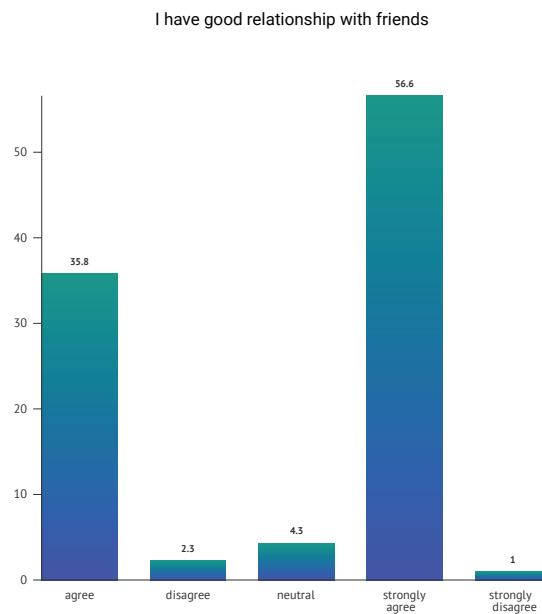Figure 16. I have good relationship with friends
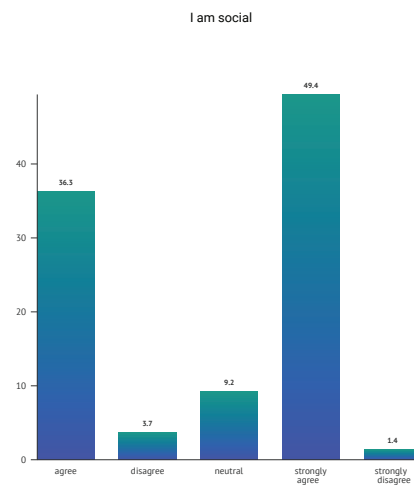
I am social

Figure 17. I am social

I often have conflicts with family
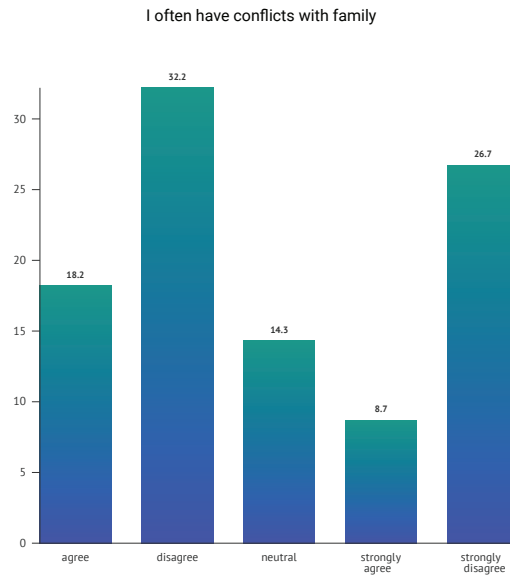
Figure 18 I often have conflicts with family

I often have conflicts with colleagues
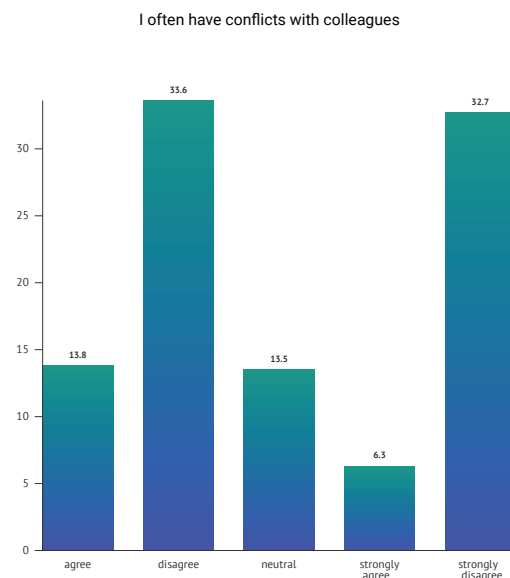
Figure 19 I often have conflicts with colleagues

Although the above information from the survey indicated that most people were loved and have a good relationship with theirfamilies, the focus group discussions indicated that youth who are involved in delinquent behaviour are from families with weak relationships or bonds.

I also want to highlight that the main risk factor is that the relationship or bond between children and parents/ guardians are weak. Some students are without food in school and hungry. When they do not get enough love from home, they spend the time with their friends, and they express their feelings in different ways. Even though the children get love, there are many children who do not get guidance. Second point is that, in our society, Islamic values are not being inculcated fromchildhood. There is a need to teach these values to prevent deviant behaviour. Then about children's abilities…. children who are weak in cognitive ability, problem solving, mental power are more likely to be involved in these things.

6.3 Self-evaluation scale

When survey participants were asked whether they feel isolated and marginalised from society, more than 60% of them disagreed/strongly disagreed, but there were more than 20% who agreed with the statement (Figure 20). Majority (77%) of the participants consider themselves to be religious people (Figure 21). When asked about how often they spent time with other children, 69% of them said they did it very often/often and 6% said they never spent time with other children (Figure 23). A similar percentage of participants said that the approval of peers is very important/important to them (Figure 22).
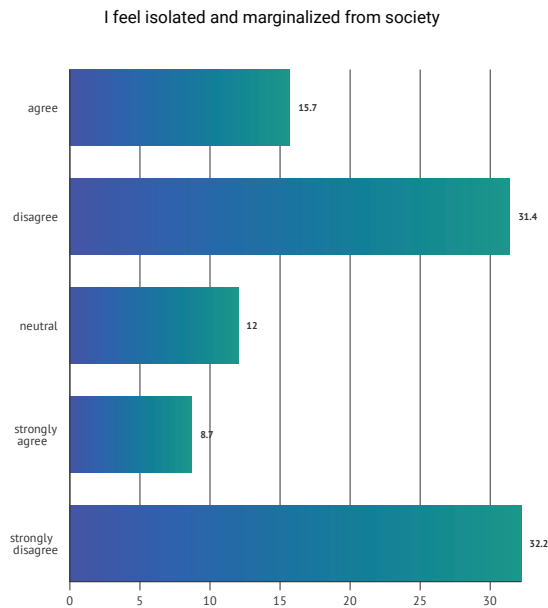
Figure 20. I feel isolated and marginalized from society
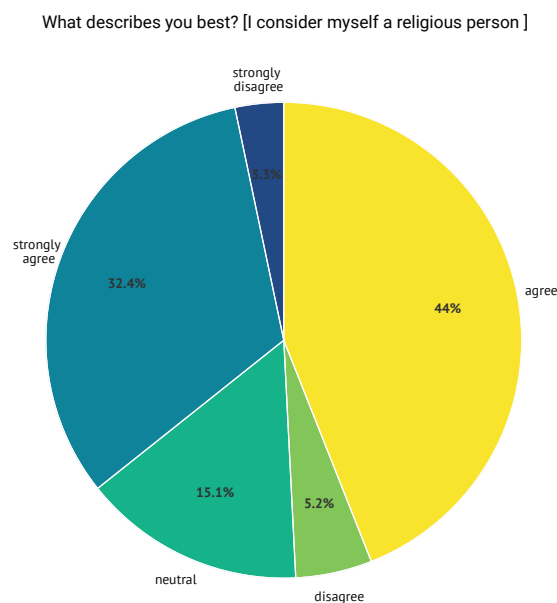
Figure 21. I consider myself a religious person

How important is the approval of your peers for you?
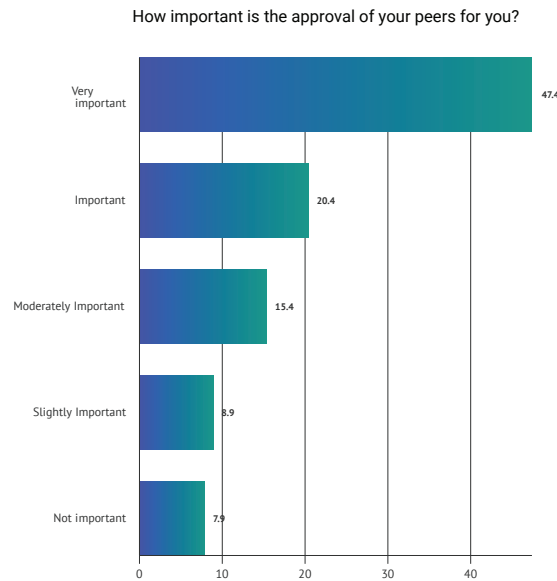
Figure 22. How important is the approval of your peers for you?

How often did you hang-out with other children?
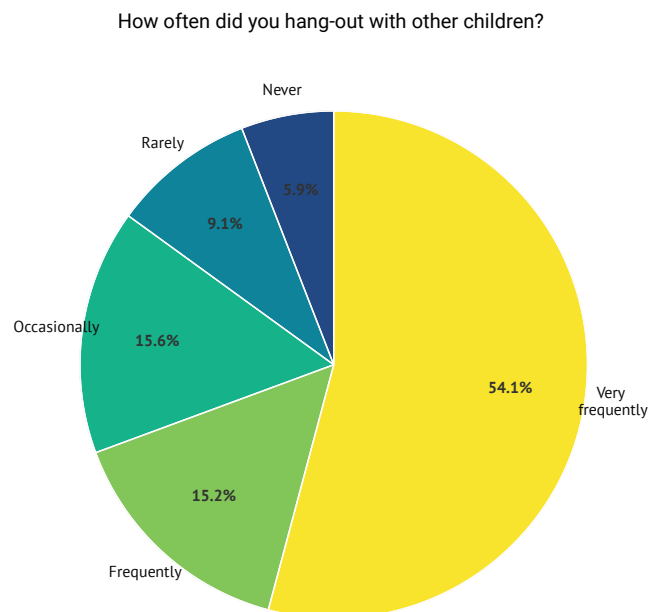
Figure 23. How often did you hang-out with other children?

6.4 Percentage of youth who commit crimes and the factors that lead them to be involved in crime

6.4.1 Knowing family or close friends who are involved in criminal activities

It isunexpected that when participants were asked about their level of engagement in political activities, 64% said that they never engaged and only 13% said they engaged in political activity very frequently or frequently (Figure 24). As seen inFigure 25, 79.6% of the participants said that they had not seen or heard violence within their home environment. However, 20.4% indicated that they had seen or heard violence at home.

Many respondents (42.32%) indicated that they knew someone from their family or close friends who were involved in traffic violations (Figure 26). It is not surprising that more than 50% of participants stated that they knew someone who drove without a license (Figure 28).

