Acknowledgments

Contents

iii

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In Part One of this study of rural crime, analyses of census data and crime rates across rural Local Government Areas (LGAs) highlighted the extraordinary diversity amongst rural communities in Australia. Crime rates were found to be clearly related to social structures that varied across identifiable types of geographic locations. Based on analyses of demographic variables, it was apparent that factors that implied greater community cohesion and integration were linked to less crime. Measures of lower cohesion and integration, such as unemployment and single parent households, had more crime. However, these findings were based on categories of behaviour rather than individual observations and experiences in the context of their communities. The high variability in the data indicated a need to conduct qualitative case studies of individual communities in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of crime and social factors within rural communities. Therefore, in this second stage of the project, the primary focus of the study will be qualitative.

One impetus for conducting a close examination of rural crime was stimulated by observations over recent years, that the residents of several rural communities in New South Wales had publicly expressed a great deal of concern about levels of crime in their towns. While it could be assumed that the economic difficulties caused by severe drought and falling commodity prices would be the primary concern of the people within these communities, crime appeared to be one of the greatest threats to their welfare.

This Australian experience mirrors that of communities in rural America. In a national poll commissioned by the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (cited in Hobbs, 1994), rural people identified the five greatest threats to rural America to be alcohol abuse, an increase in crime, an increased use of illegal drugs, loss of family farms, and lack of jobs. Almost half of rural residents believed these problems were threatening rural life (Hobbs, 1994).

Hobbs points out that the W.I. Thomas' Theorem maintains that perceptions, be they be true or not, produce real consequences. Therefore, if residents of a community believe that increasing crime and drug and

alcohol abuse are serious threats, they will respond to these threats, if only by further dividing their communities into 'good people' and 'those people.' Such social divisions can diminish the sense of community and impede the achievement of common goals (Hobbs, 1994).

Hobbs (1994) maintains that what rural residents perceive as the 'causes' of these problems will affect how they mediate them. If residents blame individuals who engage in the behaviour, they likely will devalue these individuals in the local social environment and look to specialised programs to restore them to acceptable behaviour. On the other hand, if residents consider the causes to lie outside the community, they likely will do nothing, which Hobbs believes is a typical response in many contemporary rural communities.

These observations of rural communities in America were applied to the Australian context within this second phase of the study of rural crime.

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the second phase of the study was to investigate the relationship between crime and community cohesion within four rural communities as perceived by the residents of those communities. Case studies of four rural towns were conducted to identify similarities or differences between these communities in the attitudes of residents concerning crime and other social problems that they believe exist in their towns. The incidence and types of crime experienced in their region and any factors that intervene between the success or failure of the residents to cope with crime were examined. The specific objectives of the study were to identify:

- the actual rates of crime in these towns;
- the perceived rates and types of crime in these towns;
- the perceived causes of crime within the community;
- the fear of crime in the community;
- the personal and property security measures employed by residents;
- those variables which mediate between the success or failure of the communities to cope with crime; and
- the unique solutions and initiatives developed within the communities to deal with the problem of crime.

1.2 STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

In chapter two, the methodology for conducting the study is outlined. In chapter three, the results of the mail survey of rural communities are presented and discussed. In chapters, four through seven, the results of the case studies of the four individual communities are described. In chapter eight, the value judgements of residents on a range of criminal justice issues are described, and in chapter nine, the implications of these findings are discussed.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1   INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the procedure by which data was collected for this study is described.

2.2   THE COMMUNITIES

In the analysis of secondary data conducted in stage one of this study, clusters of communities emerged which were differentiated according to their social and demographic profiles. These clusters were also shown to experience different levels of crime. Four Local Government Areas (LGAs), which represented the extreme diversity amongst rural communities, were selected for case study to more closely examine the experiences of crime at the community level.   Two coastal communities (Encounter Bay and Greenhills), and two inland communities (Hillnest and Reedy Creek), were selected to take into account the environmental and geographical diversity that emerged in the cluster analysis.   (Note: Pseudonyms, based upon the original Aboriginal names, are used to protect the anonymity of the communities.)

