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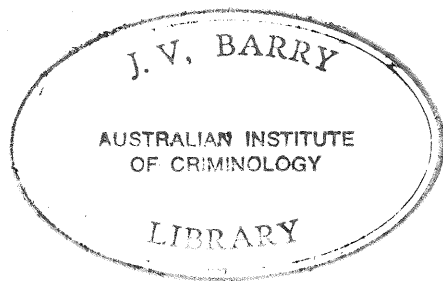
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# Preventing Violence

## An International Perspective

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The initial European settlement of Australia 200 years ago was accompanied by violence on a horrific scale. The very reason for the colony's establishment was to rid British gaoles of excessive numbers of convicted felons. Their treatment after arrival in Australia was marked by extreme brutality (Hughes 1987). The scale of the suffering of Aborigines at the hands of European settlers has been extensively documented (Reynolds 1982), and the legacy of that persecution remains with Australians today.

Despite its brutal history, Australia is now a relatively tranquil place. Nevertheless, there have been good reasons in the last decade for Australians to feel increasingly threatened by violence, both at home and abroad.

The killings in the Netherlands earlier this year of two young Australians by IRA (Irish Republican Army) gunmen, for example, was grievously shocking to us, and brought home the reality of international terror. By comparison with some other parts of the world, Australia is relatively free of such violence, though we too have experienced horrific individual incidents in recent times.

In 1987 in Melbourne, Australia's second largest city, there occurred two mass killings, which resulted in the deaths of 16 people and serious injury to many more. Australians were appalled at these events, which represented a nightmarish manifestation of a growing level of alarm about violence in our society.

In a country with a long liberal democratic tradition, increasingly Australians have expressed unease with what has been perceived as a grave risk of random violence. Actual risk rates for becoming a victim of such crime are not high, but nonetheless a general perception is abroad that using public places and public transport, for example, is unsafe, and that as a consequence quality of life has diminished. In addition, Australians have become aware of the shadow of

family violence which had for so long been ignored, not only in Australia but all over the world.

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## National Committee on Violence

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In this climate of anxiety about the level of violence in the community, a meeting at the end of 1987 between the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia and heads of all Australian state and territory governments, agreed to the establishment of a National Committee on Violence.

This Committee has much in common with similar inquiries which have recently been carried out in two other countries. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the Anti-Violence Commission, chaired by Professor Dr Hans-Dieter Schwind of Ruhr University, Bochum, reported in May this year, while in the United States, the US National Academy of Sciences Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violent Behaviour, chaired by Professor Albert Reiss of Yale University, is due to report in 1991.

The range of issues which the Australian Committee was asked to address was set out in its Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1). In brief, it was asked to examine the level of violence in Australia, to review explanations for violent behaviour, and to make recommendations for the control and prevention of violence.

Noted authorities with expertise in various areas of the Terms of Reference were appointed as members of this Committee, which was chaired by the Director of the Australian Institute of Criminology (Professor Duncan Chappell). The secretariat for the Committee

was located within the AIC, which was able to provide a range of services deriving from its position as the centre of cooperation between Australian jurisdictions in the area of criminological and criminal justice research.

The Committee was required to report by the end of 1989. During its relatively brief lifespan, it generated a considerable volume of material on various aspects of violence (for a complete list of its publications, see Appendix 2). In its final report, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, which was published in February 1990, the Committee set out in detail its response to the issues raised in its Terms of Reference.

Although we are conscious that this report was designed to confront and to respond to specifically Australian circumstances, we are convinced that many of the problems relating to violence in our community are shared with other parts of the world. Indeed, in its lifetime, the Committee became familiar with much that has been written elsewhere about violence—written because of the commonality of concern about this deeply troubling problem.

We believe, therefore, that many of the findings of the National Committee on Violence can be generalised to other countries. Even more importantly, we believe that many of its recommendations for the control and prevention of violent behaviour can be adopted elsewhere as models for action.

For these reasons, we have published this document, which summarises some of the major points made by the Committee, because we believe they are of interest and importance to a broader audience: an audience greatly concerned with the grave issue of increasing levels of violence throughout the world.

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## Incidence of violence

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Violent behaviour is found universally. However, some nations are more violent than others; some places are more violent than others; some individuals are more likely to commit acts of violence than others.