The number of participants who answered in the affirmative was lower (29.7%) when asked whether they knew someone from family or friends involved in assault (Figure 27). Only 17% of participants said that they knew someone from family or close friends who damaged public/private property (Figure 29).

More than 20% of the respondents said they knew someone who stole something and 30.71% said that they knew someone who used drugs. Some participants (12.07%) stated they knew someone from family or close friends who used a weapon to harm or threat someone and 9.96% said that they knew a person who sexually abused someone. Same information is shown in Figures 26-33.

To what level are you engaged in political activities?
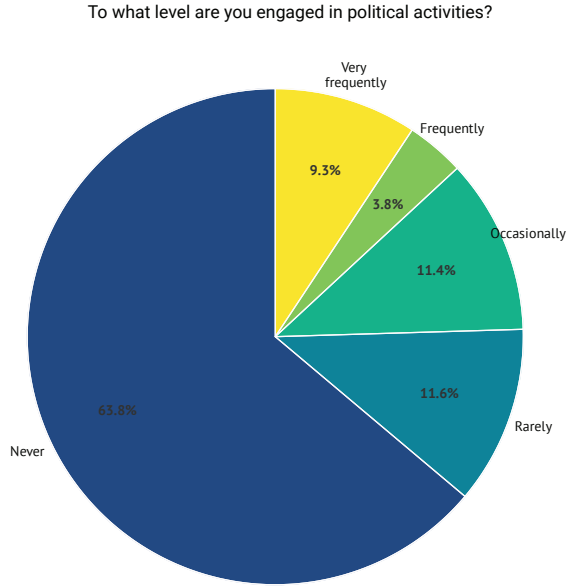
Figure 24 To what level are you engaged in political activities?

Have you seen or heard violence within home environment
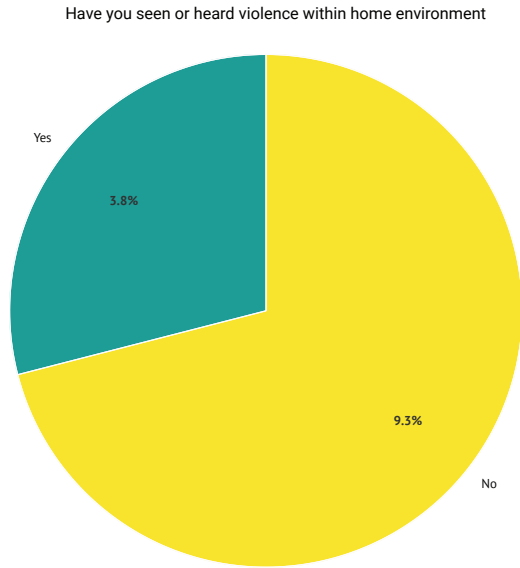
Figure 25 Have you seen or heard violence within home environment?

Table 5.Knowledge of family or close friends with deviant behaviour

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?	Yes (%)	No (%)
Traffic violations	42.3	57.7
Physically hit someone	29.7	70.3
Drove without license	59.6	40.4
Damaged public/private property	17.0	83.0
Stole something	21.4	78.6
Used drugs/ substances	30.7	69.3
Used a weapon to threat/ harm someone]	12.0	87.9
Sexually abused someone	10.0	90.0

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Traffic violations]
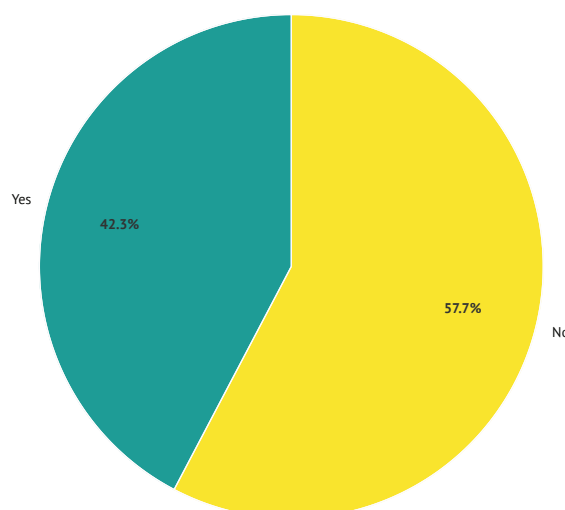
Figure 26. Perception of whether family/close friends engage in traffic violations

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Physically hit someone]
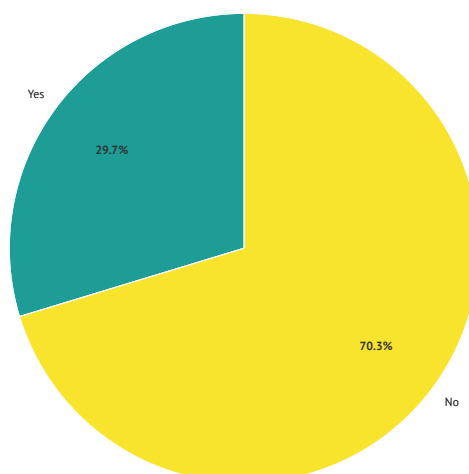
Figure 27. Perception of whether family/close friends had physically hit someone

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Drove without license]

No
40.4%

59.6%
Yes
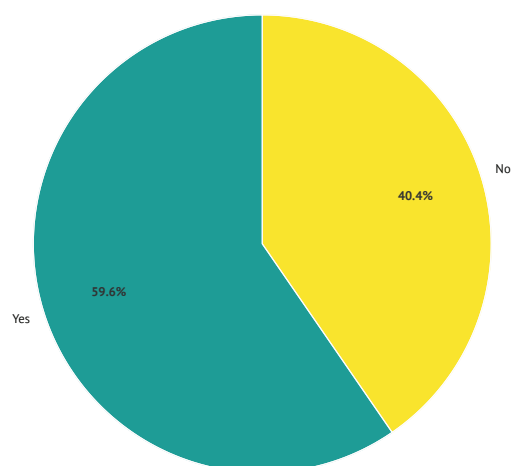
Figure 28. Perception of whether family/close friendsdrive without license

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Damaged public/private property]

Yes
17%

83%

No
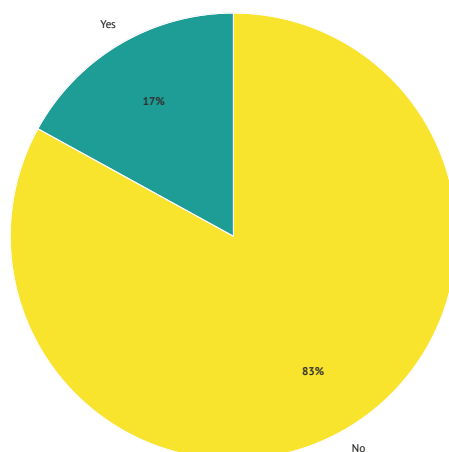
Figure 29.Perception of whether family/close friends engage in vandalism

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Stole something]

Yes
21.4%

78.6%

No
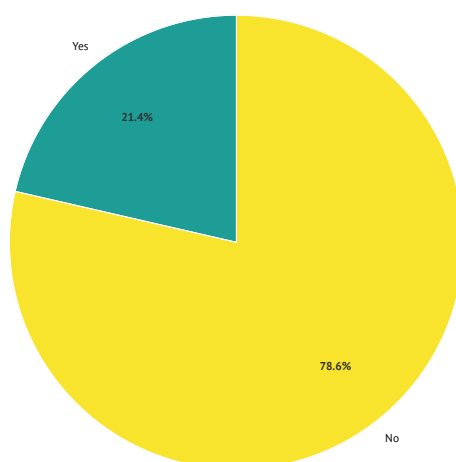
Figure 30. Perception of whether family/close friendsengage in stealing

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Used drugs/ substances]
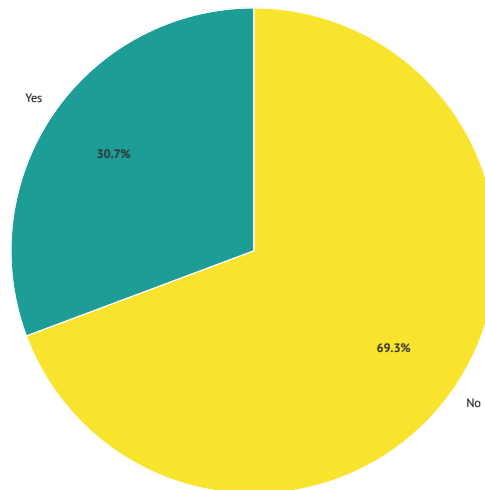
Figure 31.Perception of whether family/close friends are involved in substance abuse

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Sexually abused someone]
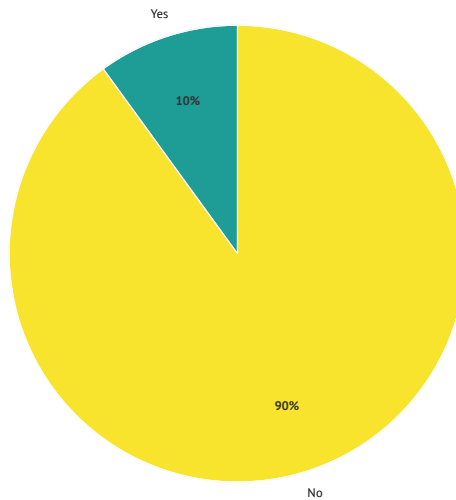
Figure 32.Perception of family/close friends' involvement in sexual abuse

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?
[Used a weapon to threat/ harm someone]
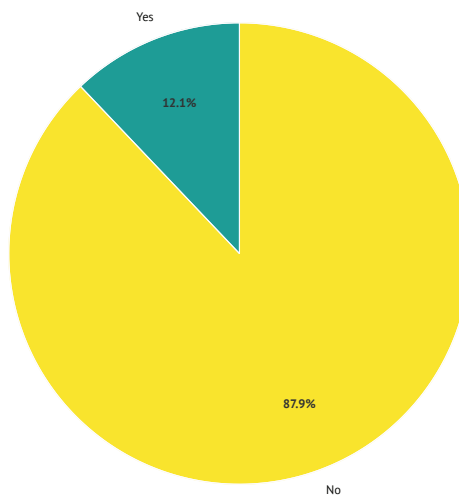
Figure 33. Perception of family/close friends' use of weapon to threaten/harm someone

6.4.2 Being involved in crimes

Table6 shows the responses given when participantswere asked whether they had been involved in any of the statedcrimes. The type of crime with the highest percentage (37.5%) of participants involved was driving without a licence. More than 20% said they have had atraffic violation; 10.9% said they had physically hit someone; 6.8% said they had damaged public/private property; 6.4% said that they had stolen something; 3.4% said that they used drugs; 2.3% said that they dealt drugs; 2.7% said that they had used a weapon to threaten or harm a person; and 1.8% said that they have sexually abused someone. The same information is shown in Figures 34-42.Figure 43 shows that compared to the people who agreed/strongly agreed, more people disagreed/strongly disagreed when asked whether they think that the community is accepting of people returning after jail time.