The communities were chosen based upon their scores on a range of significant social variables around the mean for the whole sample. It was decided not to include those communities in the north west of the state which experience the highest rates of crime because the problems facing these communities have been the subject of previous case studies of rural crime (Cunneen, 1987; 1992).   The cases were selected from more typical communities with varying rates of recorded crime and with different types of crime. These communities displayed diverse social characteristics, such as high proportions of in or out migration, ethnic diversity, family diversity, and differed in geographical location, population size and growth, income level and industry base. Two communities had average to high crime levels and two had lower than average crime levels. Two had high populations of Aboriginal people and two had low populations.   Two had high in

migration and two had low. Table 2.1 displays the values of the census data which describe the social characteristics of each community.

Table 2.1: Social characteristics of the four communities.				
Social Characteristics	Encounter Bay	Greenhills	Hillnest	Reedy Creek
Population	27565	26430	4872	1960
Average growth	4.16	0.86	-1.45	0.08
In migration	6914 (25.08%)	4381 (16.58%)	764 (15.68%)	401 (20.46%)
Aboriginal population	339 (1.2%)	1793 (6.78%)	309 (6.34%)	29 (1.48%)
Overseas born	3724 (13.51%)	1709 (6.47%)	191 (3.92%)	127 (6.48%)
Median age	36	37	37	36
Median individual income	250	180	250	250
Median household income	400	400	400	600
Unemployment rate	19.16	19.56	8.08	4.73
People married	10159 (36.8%)	10977 (41.5%)	2223 (45.6%)	938 (47.9%)
Sole parents	3417 (12.4%)	3226 (12.2%)	477 (9.79%)	91 (4.64%)

Figures 2.1 through 2.4 present the 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 crime rates per 100,000 population for the four communities. Figure 2.5 displays the State average for five types of crime. Note that communities were selected for the study based on 1996 recorded crime rates. Recently received 1999 recorded crime data (BOCSAR, 2000) shows great variability in the data which is relevant for interpreting the interviews with participants in the study. High variability in recorded crime is characteristic of crime in small rural communities and demonstrates the impact of crime on both the infrastructure and the people within these communities.

A review of the figures reveals that Greenhills consistently experienced the highest rates of crime for assault, break and enter, and malicious damage. The rate of motor vehicle theft was the highest across the communities in 1996, but fell in 1999. All four communities experienced rates of motor vehicle theft that were much lower than the state average. This type of crime is associated with urban centres where there are more vehicles to steal and there are more opportunities.

Encounter Bay consistently recorded the highest rate of drug offences. Hillnest had the lowest rates of crime across all five categories of crime in 1996, but recorded high increases in all offences in 1999, particularly for drug offences. Reedy Creek had high rates of recorded offences in 1996, particularly for break and enter and drug offences. However, crime rates fell considerably in 1999, with the exception of rates for malicious damage.

Although rates of crime per 100,000 population were used to compare crime across communities, the high variability in the data must take into account the small population of communities, such as Reedy Creek. Crime rates are very sensitive to small population sizes. Minor changes in the number of offences or the population can lead to disproportionate changes in the reported crime rate and therefore data for small communities should be interpreted with caution (BOCSAR, 1998).