Levels of violence vary from country to country, but similar problems are found everywhere in the measurement of violence. Most countries experience difficulties with police records, and Australia is no exception to this. In addition, police statistics reflect the crimes reported to, or detected by, the police and therefore cover only part of the total number of offences actually committed.

Most also experience problems in measuring particular categories of violent crime—especially sexual assault and family violence. Almost everywhere, cultural reasons prevent the ready reporting of these categories of crime: and in those countries where, in recent years, victims of such crime have been encouraged to report to the police, it is sometimes unclear whether the increased rate of reporting indicates a true increase in incidence or, instead, an increasing willingness to report. In either case, Australia is not alone in finding that much violence in the community is found in the home rather than on the street.

Because of the universal nature of problems with official crime figures, the Third United Nations Crime Survey (Crime and Justice in Asia and the Pacific 1990) recommends that sources other than official crime figures should be sought, in order to estimate the true level and nature of crime in a society. In particular it recommends that crime victim surveys should be conducted at regular intervals—with assistance from the United Nations—because of their particular value in designing crime control and

crime prevention policies. These observations are true for all regions of the world, and for both developed and developing nations.

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## Causes of violence

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The Committee reviewed available literature concerning the causes of violence, and examined a number of theories and facts which sought to explain such behaviour. It found that the reality of violence is complex and usually the consequence of the interaction of a number of contributing factors. The most important of these factors were judged to be:

- The influence of the immediate family in which a child grows up. It is within the family that aggressive behaviours are first learned; to the extent that families fail to instil non-violent values in their children, those children are more likely to respond with violence in negotiating life as adults.
- Norms of behaviour. To the extent that a society values violence, attaches prestige to violent conduct, or defines violence as normal or legitimate or functional behaviour, the values of individuals within that society will develop accordingly.
- Economic inequality. Violence is more common in those societies characterised by widespread poverty and inequality. In addition, both victims of violence and violent offenders tend to be drawn from the most disadvantaged sectors of society.

The Committee recognised the importance of a number of other factors as well. These included problems associated with cultural disintegration, attitudes of gender inequality, certain biological and personality factors, abuse

of drugs, particularly alcohol, some forms of mental illness, and the influence of the media and peers.

Essentially, it was the view of the Committee that the experiences of childhood and the influence of the family are paramount in determining whether or not an individual becomes violent in his or her behaviour. While biological and personality factors may predispose individuals to violence, strong evidence suggests that in almost every case a loving and secure environment can overcome such predispositions. Likewise, alcohol, the media and peer pressure may all exert their influence, but what children observe and learn in their homes—what they come to recognise as norms of behaviour—will largely determine their reaction to these influences.

Of course, each child lives within a larger culture where factors such as economic and gender inequality may be realities they have to cope with on an individual basis as adults, and which may be sources of disillusion and frustration. Nevertheless, what is learned in the process of socialisation within the family can be both protection and a source of strength in coming to terms with or even altering these realities.

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## Recommendations for the control and prevention of violence

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The Committee found that the complexity of violence is such, and its causes so numerous, that it is important to resist the temptation to rely upon simplistic solutions. It is important also to remember that the control and prevention of violence is everyone's business—not just the responsibility of government instrumentalities.

The Committee was strongly of the view that in dealing with violence, greater emphasis is needed on preventive programs to supplement various forms of control. It also concluded that an adequate preventive strategy requires the cooperation of many different agencies.

A comprehensive formulation of anti-violence strategies must encompass programs which are the responsibility of a number of government agencies, such as education, health and welfare, employment, public housing, public transport, the police and the courts. This is because the issues which must be addressed cut across a number of agencies: such issues include family violence, family support, alcohol and drug abuse, the control of firearms, support for victims, the special problems of minority groups, as well as research and information collection.

In framing its recommendations, the Committee identified three major objectives:

- Because the degree to which violence is condoned in any society is a fundamental impediment to achieving non-violence, it was considered that governments should take the initiative in promoting non-violent attitudes. This could, for example, take the form of a national media campaign.
- Factors which aggravate the risk and extent of violence, such as the consumption of alcohol and the availability of firearms, should be examined and, where possible, measures should be taken to mitigate their effects.
- An improvement in the availability of accurate information about the extent and nature of violence is essential, both for the provision of a proper basis for decision-making, and to permit a realistic appreciation of the level of violence in society.