Table 6. Self-reporting of deviant behaviour

Do you know anyone (family / close friends) involved in any of the following?	Yes (%)	No (%)
Traffic violations	42.3	57.7
Physically hit someone	29.7	70.3
Drove without license	59.6	40.4
Damaged public/private property	17.0	83.0
Stole something	21.4	78.6
Used drugs/ substances	30.7	69.3
Used a weapon to threat/ harm someone]	12.0	87.9
Sexually abused someone	10.0	90.0

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Traffic violations]

Figure 34. Perception of self as a traffic rules offender-

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Physically hit someone]

Yes
10.9%

89.1%

No
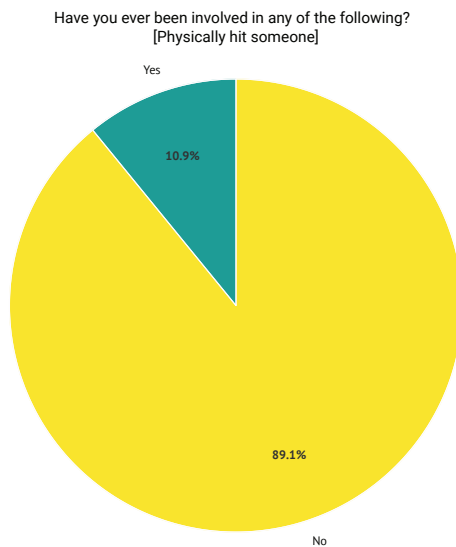
Figure 35. Perception of self as a physical aggressor

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Drove without license]

Yes
37.5%

62.5%

No
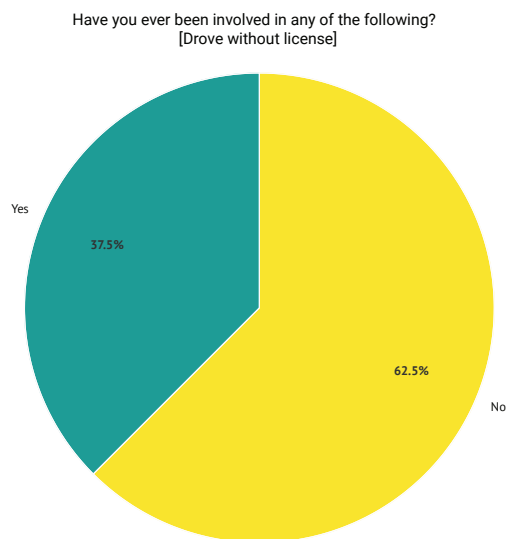
Figure 36.Perception of self,having driven without license

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Damaged public/private property]

Yes
6.8%

93.2%

No
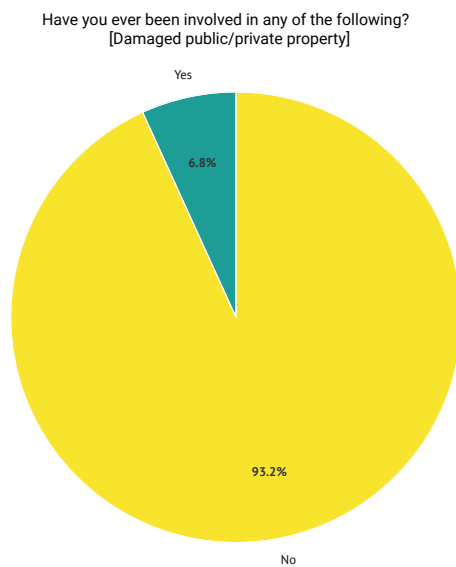
Figure 37.Perception of self-involvement in vandalism

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Stole something]

Yes

6.4%

93.6%

No
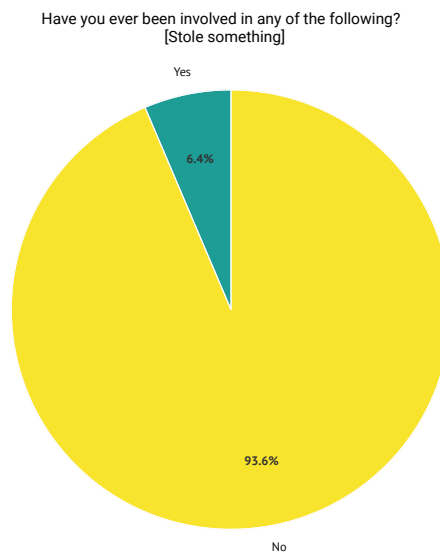
Figure 38. Perception of self-involvement in stealing

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Used drugs/ substances]

Yes

3.4%

96.6%

No
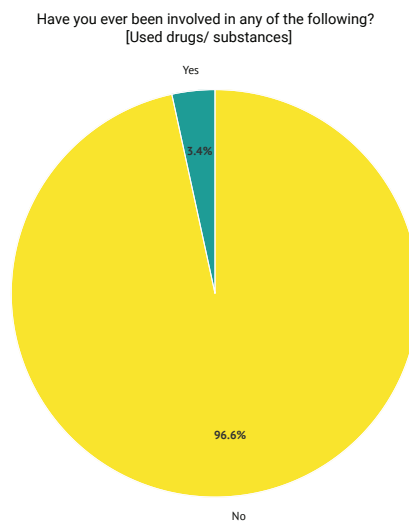
Figure 39.Perception of self-involvement in drugs/substance abuse

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Dealt drugs/substances]

Yes

2.3%

97.7%

No
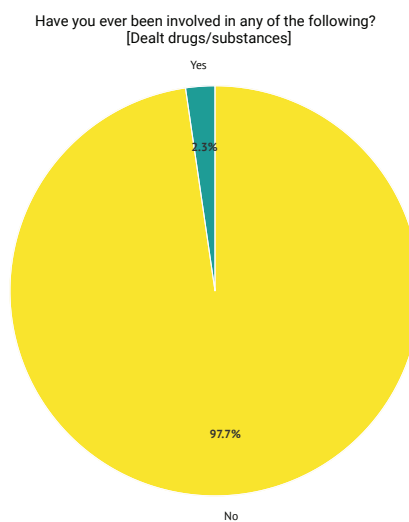
Figure 40.Perception of self-involvement in dealing drugs/substance

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Used a weapon to threat/ harm someone]
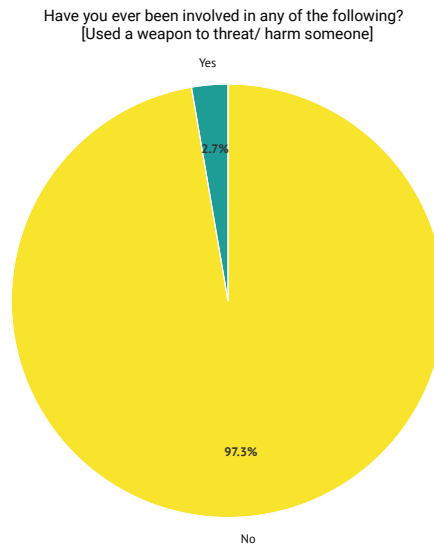
Figure 41.Perception of self-involvement in using a weapon to threaten/harm someone

Have you ever been involved in any of the following?
[Sexually abused someone]
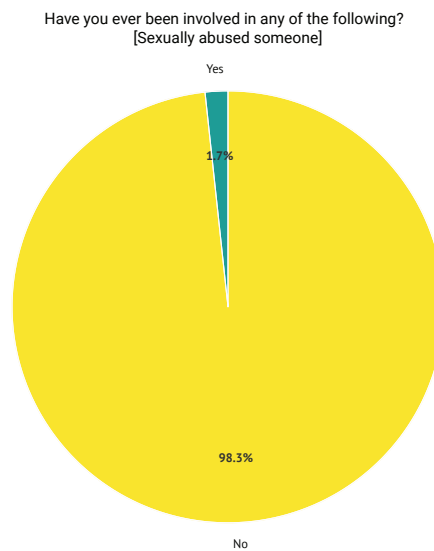
Figure 42.Perception of self-involvement in sexually abusing someone

Do you think the community is accepting of people returning after jail time
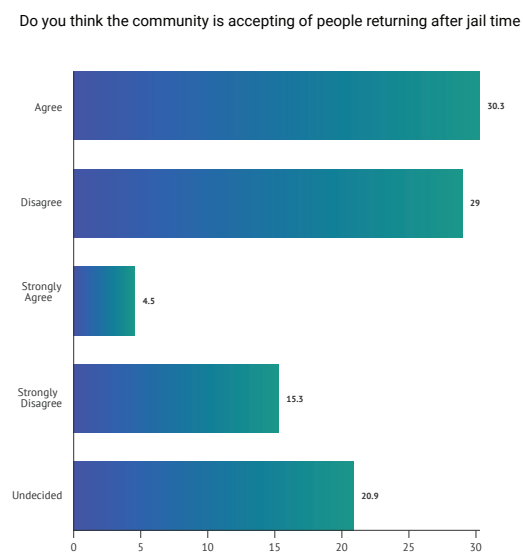
Figure 43.Perception of Community acceptance of people returning after jail time

6.5 Laws and regulations regarding crime

Although 33.3% of the participants agreed and 8.2% strongly agreed that they were aware of the laws and regulations related to crime, more than 30% answered neutral to the statement (Figure 44). As illustrated in the same Figure, close to 30% of the participants disagreed or strongly disagreed to the same statement indicating lack of awareness of the stated laws. It is ofgreat concern that the majority of the participants disagreed orstrongly disagreed that the existing laws address corruption, extremism, gang violence, substance/alcohol abuse ordomestic violence (Figures 45-52).

The analysis also showed that the participantsrespondedvery negatively to the question that asked if existing laws address child abuse. As shown in Figure 50, most participants strongly disagreed that the existing laws in the country address child abuse issues, while only 22.9% agreed that the existing laws do addresschild abuse issues, with another 12.7% of the participants' undecided on the matter.

More than 50% of the participants disagreed and strongly disagreed that that the existing laws in the country address the issues of theft, stealing and robbery, while only about 20% agreed orstrongly agreed with the statement. Another14.3% remained undecided on the matter (Figure 52).

The focus group discussions also cantered on the issue of whether the existing laws address the issues of theft, stealing and robbery.