Figure 2.1:
Encounter Bay: Crime rates per 100,000 Population 1996 to 1999**.**
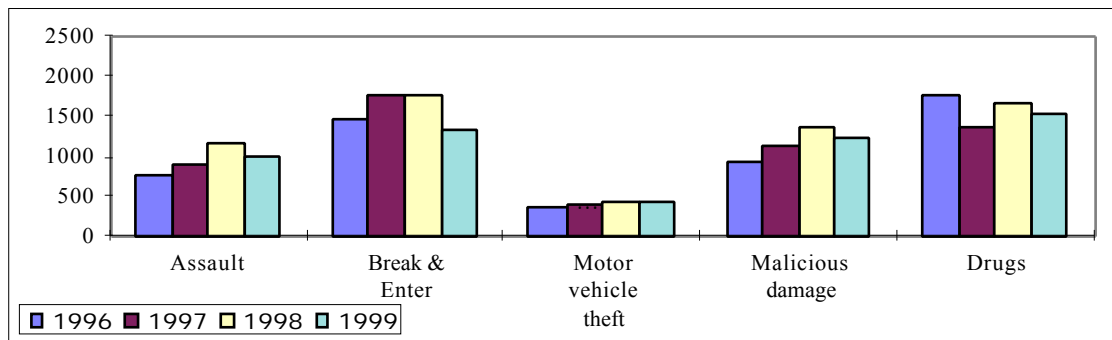
Figure 2.2:
Greenhills: Crime rates per 100,000 Population 1996 to 1999**.**
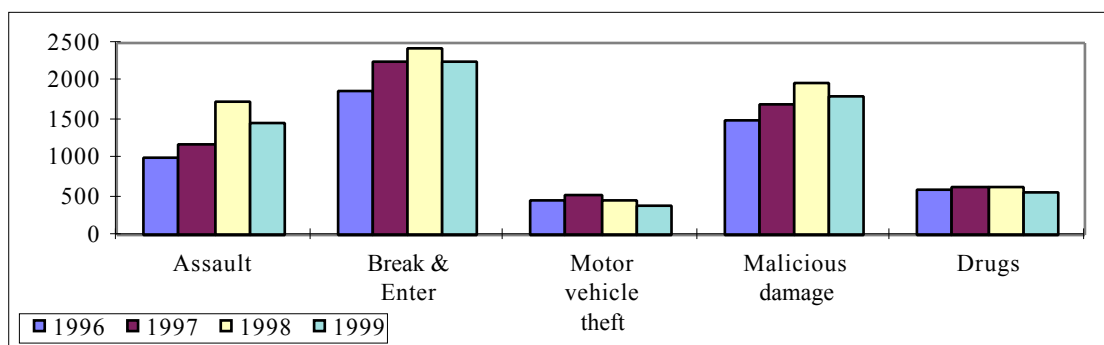
Figure 2.3:
Hillnest: Crime rates per 100,000 Population 1996 to 1999.
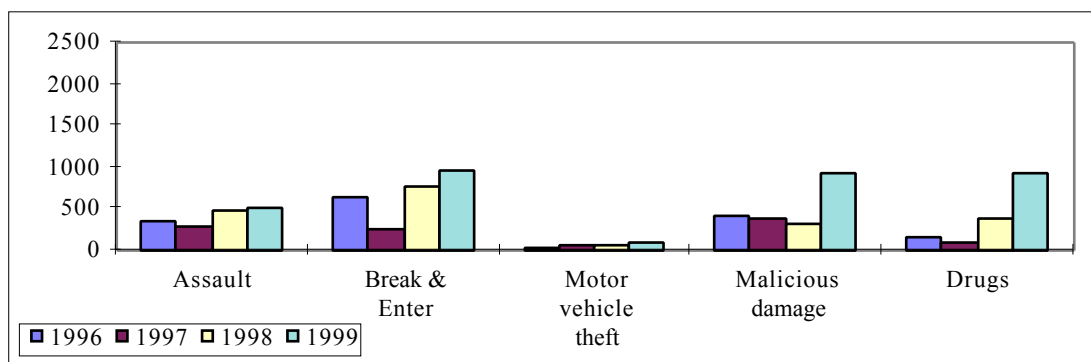
Figure 2.4:
Reedy Creek: Crime rates per 100,000 Population 1996 to 1999**.**
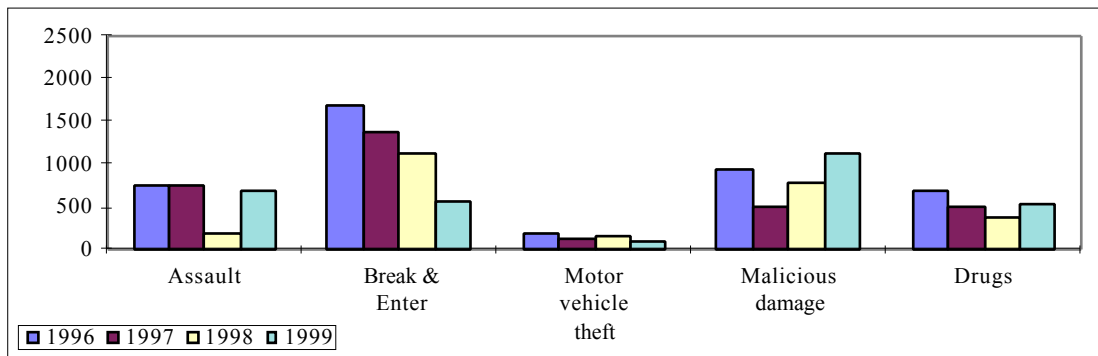
Figure 2.5:
New South Wales Total: Crime rates per 100,000 Population 1996 to 1999**.**
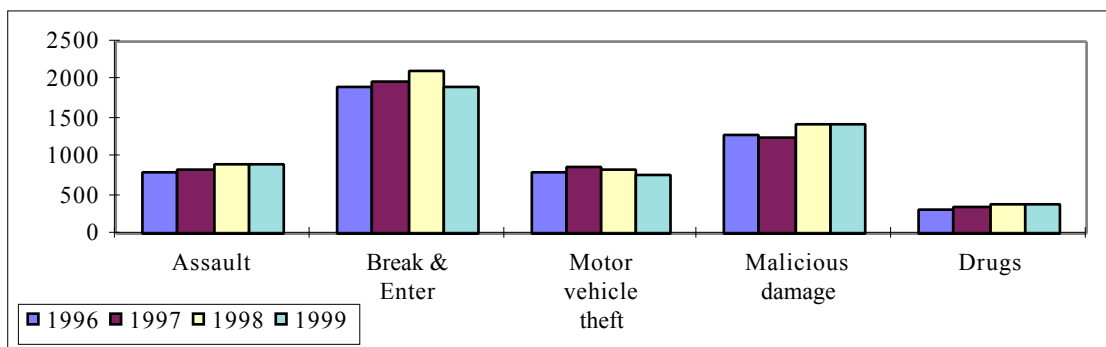
2.3   DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through three methods; a self report questionnaire, in depth interviews and focus groups.