The Committee made a number of specific recommendations for the prevention and control of violence, many of which are summarised below. For greater detail, readers are referred to the Committee's report, *Violence: Directions for Australia*.

### Health and Welfare

- All health service providers, including hospitals, should develop specific procedures for the identification and treatment of victims of violence, especially domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse; attention should be given to the special needs of minority groups and people with disabilities.
- Institutions which provide education and training for health and welfare personnel should offer training in the recognition, treatment and management of victims of violence, especially domestic assault, sexual assault and child abuse. Issues relating to gender inequity and its implications in relation to violence, should be included in this training.
- A national campaign for the prevention of child abuse should be conducted, and a national research centre on child abuse established.
- Governments should sign and ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Health authorities should investigate the feasibility of perinatal screening for child abuse risk.
- Education for parenthood should be incorporated in hospitals as part of classes associated with childbirth: it should continue after birth and post-natal support services made available locally.

- Respite care should be available to parents and a crisis telephone line be set up for parents to call for support and advice in dealing with children.
- Counselling programs for violent men should be encouraged.

Governments should provide 24-hour crisis intervention services, which can provide immediate support and information for victims of violence.

- Governments should ensure that safeguards exist to protect institutionalised persons with intellectual disabilities from abuse; adequate support services must be available for these individuals and their carers in the community.
- Governments should assess the impact of any policy of deinstitutionalisation of the mentally ill, and ensure that appropriate community support is available to reduce the risk of their becoming victims or perpetrators of violence.
- The consumption of alcohol should be reduced by requiring health warnings on all alcoholic beverage containers, prohibiting electronic advertising, and encouraging, through price differential, the consumption of low alcohol rather than high alcohol beer.

### Education

- Education authorities should include conflict resolution strategies as an integral part of school and other educational curricula; teacher training institutions should incorporate into their curricula materials relating to non-violent conflict resolution, including an analysis of the gender basis of patterns of violence.

- Corporal punishment should be prohibited in all schools, and educational authorities should develop instead constructive, non-violent means of social control.
- Programs should be introduced into school curricula for instruction in human relationships, including proper gender roles, parent responsibilities and child development; information should be available on non-violent means of disciplining children.
- Training in the recognition of child abuse should be an integral part of the teacher training curriculum.
- All school students should be provided with information about what constitutes abuse, the importance of telling someone when abuse occurs, and appropriate individuals in whom they might confide.
- Medical education should include components dealing with all aspects of violence. There should be special emphasis on the care of victims, the prevention of violent behaviour and the treatment of violent persons.
- Governments should develop pre-school enrichment programs, particularly for disadvantaged children, which should extend to assistance to parents of these children.

### **Employment**

- Governments should emphasise job-skills training programs for the long-term young unemployed. Residential programs should also be encouraged for particularly disadvantaged young people.
- Accessibility of employment training programs to young women should be

promoted as an important means of bringing about a reduction in violence against women, by encouraging their financial independence.

### **Housing**

- Governments must ensure that victims of domestic assault are never denied alternative shelter, and that they are given priority in the allocation of emergency and low-cost accommodation.
- Governments must ensure that homeless children are given adequate access to accommodation.
- Attention must be given to considerations relating to the reduction and prevention of violence in the design of public housing.

### **Public Transport**

- Transport authorities should exercise care in the design and maintenance of their facilities, with a view toward crime prevention. They should also include and publicise a clearly stated violence prevention strategy in their transport plans.

### **Sport and Recreation**

- Sporting authorities should refer cases of criminal assault on the playing field to law enforcement agencies for prosecution.
- Programs should be developed which provide a variety of high standard alcohol-free recreation and entertainment activities for young people, planned in consultation with the intended users.

### **Indigenous People and Minority Groups**

- Governments should promote appreciation of the social and cultural traditions of its minorities and indigenous peoples, so that

all may take pride in the richness of these traditions.