The law itself has become the problem when a uniformed police officer cannot do anything even if they witness an actual crime. The lack of enforcement is exacerbated because [criminals] have too many escape routes. They can evade the Prosecutor General, the Courts and even the Police. So, if enforcement is lacking, [criminals] have nothing to fear, right? There's protection for major theft now, not petty ones. The same with other crimes.

Similar answers were given when asked whether existing laws address violent crimes.While 34.6% of the survey participants strongly disagreed on the matter, only 15.6% agreed that existing laws address violent crimes. A few (13%) remained undecided on the matter (Figure 51).

The question as to whether the existing laws address the issue of violent crimes was discussed in the focus groups as well.

I do not think it is just the law that is the issue here but there are reasons why laws came into effect in their present state. We saw people who were imprisoned for slights and consequently become hardened criminals. People were taught how to conduct the drug business in this way, and I observed it very closely when I was at theisland (prison). I think the laws are good, but utility of those laws is not uniform: they do what they want and avoid what they do not want. And that is the problem. Even the policeman should not be free to do whatever they do.

I am aware of the current laws and regulations related to crimes.
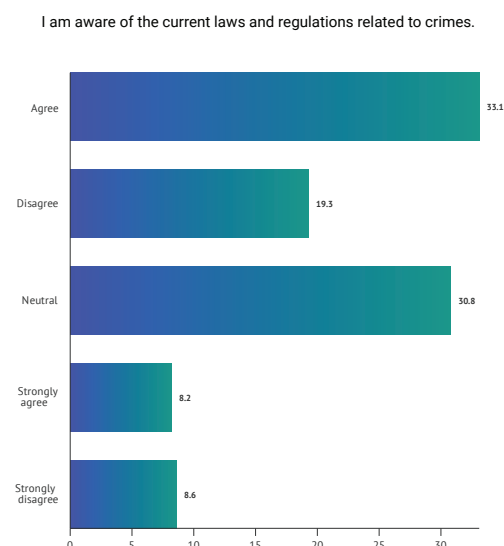
Figure 44. Awareness of the current laws and regulations related to crimes

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Corruption]
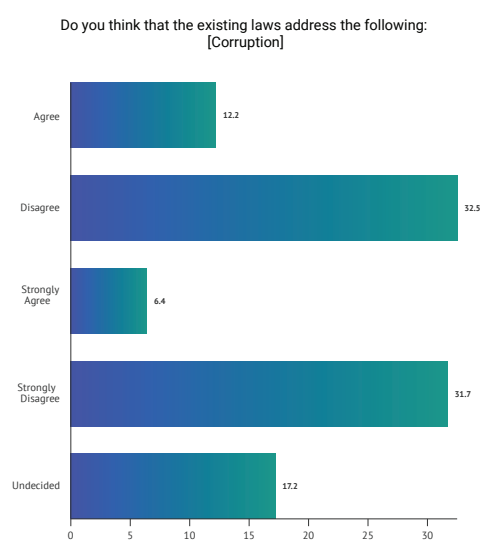
Figure 45. Perception of whether existing laws address Corruption

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Extremism]
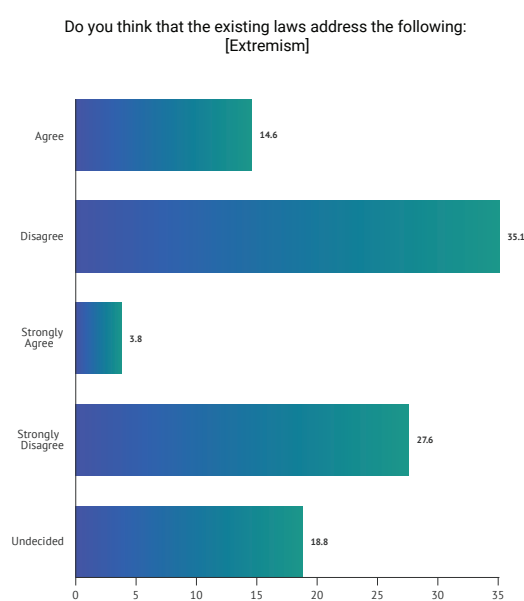
Figure 46. Perception of whether the existing laws address Extremism

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Gang Violence]

Agree	14.4
Disagree	36.7
Strongly Agree	3.7
Strongly Disagree	31.3
Undecided	13.9
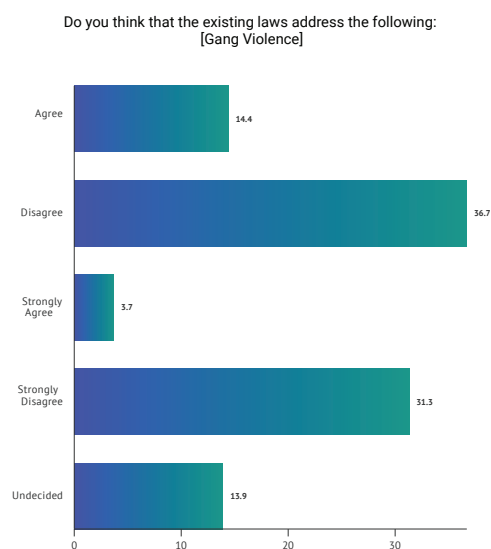
Figure 47. Perception of whether the existing laws address Gang Violence

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Substance/ alcohol abuse]

Agree	14.3
Disagree	35.6
Strongly Agree	4.2
Strongly Disagree	33.3
Undecided	12.7
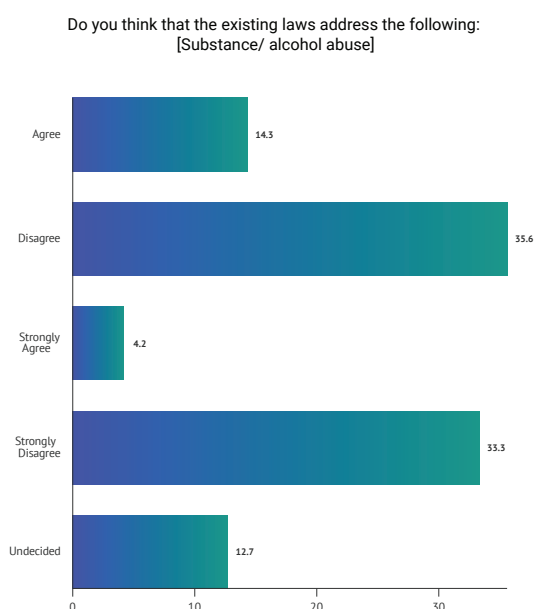
Figure 48. Perception of whether the existing laws address Substance/ alcohol abuse

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Domestic violence]

Agree	21.6
Disagree	31.8
Strongly Agree	5.2
Strongly Disagree	27.1
Undecided	14.3

Figure 49. Perception of whether the existing laws address Domestic violence

Do you think that the existing laws address the following: [Child abuse]

Agree	22.9
Disagree	31.3
Strongly Agree	6.5
Strongly Disagree	26.7
Undecided	12.7
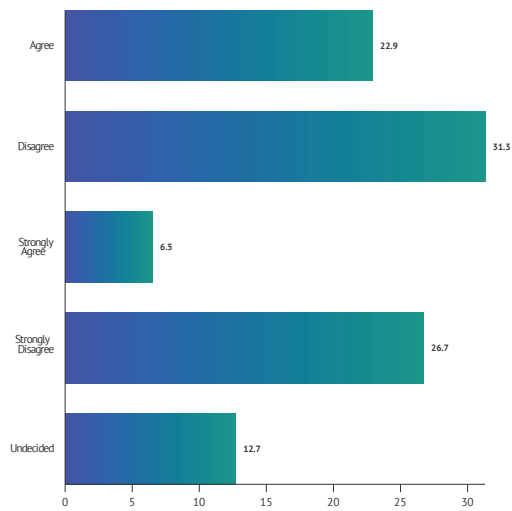
Figure 50. Perception of whether the existing laws address Child abuse

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Violent crimes]

Agree	15.6
Disagree	34.6
Strongly Agree	4.8
Strongly Disagree	32.1
Undecided	13
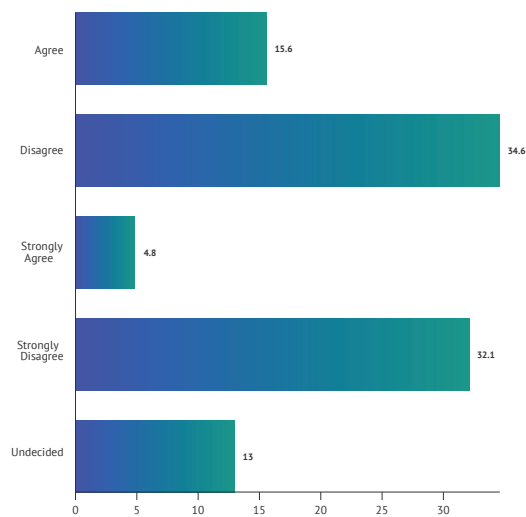
Figure 51.Perceptions of whether existing laws address Violent crimes

Do you think that the existing laws address the following:
[Theft/ stealing/ robbing]

Agree	16
Disagree	33.5
Strongly Agree	4.4
Strongly Disagree	31.9
Undecided	14.3
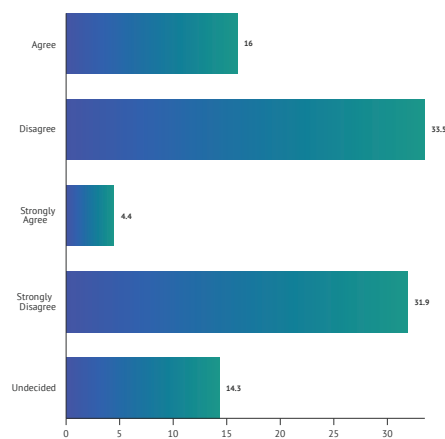
Figure 52.Perceptions of whether existing laws address theTheft/ stealing/ robbing

6.6 Loopholes in law enforcement or mechanisms

When asked if the police are sensitised to youth offenders, more than 50% of the survey participants disagreedorstrongly disagreedwith the statement, while 23.1% agreedwith the statement, and only 5.4% strongly agreedthat police are sensitised towards youth offenders. A few (20.7%) remained undecided on the matter (Figure 54).

This was discussed in the focus group discussion as well.