2.3.1 Community Surveys

Prior to visiting the communities, a mail survey of a random selection of households in the four communities was conducted. The objective of the survey was to gather insight into residents' perceptions of the problem of crime within their town relative to other problems that face rural communities, such as unemployment and economic decline. The responses to the survey also provided us with an understanding of the particular issues within each community, which well prepared us for the interviews and focus groups we subsequently conducted.

In February 2000, a self-administered questionnaire was mailed to a random selection of 500 households in the four communities.   There were 100 households selected in each of the two smaller inland communities and 150 in each of the two larger coastal communities. More were selected in the

7

coastal communities as there is a higher turnover of population in these regions which resulted in a higher 'return to sender' rate. The names and addresses of participants were drawn at random from Telstra's White Pages for 1999. A covering letter outlining the purpose of the survey accompanied each questionnaire. However, in order not to influence respondents, we refrained from stating that the main interest of the survey was to investigate the impact of crime within the communities relative to other social problems. For ethical reasons and to encourage a high rate of response, participants were assured of the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. Respondents were not required to place their name or any other identifying information on the survey. A reply-paid self-addressed envelope was provided. A reminder survey was posted approximately four weeks after the initial mailing.

In the questionnaire, participants were asked to rate each item from a list of fifteen strengths. A Likert scale was used to measure how great each strength was within a community. Participants were also asked to rate each item from a list of fifteen problems, and indicate how great each problem was in their community. Crime was included as a social variable within both these scales. Some demographic information was sought from participants as well as information on their ties to the community through questions inquiring how long they had lived in the area and whether they had plans to move on.

The response rate, after allowing for 'return to senders' where respondents had left the district, was 46% which was very satisfactory. The response rate for the individual communities was 47% for Encounter Bay; 32% for Greenhills, 49% for Hillnest and 58% for Reedy Creek. Six questionnaires were discarded due to missing information, leaving a sample of 205 for analysis. These included 56 from Encounter Bay; 46 from Greenhills, 46 from Hillnest and 57 from Reedy Creek. The total sample included 108 males and 96 women. Their ages ranged between 17 and 89 (mean 53 years). There were 131 married and 73 single participants. Education levels ranged from university degree (19.5%), trade qualification (28.8%), high school certificate (21%), part of high school (24.9%), and primary school (4.9%).

2.3.2 The Case Studies

Two investigators visited the four communities in March and April 2000 to conduct face-to-face interviews and focus groups with service providers and local residents in order to gather an overall impression of the residents' perceptions of the social issues facing their communities. There was a total of 101 participants in the interviews and focus groups conducted in the four communities. There were 23 participants in Encounter Bay, 30 in Greenhills, 24 in Hillnest, and 24 in Reedy Creek.

The services sampled in each community included:

•	**Local Police Officers:**	Local officers provided an overview of the main types of crime and issues encountered in policing the community.
•	**Ambulance Officers:**	Ambulance Officers are 'at the coal face' of the social problems that effect a community and were able to provide a realistic perception of crime within the community.
•	**Community Health Workers:**	Staff were able to provide us with an overview of the support services available in the community as well as an insight into the extent of drug and alcohol abuse and domestic violence.
•	**School Principals:**	Principals provided insight to the issues facing youth in the community.
•	**Catholic Priests:**	A Catholic church was represented in each community and the priests were able to provide an understanding of the social problems they encounter in their parish.
•	**Editors of the local newspaper:**	Editors are an excellent source of information on all the current issues facing their local community.
•	**Representatives of the local Aboriginal Community:**	Aboriginal elders in the communities were interviewed to gather their perceptions of crime in the community and the impact of crime upon local Aboriginal people
•	**Security Officers:**	Being professional observers of life, security officers were able to provide a very knowledgeable and unique perspective of crime.
•	**Town Council:**	The Mayor or Community Manager was able to provide an overview of the issues in their town and the actions they had taken to address the social problems of their community.

In addition to commenting on issues related to their specific organisation, these respondents also answered a common set of questions regarding community problems and social cohesion. Some communities had more services than others. This enabled us to conduct more interviews with personnel from services in the communities, such as Probation and Parole, Community Neighbourhood Centres and Police Citizens Youth Clubs.

Permission was sought from the regional offices of each organisation prior to sending invitations to service providers to participate in the study. All applications were favourably received. Service organisations displayed considerable interest in the outcomes of the study. We initially intended to conduct focus groups with school children in each region. However, new ethical guidelines introduced by the University of New England and the New South Wales Department of Education, prevented us from obtaining permission prior to our visits. However, in three of the communities, some children were present at the interviews with local residents and the parents encouraged us to ask questions of their children. The responses from these

children proved very enlightening. We were grateful for this opportunity but we regret not being able to conduct the focus groups with school children which would have enriched our study.