- Special programs should be developed to deal with issues such as alcohol abuse and health problems, which may be a consequence of their disadvantaged status and associated with violent behaviour within such communities.

### **Criminal Law, Evidence and Procedure**

- Governments should take action to minimise death and injury arising from the use of firearms by reducing the number of firearms in the community and by preventing access to such weapons by individuals who are not fit and proper persons, such as those who have been convicted of a crime or have demonstrated a propensity for violence.
- Victim impact statements, which disclose the physical, psychological and financial effects of a crime on the victim, should be available for consideration by courts in formulating an appropriate sentence for the offender.
- Governments should embrace the principles of justice and fair treatment for victims as set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Victims.
- Domestic violence legislation should be developed which contains the following features:
  - powers for police to enter premises to deal with domestic violence incidents;
  - applicability to partners from de facto and past relationships;
  - provision for restraint orders, to limit a defendant's access to the family home, to

be issued on application of the police as well as the victim;

- provision for offenders to be taken into custody where there is reasonable belief that the spouse or a child of the house would otherwise be in danger.

### **Police**

- Domestic violence should be targeted for police skills training.
- Where there is sufficient evidence of criminal assault in the home, police should lay charges.
- Police should seize any firearms or other weapons which are present at the scene of a domestic assault.
- Police should adopt formal guidelines for the questioning of youth, and be trained in non-punitive options for dealing with young offenders.
- In association with other agencies, police should develop fear reduction programs by experimenting with such strategies as alternative patrol techniques and public information campaigns.
- Interviews by police should be video recorded.
- Police training should refer to problems arising from cultural conflicts. It should aim to improve understanding about minority groups within the broader community, and members of such minorities should be encouraged to join police forces.
- Police dealing with child abuse should receive training in child development, in issues relating to disabled children and in special forensic issues. Special attention



should be given to methods of investigating allegations of child sexual abuse. This should include close liaison between police and other workers in this field and the provision of training in interviewing techniques.

- Laws governing the lethal use of force by police should reflect the principal that such force should only be used as a last resort, involving self-defence or the defence of others; police must receive adequate training in the use of arms.

### **Courts**

- Counselling and support services should be available for victims and witnesses attending court.
- In the case of child witnesses, modifications to the courtroom environment, such as video-links and screens, should be made to reduce the stress and trauma likely to be experienced, and to enhance the accuracy and reliability of a child witness' testimony.
- Judicial officers and other legal personnel should have access to continuing education in matters relating to victims of violence generally, and victims of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse in particular.
- Alternative dispute settlement services, outside the mainstream judicial system, should be provided wherever possible for the resolution of personal disputes.

### **Prisons and Corrections**

- Correctional agencies should continue to develop programs for the rehabilitation of offenders, and should subject these programs to rigorous evaluation.

- More support should be provided for ex-prisoners subsequent to their release from custody.

### **Regulatory Authorities**

- Consumer affairs authorities should ban 'victim toys'.
- Media regulatory authorities should provide detailed classification and program description to enable viewers to make informed choices about programs, and to ensure that proper responsibility can be exercised regarding children's viewing.
- Children must be protected from consuming and participating in the production of erotic materials, violent or otherwise.
- Liquor licensing authorities should consider the social consequences of their decisions regarding the issuing of licences, in order to minimise the adverse impact of alcohol.
- Conformity with server intervention programs should be a condition of liquor licence renewal. Such programs should include guidelines for the training and conduct of security personnel employed by proprietors of licensed premises.

### **Information and Research Agencies**

- Inadequate knowledge about the incidence and epidemiology of violence precludes accurate assessments being made of the costs of violence, and other information needed for the formulation of a rational public policy response to violence. It is therefore necessary for national crime surveys to be conducted regularly. Such surveys should devote special efforts to identifying the incidence and prevalence of violence against minority groups.

- Applied research on violence would yield considerable benefits, and requires adequate funding.

### Media Organisations

- Media organisations should develop a code of conduct aimed at reducing gratuitous intrusions upon victims' and alleged offenders' privacy and dignity, avoiding glorification of violence and avoiding portrayals which may encourage the commission of similar offences.
- Media coverage of sporting events should avoid the gratuitous re-play of violent incidents; commentators should forcefully condemn violence in sporting events whenever it occurs.
- The media generally and the television industry in particular should demonstrate a commitment to programming which promotes prosocial and non-violent values.