My opinion on this matter is slightly different. Enforcement authorities claim that the island has a relatively small crime rate. Drugs and theft are no longer considered major crimes which n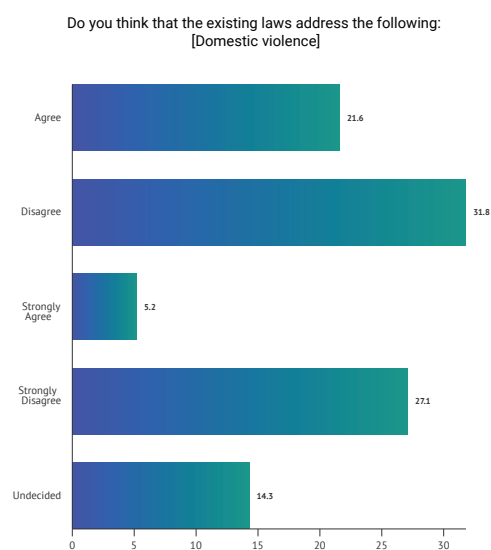ow include deadly assault. We haven't reached that state yet, but drug trafficking is common here. Some people are trying to conceal this fact despite the open sale of narcotics. And then there's indecent activities which are no longer considered big crimes. It scares me to see the videos taken by school age children. This is why [they are] saying that crime is low, but I believe that these are still crimes.

Survey participants responded with similar answers when asked whether prosecutors are sensitised towards youth offenders. As shown in figure 55, only 2.7% of the participants strongly agreedor17.7% agreedtothe statement, while 16.7% strongly disagreed and 32.1% disagreed that prosecutors are sensitised towards youth offenders. Many of the participants (30.7%) remained undecided on thismatter as well (Figure 55).

Participants were further asked if Courts are sensitised towards youth offenders and as shown in Figure 56, 33.7% disagreed and 16.8% strongly disagreedwiththe statement, while only 18.7% agreed and 2.7% strongly agreedwiththe statement that the Court systems are sensitised towards youth offenders. Quite a few (28.2%) of the participants remained undecided on the matter (Figure 56).

When asked if the prison officers are sensitised towards youth offenders, more than 50% of the participants strongly disagreedwith the statement, while less than 20% agreed that prison officers are sensitised towards youth offenders. Manyof the participants (37.1%) remained undecided on the matter (Figure57).

Participants were also asked if social workers are sensitised to youth offenders. As shown in Figure 58, less than 50% agree and strongly agree with the statement while 35% disagreed and strongly disagreed that social workers are sensitised to youth offenders. Many participants (31.1%) remained undecided on the matter (Figure 58). Participants were also asked if they believedthat existing rehabilitation programs were effective. As shown in figure 59, while 19.2% strongly agreed and 20.5% agreed with the effectiveness of the existing rehabilitation programs, there were a few (19.2%) who strongly disagreed and 31.2% who disagreed with the statement. There were also some (24.0%) who remained neutral with their stand (Figure 59).

The effectiveness of rehabilitation centres was discussed during the individual interviews as well.

According to my experience and what I see in this Island I think that yes after these people are rehabilitated, they are given the opportunities to work and they are given a second chance at being part of the society but what I notice in this Island is that they are prone to becoming substance abusers again once they are back in the island and even afterthey havecompleted their rehabilitation, so again they go back to their old ways and start using it.This is what I think is happening in this island. So how can anyone trust them with their businesses, give them a job and if they are given the opportunity while they are using drugs, they are sure to loot the persons business. Actually, it could be that the person who comes back recovered is not fully recovered. I think it is in name that they are recovered because if they are recovered, they will not go back to being users.

The following agencies are sensitized towards youth offenders:
[Police]

Agree	23.1
Disagree	33.3
Strongly Agree	5.4
Strongly Disagree	17.5
Undecided	20.7
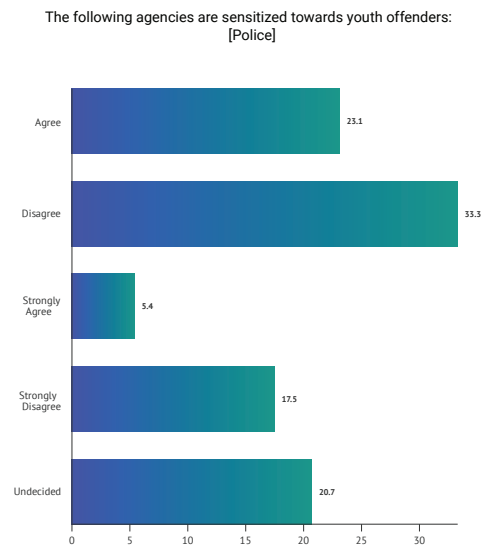
Figure 53.Perception of whether the Police are sensitised towards youth offenders

The following agencies are sensitized towards youth offenders:
[Prosecutors]

Agree	17.7
Disagree	32.1
Strongly Agree	2.7
Strongly Disagree	16.7
Undecided	30.7
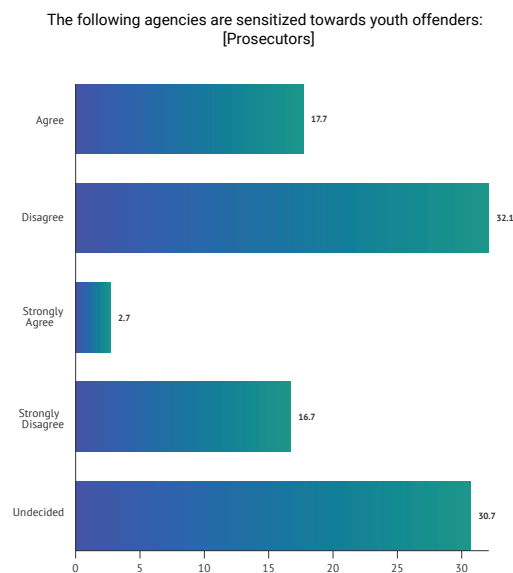
Figure 54.Perception of whether the Prosecutors are sensitised towards youth offenders

The following agencies are sensitized towards youth offenders:
[Courts]

Agree	18.7
Disagree	33.7
Strongly Agree	2.6
Strongly Disagree	16.8
Undecided	28.2
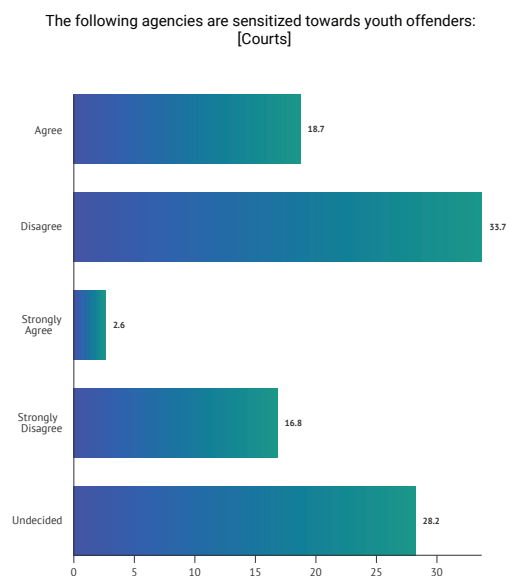
Figure 55.Perception of whether the Courts are sensitised towards youth offenders

The following agencies are sensitized towards youth offenders:
[Prison Officers]
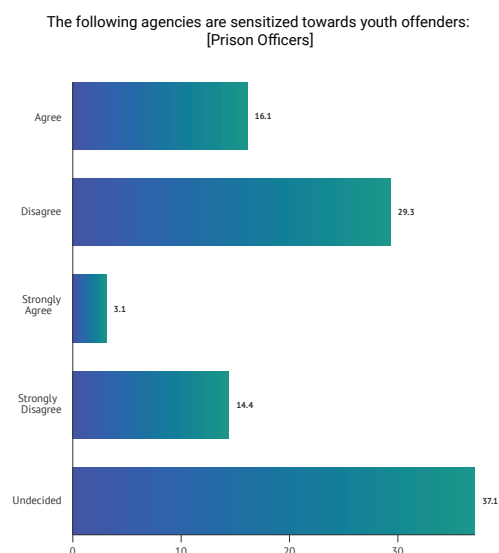
Figure 56.Perception of whether the Prison Officers are sensitised towards youth offenders

The following agencies are sensitized towards youth offenders:
[Social Workers]

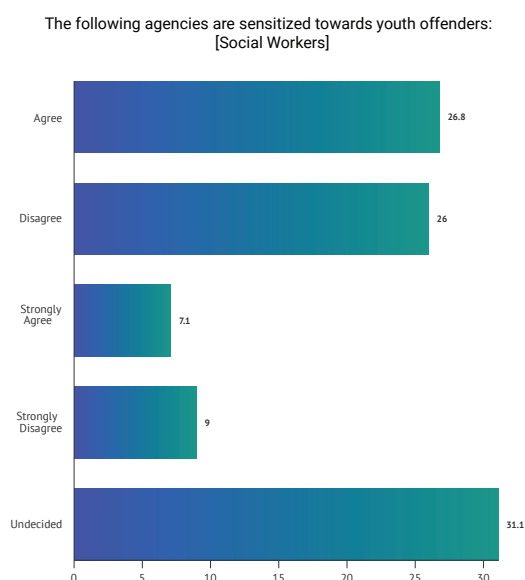Figure 57.Perception of whether Social Workers are sensitised towards youth offenders

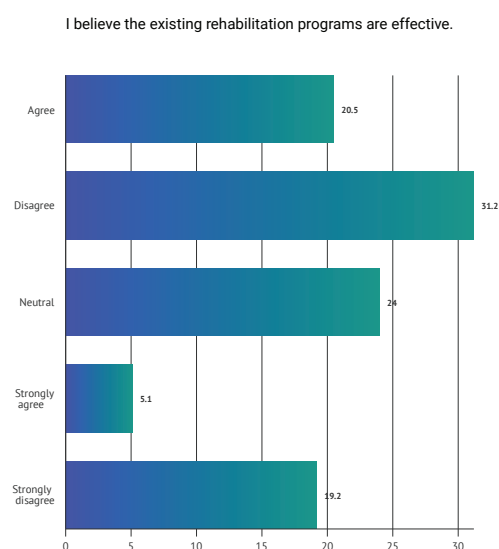I believe the existing rehabilitation programs are effective.

Figure 58.Perceptions of whether the existing rehabilitation programs are effective

6.7 Reasons why the youth are not engaged in income generating activities

The analysis of the survey responses showed that the participants responded very negatively when asked if there were enough crime prevention programs that exists in the country for the youth. As shown in Figure 60, more than 50% of the participants strongly disagreedordisagreed with the statement, while about 20% agreed and strongly agreed that that were enough crime prevention programs that exists in the country for youth. A few participants (15.4%) remained undecided on the matter (Figure 60). The analysis showed that the participants respondents very negatively to the question that asked if it's challenging to get employment opportunities due to foreign employees taking over local jobs. As shown in Figure 61, more than 50% strongly agreed oragreed with the statement.