In-depth interviews were also conducted with a sample of about ten local residents within each community. These residents were selected through the mail survey. An invitation for residents to participate further in the study through a face-to-face interview was included with the questionnaire to households. While this produced a purposeful sample of subjects, we did wish to speak to residents who were vitally interested in their community and were keen to share their views. Residents who responded to this invitation were telephoned to arrange a personal interview. The respondents were also advised at that stage that much of the interview would focus upon the issue of crime within the community. All respondents were willing to proceed with the interview.

Participants came from a wide cross-section of the community. Ages ranged from 11 to 73 years (mean 47.2 years). There were 56 men and 45 women. They included a range of professional people including several school teachers, local business owners, farmers, office workers, artists, young mothers and their children, and retirees. They varied greatly in the length of time they had lived in the community, from relative newcomers to life long residents.

The questionnaire used in the interviews and focus groups (which is available from the authors on request) was a structured form to ensure consistency in reporting across interviewers. The questions sought residents' perceptions upon the following topics.

Community	• Community strengths.
	• Community spirit.
	• Community problems.
	• How easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community.
	• Neighbourhood Watch.
	• Participant's level of involvement in the community.
Crime	• The perceived incidence of a range of crime types and social problems.
	• The perceived source of blame for crime in the community.
	• How serious crime was in the community.
	• Whether the amount of crime in the community had increased or decreased over the past year.
	• How serious crime was compared to other rural areas in NSW.
	• Whether there had been any change in the types of crime that occurs.

Policing	• The perceived level of police presence in the community. • Whether there were too many or too few police in the community. • Whether the police were doing a good job. • Whether the police had the crime problem in the community under control. • Whether there was much respect for police in the community.
Safety and Security	• How safe participants felt in their community during the day and after dark. • Whether there were any unsafe areas in town. • How concerned participants were about the safety of their family members. • What precautions participants took for their personal safety and for the security of their possessions. • Where they received information on crime.
Solutions	• Whether there had been any shift in the attitude of local people towards the problems of crime. • Whether there were any community groups developed for local people to help themselves deal with the problem of crime. • Whether participants had any thoughts or suggestions for reducing the level of crime in their area.
Values	• Policing. • Drug laws. • Criminal Justice. • Social Justice. • Community responsibility. • Family responsibility.

Focus groups and some face-to-face interviews with service providers were taped, where it was necessary in order to ensure all information provided was captured. The transcripts of each tape were evaluated and relevant information drawn for inclusion in the study. The responses to closed ended questions were entered into a data base and statistically analysed.

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the methods by which the self report survey of communities was conducted and the interviews with the residents of four rural communities were defined. The following chapters provide a description of the findings of these procedures.

Chapter 3

THE SURVEY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A self report mail survey was conducted within the four communities in order to gauge residents' perceptions of crime issues relative to other problems evident in their towns. In this chapter, the results of the survey are analysed and mapped and the implications of the findings are discussed.

3.2 THE MAIL SURVEY

In a three page self report questionnaire, respondents were asked to rate each item from a list of fifteen community strengths, and indicate how great each strength was exhibited in their community. Respondents were asked to evaluate each item as a major strength, a minor strength, or not a strength at all. Similarly, respondents were asked to rate each item from a list of fifteen community problems, how great each problem was exhibited in their community. The list of strengths and problems are presented in Table 3.1. Respondents were also asked to provide some basic demographic data.

The questionnaire was designed to provide an empirical basis for identifying how residents perceive substantial qualities of the communities. It also provided a foundation for comparing perceived strengths and weaknesses between the sample communities.

3.3 THE ANALYSIS

Multi-dimensional scaling was employed to identify key dimensions underlying respondents' perceptions of the fifteen possible strengths and the fifteen possible problems within their respective communities.

Table 3.1:
Survey items of community strengths and problems.