### Religious Organisations

- Religious organisations should continue to foster non-violent values by encouraging the peaceful resolution of conflict and by denouncing violence whenever it occurs.
- Religious organisations should review their training curricula to ensure that the counselling they provide is consistent with current professional practice relating to child abuse and domestic violence.

In making its recommendations, the Committee has also made the following observations:

- the fact that the bulk of its recommendations dwells on the responsibilities of governments and non-government organisations should in no way be read as absolving individuals of

responsibility for the prevention and control of violence, and for assisting the victims of violence.

- that as a matter of principle, priority amongst its recommendations for action should be given to those programs which, in addition to their efficiency and effectiveness in the prevention and control of violence, would produce other economic and social benefits.
- that policies or programs to combat violence which might constrain freedom or curtail liberty, should be framed as narrowly as possible in order to minimise this possibility.
- that the focus of preventive strategies should be those members of society at greatest risk. In common with many other countries, Australia's high risk groups were found to be young children, young adult males and women who are victims of violence in the home.
- that in circumstances of fiscal restraint which require that particular attention be paid to effective allocation of public sector resources, attention should be given to provision within programs and policies for rigorous, independent evaluation of their effectiveness.
- notwithstanding the need for circumspection in the allocation of resources, it is vital for governments to realise that violence incurs great cost, in both financial and human terms. Given the financial burden imposed by current levels of violence, governments are faced with a stark and simple choice—either to pay now and make society less violent; or to pay later and suffer not only the direct costs of violence, but also the deterioration

in the quality of life which the aftermath of violence imposes on us all.

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## Conclusion

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We recognise that there are no panaceas and no easy answers to the problem of violence. We also recognise the cultural and attitudinal differences which may separate us. Nevertheless, we believe there are sufficient similarities in the difficulties we jointly face to make it worthwhile to inform the international community represented at the Eighth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders of what we have learned. We do so in the hope that these findings and the associated recommendations will be seen as useful and compelling data in the international arena.

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## References

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- National Committee on Violence 1990, *Violence: Directions for Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
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- United Nations 1990, *Crime and Justice in Asia and the Pacific. A Report on the Third United Nations Survey of Crime Trends, Operations of Criminal Justice Systems and Crime Prevention Strategies, 1980-1986*. Tokyo and Canberra.

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## Appendix 1: National Committee on Violence Terms of Reference

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The Committee's Terms of Reference required it to examine the following issues:

- the contemporary state of violent crime in Australia;
- related social, economic, psychological and environmental aspects;
- gender issues in violence;
- the impact of the mass media on the incidence of violence;
- the effects of drugs and alcohol on violent behaviour;
- attitudes to violence amongst children and adolescents;
- the vulnerability to violence of particular groups;
- the development of strategies to prevent violence;
- the need for support and assistance for victims of violence; and
- the need for special measures in the treatment of violent offenders.



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## Appendix 4: Complete list of National Committee on Violence publications

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In its Violence Today series, the following titles appeared:

- No. 1. *Violence, Crime and Australian Society.*
- No. 2. *Domestic Violence.*
- No. 3. *Violence Against Children.*
- No. 4. *Violence in Sport.*
- No. 5. *Violence and Public Contact Workers.*
- No. 6. *Violence on Television.*
- No. 7. *Violence, Disputes and their Resolution.*
- No. 8. *Racist Violence.*
- No. 9. *Political Violence in Australia.*

In its series of monographs, particular issues relating to violence were discussed in more extensive detail:

Monograph No. 1 *Violence in Australia*, which raises some key issues and summarises facts about violence in contemporary Australian society.

Monograph No. 2, by Peter Grabosky, *Victims of Violence*, which describes the vulnerability to violence of particular groups, and the need for support and assistance for victims.

Monograph No. 3, by Peter Grabosky and William Lucas, *Society's Response to the Violent Offender*, which discusses the need for special measures in the treatment of violent offenders, and reviews the basic issues which must be considered by authorities on behalf of society in response to an act of violence.

*Violence: Directions for Australia, Final Report of the National Committee on Violence.*



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