Many of the participants (25.4%) strongly agreed and 32.6% agreed that it is challenging to get employment opportunities due to foreign employees taking over jobs (Figure 61). Further, 10.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 24.8% disagreed with the statement. A few (10.6%) of the participants remained undecided (Figure 61).

The analysis also showed that the participants responded very negatively to the question that asked if it waschallenging to get employment due to inadequate opportunities. As shown in Figure 62, more than 60% strongly agreed oragreed with the statement. Many of the participants (25.0%) strongly agreed and 41.7% agreed that it is challenging to get employment due to the lack of opportunities and 6.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 18.6% disagreed with the statement. A few (8.6%) of the participants remained undecided.

This stance was supported through the individual interviews as well.

"For example, there is a job opening that is announced. The thing is because I have faced something like that. I also applied to ____ here in Male'as an assistant director,also as an HR officer to the hospital, but what happens is everyone finds the loophole-- the announcement is made, but the job has already been filled. They follow the procedure, but already a person is selected. They will conduct the interviews and everything but the person who they want gets it as it is targeted to a particular person, and if that person doesn't apply to the post, they even cancel the announcement and re-announce

Survey participants responded with similar answers when asked whether it is challenging to get employment opportunities due to the job description or not meeting the academic qualifications. As shown in Figure 63, only 5.0% strongly disagreed and 14.3% disagreed with the statement, while more than 60% of the participants (25% strongly agreed and 41.9% agreed) statingthat it is challenging to get employment opportunities due to the job description and not because of unmet academic qualifications. A few of the participants (13.8%) remained undecided on the matter as well.

These findingswere further supported through the information obtained during the individual interviews.

Yes, definitely! There are other reasons as well [for unemployment].There are not enough jobs in this island for youth and there could also be reasons such as not being qualified enough.

Survey participants responded with similar answers when asked whether it was challenging to get employment opportunities due to not being able to apply academic knowledge. As shown in Figure 64, only 6.2% strongly disagreed and 14.7% disagreed with the statement while more than 60% of the participants (21.1% strongly agreed and 42.4% agreed) that it is challenging to get employment opportunities due not being able to apply academic knowledge to the workplace. A few of the participants (15.5%) remained undecided on the matter as well.

The challenges of getting employment, and the reasons why youth are not engaged in income generating activitiesthat lead them to crime was discussed in the focus groups.

Everybody who completes grade 10 would not be able to work with a tie [official wear, at desk jobs] and there aren't that many civil service jobs available. Civil service jobs cannot also be created for all the school leavers. If 'Hunaru' program can be conducted in an organized way in collaboration with the government, more youngsters would be willing and interested to work in sectors/jobs other than desk jobs within civil services. Unemployment is a problem. None of them have any skills when they finish school, so when they go to office in tie andtype something they think they are working. They don't even have an interest in the job. I am not saying everyone is like that, but a larger percentage is like that. Thousands of children complete O' levels or A 'levels but only about 2% get a job. So, when children have no work, they wander around 'goalhikanmathi' (street corners). Some school leavers get a lot of money if they get jobs from resorts, but most parents do not want their children to work in resorts. That's a big problem in the Maldives and narcotics is an unresolved issue. So, I believe if these two major problems can be tackled, all problems will be solved.

There are enough crime-prevention programs for youth.
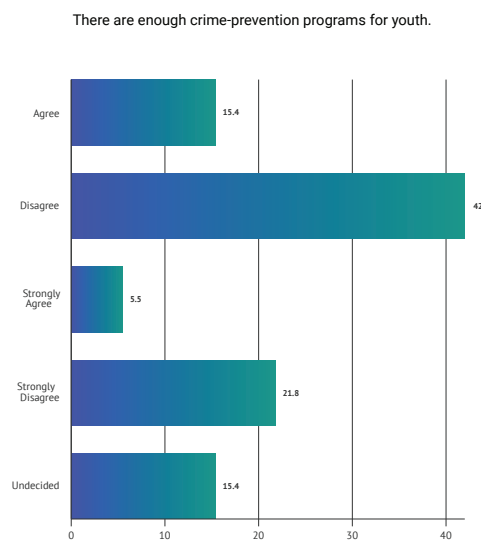
Figure 59. Perceptions of whether there are enough crime-prevention programs for youth

It is challenging to get employment opportunities due to:
[Foreign employees taking over jobs]
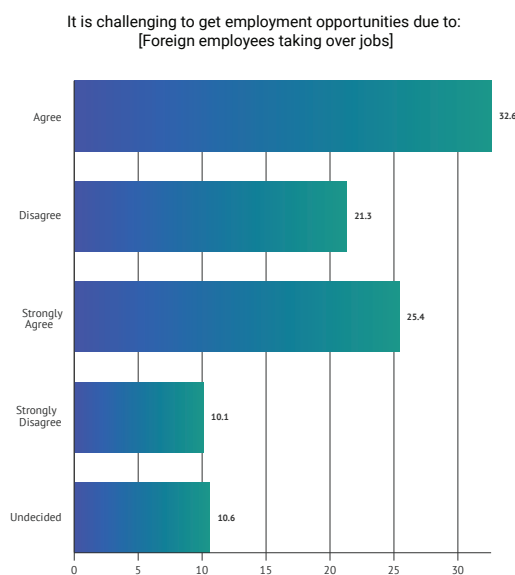
Figure 60. Perception on whetherit is challenging to get employment opportunities due toForeign employees taking over jobs

It is challenging to get employment opportunities due to:
[Not adequate opportunities]
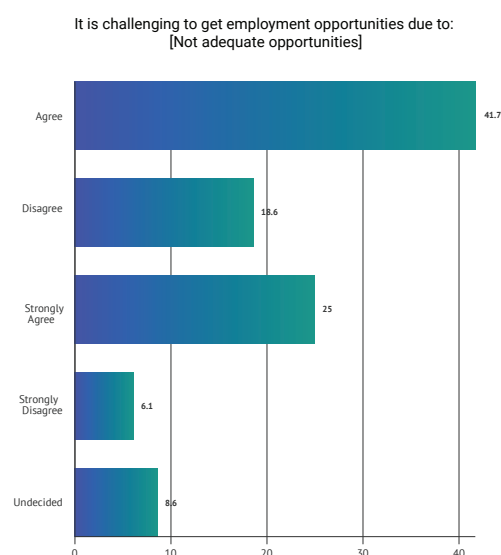
Figure 61.Perception of whether it is challenging to get employment opportunities due to inadequate opportunities

It is challenging to get employment opportunities due to:
[Job description does not meet academic qualification]
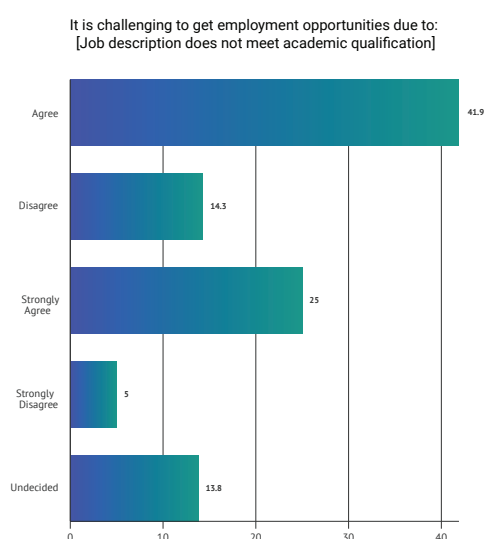
Figure 62. Perception of whetherit is challenging to get employment opportunities due to mismatch between job description and academic qualification]

It is challenging to get employment opportunities due to:
[Unable to apply academic knowledge to work place]
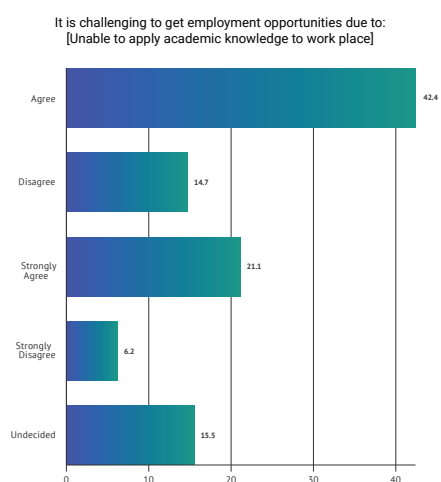
Figure 63.Perception of whether it is challenging to get employment opportunities due to inability to apply academic knowledge to workplace

6.8 Impact of lifestyle on youth mental and physical wellbeing

The mental well-being scale was scored and a total mental health score was generated for the participants using the 14 questions below. The questions were scored using a 5-item Likert scale. Figures 65-79 show how the participants responded to each of the separate items on the mental health scale

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling optimistic about the future]
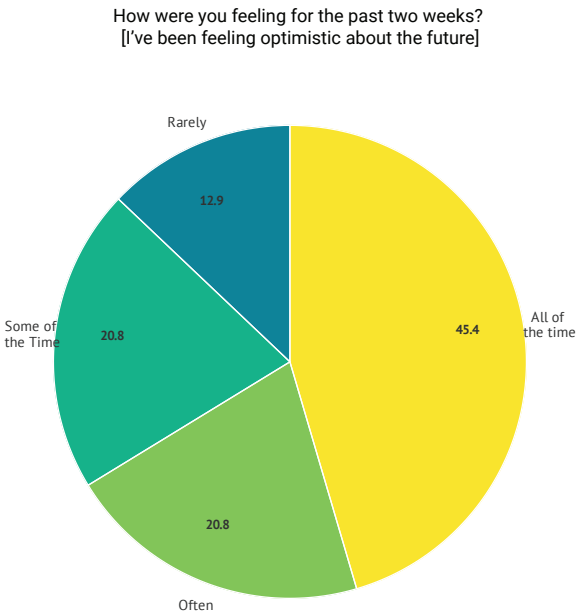
Figure 64.Experiences of optimism

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling useful]
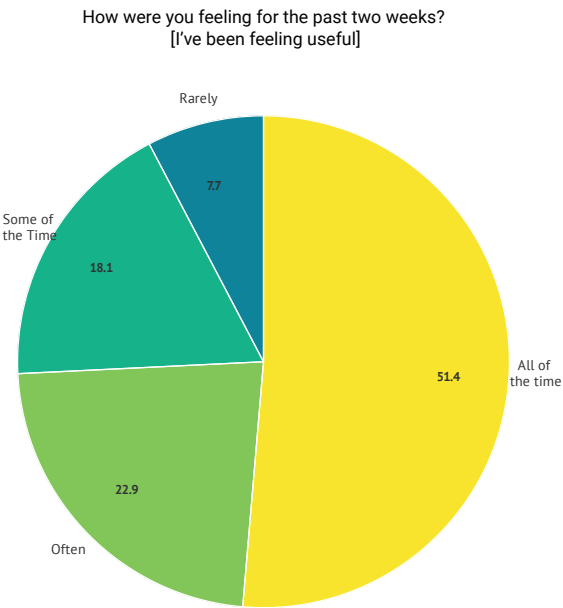
Figure 65.Experiences of feeling useful

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling relaxed]
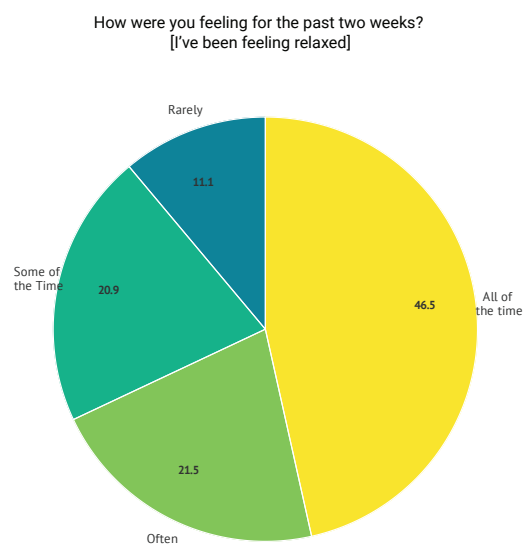
Figure 66. Experiences of feeling relaxed

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling interested in other people]
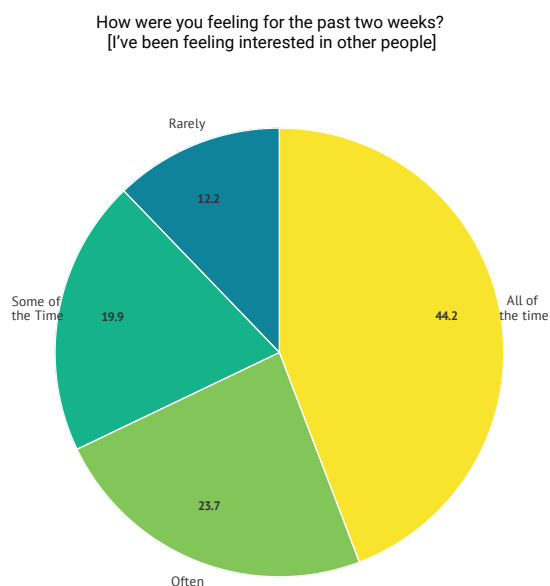
Figure 67. Experiences of feeling interested in other people

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've had energy to spare]
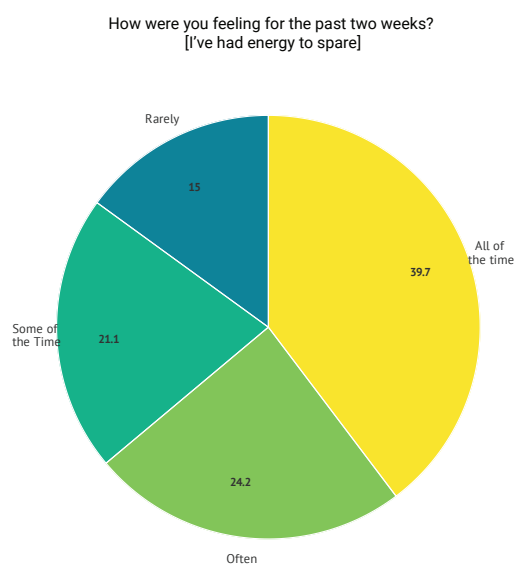
Figure 68.Experiences of having energy to spare

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been dealing with problems well]

Rarely

7.2

Some of
the Time

18.3

All of
the time

48

26.5

Often
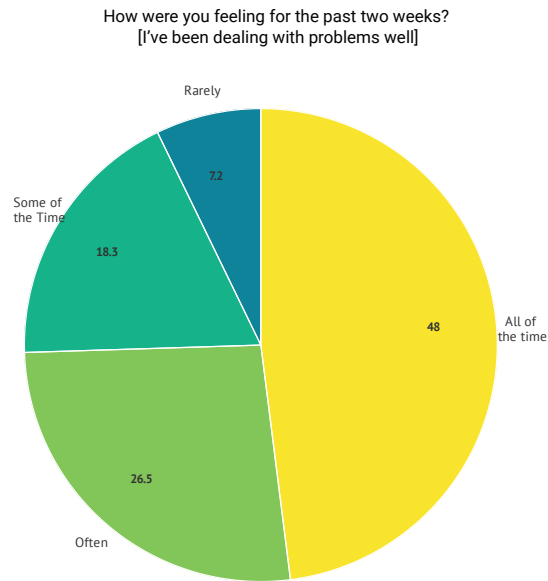
Figure 69. Experiences of dealing with problems

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been thinking clearly]

Rarely

6.2

Some of
the Time

18.6

All of
the time

51.5

23.7

Often
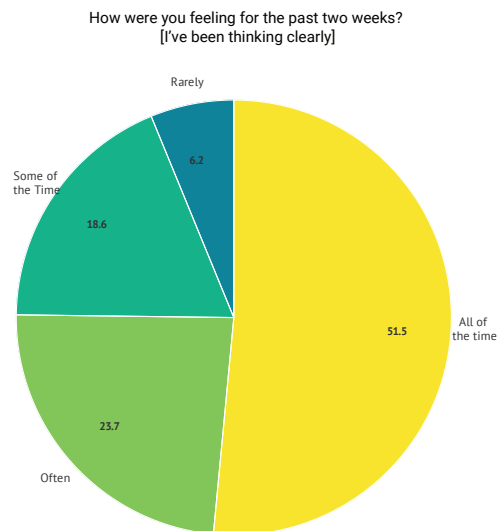
Figure 70. Experiences of ability to think clearly

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling good about myself]

Rarely

7.3

Some of
the Time

16.8

All of
the time

52.7

23.1

Often
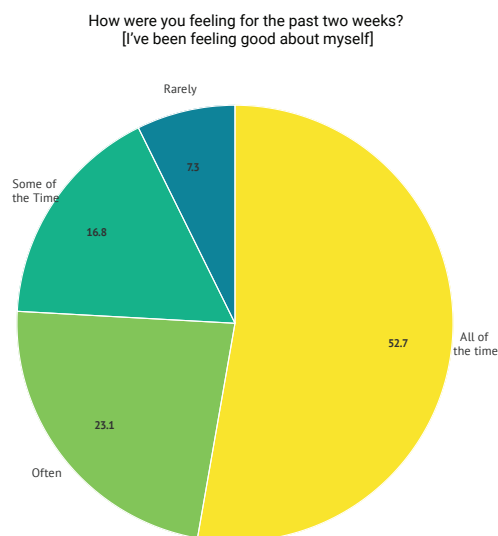
Figure 71. Experiences of feeling good about ownself

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling close to other people]

Rarely
7.9
Some of
the Time
17.6
All of
the time
49.8
24.8
Often
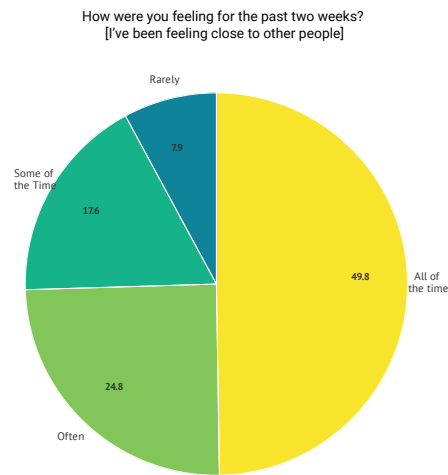
Figure 72.Experiences of feeling close to other people

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling confident]

Rarely
8.3
Some of
the Time
17.3
All of
the time
50.2
24.2
Often
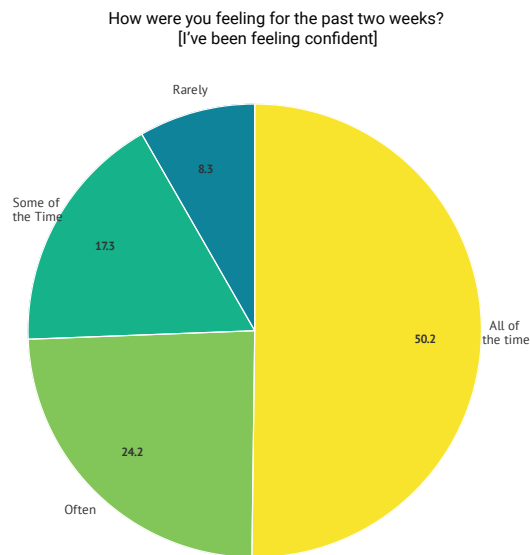
Figure 73.Experiences of feeling confident

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been able to make up my own mind about things]

Rarely
5.4
Some of
the Time
17.9
All of
the time
51.8
24.9
Often
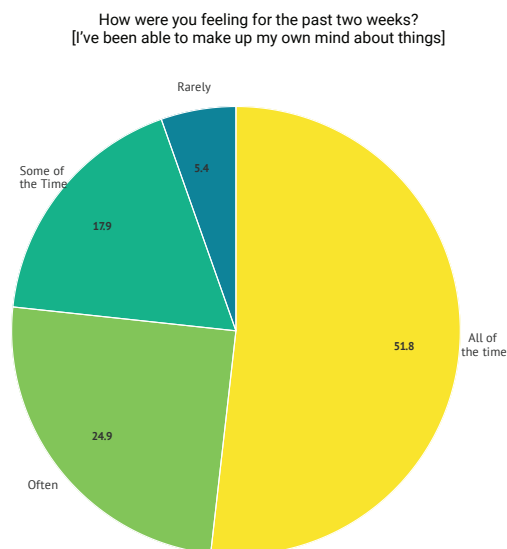
Figure 74.Experiences of decision making

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling loved]

Rarely

Some of
the Time

14.6

7

22.4

Often

55.9

All of
the time
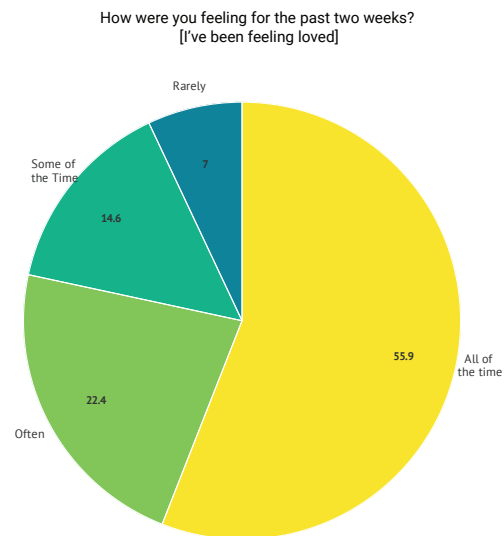
Figure 75.Experiences of feeling loved

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been feeling cheerful]

Rarely

Some of
the Time

17.9

7

51.8

All of
the time

23.2

Often
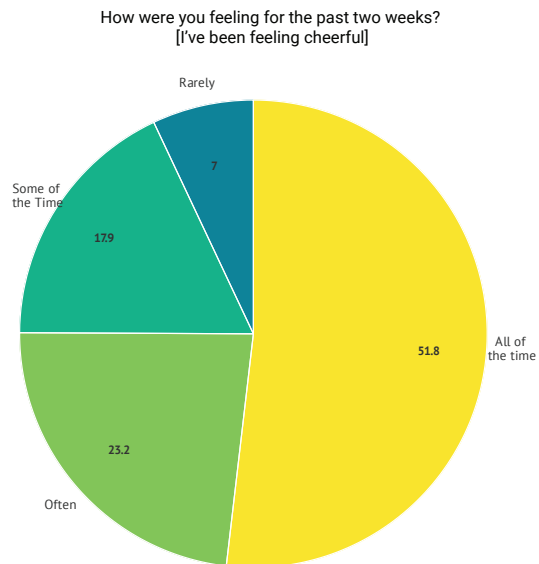
Figure 76.Experiences of cheerfulness

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I feel close to Allah]

Rarely

Some of
the Time

11.3

5.9

Often

20.6

62.2

All of
the time
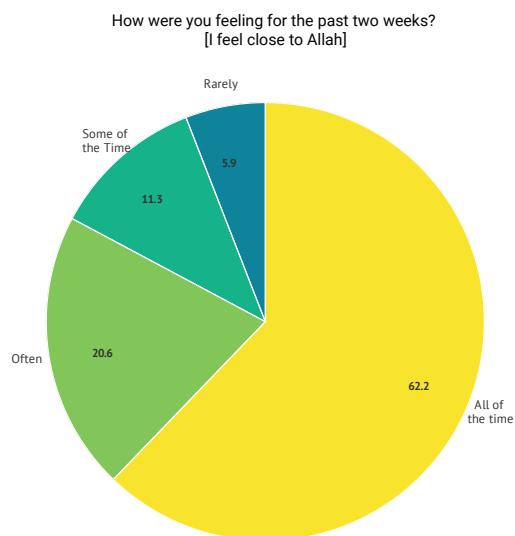
Figure 77.Experiences of feeling closeness to Allah

How were you feeling for the past two weeks?
[I've been getting 6-8 hours sleep]
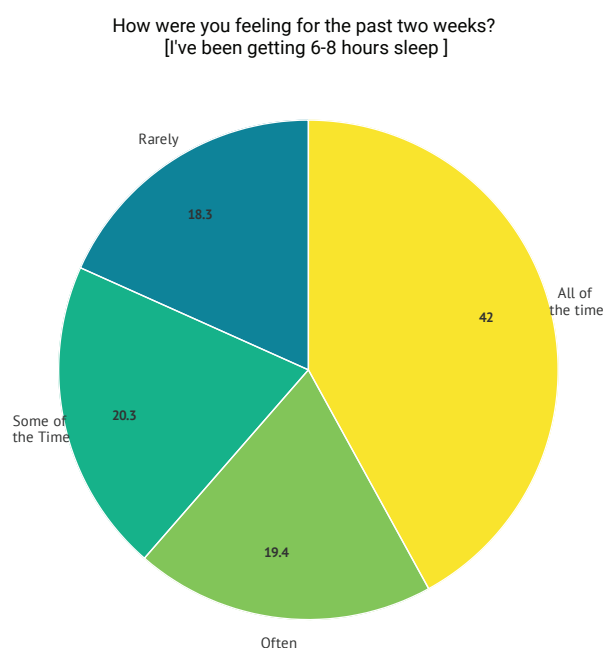
Figure 78.Experiences of getting enough sleep

The mental well-being scale was scored and a total mental health score was generated for the participants. The difference in the mental health score among the participants was significant (p<0.001). The mental health of the participants was significantly different with age (<0.001). The lowest score of mental health was among the age group of 18-25 years and the highest score was among the age group of 46-55 years.The score declined for the group 56 to more than 65 years. In general, the mental health of the survey participants seems to be good, as the average score ranged from 60 to 70. The minimum mental health score was 32 and maximum was 80.The total average mental health score was 66.1. The mental health score of the age group 18-25 was lower from the groups 26-35, 36-45, 46-55 and 56-65, but there was no significant difference in the score with the age group 65 years and above. The mental health score of the age group 26-35 was significantly lower than the age groups 46-55. There were no significant differences between gender and the mental health score; the average mental health score for females was 65.2 and 66.1 for males.

Figure 79 Mental health of participants

6.9 Ways how youth spend their leisure time

Table 7 shows the leisure activities that were identified by the survey participants they engage in, and Table 8 shows the activities the participants identified as contributors towards their positive physical and mental well-being. The most engaged in leisure activity was identified as spending time with family or friends (74.4%); followed by spending time with friends (65.4%). Time spent on watching movies/tv shows (56.6%) was clo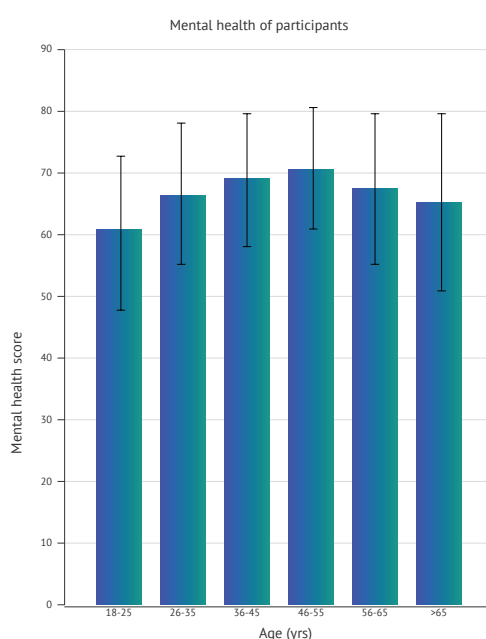se to the amount of time spent on social media (54.4%), while 35.9% of participants listened to music/podcasts. 31.4 percent of participants preferred exercise/gym/group fitness classes activities and only 28.8% engaged in sport activities.

When asked what activities contribute towards their positive physical and mental well-being (see Table 8), 82.2% identified spending time with family or friends; followed by sports (71.1%), exercise/gym/group fitness classes (66.1%), 62% of participants recommended to have a hobby while 58.8% recommended to read as a leisure activity.

Table 7. Leisure time activities

What activities do you do during leisure time	Count	Percentage
Family time	803	74.4%
Spend time with friends	715	65.4%
Watch movies/ series	618	56.5%
Engaging in social media blogging	595	54.4%
Listen to music/ podcast	393	35.9%
Exercise/gym/group fitness classes	343	31.4%
Sports	315	28.8%

Table 8. Leisure activities that contribute to positive physical and mental well-being

Activity	Count	Percentage
Spending time with family or friends	899	82.2%
Sports	778	71.1%
Exercise/gym/group fitness classes	723	66.1%
Having a hobby	678	62%
Reading	643	58.8%

Leisure activities were discussed with the individual interviews as well.
Apart from the boys playing football, I think there is nothing much else. Other than moodhahdhiun (going to the beach). Picnics are usually with family and sometimes with friends, too. No cinema to go out to. But I can set up a home cinema at home and watch with friends. There are not many things in the community to go out and do.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study was designed to explore the public perceptions of Maldivian youth disengagement. In particular, the study aimed to determine the factors associated with youth involvement in crime and re-offence which could assist in formulating youth friendly policies and establishing mechanisms to provide youth with opportunities to rehabilitate and participate in productive activities.

In summary, participants acknowledged the infrastructure, facilities and mechanisms in place and the efforts being made by the Government in terms of providing educational opportunities, jobs, rehabilitation and counselling services, and sports and recreational facilities. Nevertheless, they expressed the need for diversification, context or situation specific services, opportunities and activities. In particular, the following points were highlighted:

- a lack or shortage of employment opportunities, dysfunctional home environment, limited opportunities in the islands for young people when it comes to higher studies, and engaging in productive activities, as some of the main challenges that the youth are facing, which at times lead to repeat offences;
- there are limited opportunities for sports and recreational activities for youth especially in the islands;
- the justice agencies are sensitised enough to deal with various crimes. Nonetheless, the respondents expressed loopholes in the justice system and trust issues among the community and law enforcement agencies;
- the Maldivian youth are mainly involved in traffic violations, assault, drug abuse and vandalism.
- a lack of proper rehabilitation centres and services; and
- spending time with family and friends was identified as the most significant contributor towards positive physical and mental well-being. However, the mental well-being score was lowest in youth participants compared to other age groups.

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations can be considered:

1. Design and conduct rehabilitation programs that assist youth to habilitate by providing them with access to positive and pro-social experiences that could heighten their self-esteem, and opportunities to develop new skills.
2. Provide easily accessible mental health services for youth especially those who are at high risk.
3. Extend school completion up to Grade 12 or until 18 years of age by providing alternative pathways to study thereby assisting youth to involve in skill-based learning.
4. Provide secondary and higher secondary students work experience and internship opportunities in different industries and organisations.
5. Impart periodic career guidance, counselling, and crime prevention programs targeted for school goers, out of school children and youth.
6. Conduct targeted parenting and issue based community awareness programs to encourage initia-

tives for youth to engage in community-based activities as responsible citizens.

7. Create opportunities for youth to engage in sports, recreational, and leisure activities that are community specific and diversified.
8. Create employment opportunities that engage and encourage youth interest and participation.
9. Facilitate entrepreneurship opportunities that assist youth to start-up businesses.
10. Address loopholes in law enforcement and implementation so as to enhance trust among law enforcement agencies and the communities.
11. Conduct further research to investigate the issues and interests of youth and how younger people can be influenced to take initiatives, tackle challenges and encourage youth participation in nation building.
12. Strengthen inter-sectoral participation in coordinating and implementing youth related issues.

In conclusion, the findings of this study have implications for policy makers, caregivers, parents, and communities to ensure that school leavers are prepared for skill-based jobs and/or including entrepreneurships, given career guidance and counselling, and are provided with opportunities to engage in leisure and sports activities in a conducive and supportive environment.

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