Community strengths	Community problems
A great lifestyle.	People leaving the district.
Plenty of good employment opportunities.	A lack of jobs.
Strong economic growth.	Economic decline.
Traditional family and religious values.	Family breakdown.
Very little drug, alcohol and other potential abuses.	Drug and/or alcohol abuse.
Very little crime: a fairly safe community to live in.	An increasing crime rate: people have to worry about safety and security.
Good sport, recreational, social and cultural opportunities.	A lack of sport, recreational, social or cultural opportunities
Good schools.	Inadequate schools.
Good health and welfare services.	Inadequate health and welfare services.
A healthy natural environment.	Environmental deterioration and hazards.
Strong effective community leadership.	Poor community leadership.
Strong community spirit: a community working together.	A lack of community spirit: no cooperation.
An interesting mix of people from different walks of life.	Too many different groups within the community: A lot of division.
Friendliness: Everyone knows each other.	No privacy: everyone knows everyone else's business.
Most people in this community can be trusted.	A breakdown in trust: it's difficult to trust others these days.

Multi-dimensional scaling is a perceptual mapping technique which transforms residents' responses into distances represented within multi-dimensional space (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1995). This technique is particularly relevant for these data because it provides a means of obtaining comparative valuations and their inter relationships of a range of social factors when the specific bases of comparisons are undefinable (Hair, *et al.,* 1995).

Of interest in this analysis was the comparison of resident's responses across the four communities. We wished to ascertain the relative perceived importance of each community strength and problem and their systematic interrelations. The primary task was to measure resident's perceptions of the seriousness of crime relative to other social and economic issues that confront their community.

The frequencies of responses for each of the three point attitudinal items were grouped on a community basis. This produced a 3x30 data matrix for each of the four communities. The data were submitted to the ANSCAL multi-dimensional scaling program in SPSS. The objective of this analysis

was to display graphical representations for each of the four communities of the resident's attitudinal responses to the fifteen strengths and the fifteen problems of their community.

3.3.1 Results

In the following pages, two figures are presented for each community which display the results of the multi-dimensional analysis. For each map, a vector is placed to represent the levels of consensus towards a particular strength or problem. Items were grouped according to the degree they represent major strengths, minor strengths, or not a strength. Similar groupings were applied for the mapping of the community problems.

3.4 OVERVIEW OF THE ANALYSIS

Some of the desirable and undesirable characteristics that were identified in this research correspond to general qualities being encountered almost universally among rural communities. The findings indicate how the structure of community is associated with the perceived desirable and problematic qualities.

A review of the figures reveals that a healthy natural environment and a great lifestyle were identified as the greatest strengths by the residents of all four communities. These results suggest that respondents are very satisfied with the rural environments in which they live. However, some problems were identified.

First, the results indicate that unemployment is a major problem for all four communities. Correspondingly, the strength item 'plenty of good employment opportunities' was not considered a strength by residents in any of the four communities. The residents of Encounter Bay, Greenhills and Hillnest identified unemployment as the most serious problem facing their communities. For, Reedy Creek, an inadequate local health service was the most salient concern. The Reedy Creek Hospital had been under threat of closure for some time and the residents were zealously guarding their rights to retain their health service. Unemployment was included as major problem in Reedy Creek, but an abundance of seasonal work in the local rural industries meant that work was often available. Subsequent interviews with Reedy Creek residents revealed that their main concerns with employment lay in the fact that there was no full-time substantial employment available, particularly for young people.

Second, people leaving the district was a major concern in Hillnest and a minor concern in Reedy Creek and Greenhills. It was of no concern in Encounter Bay as high in and out migration is characteristic of this community.

Figure 3.1a: Encounter Bay: Community strengths.

◆ Low Drugs and Alcohol

NOT A STRENGTH

◆ Good employment

Lifestyle
◆ ◆ Healthy environment

MAJOR STRENGTHS

◆ Mix of people

◆ Strong leadership
◆ Family values

◆ Friendliness
◆ Strong community spirit

LOW CRIME

◆ Strong economy

◆ Good health services

◆ Trust

◆ ◆ Good schools
Good sports facilities

MINOR STRENGTHS
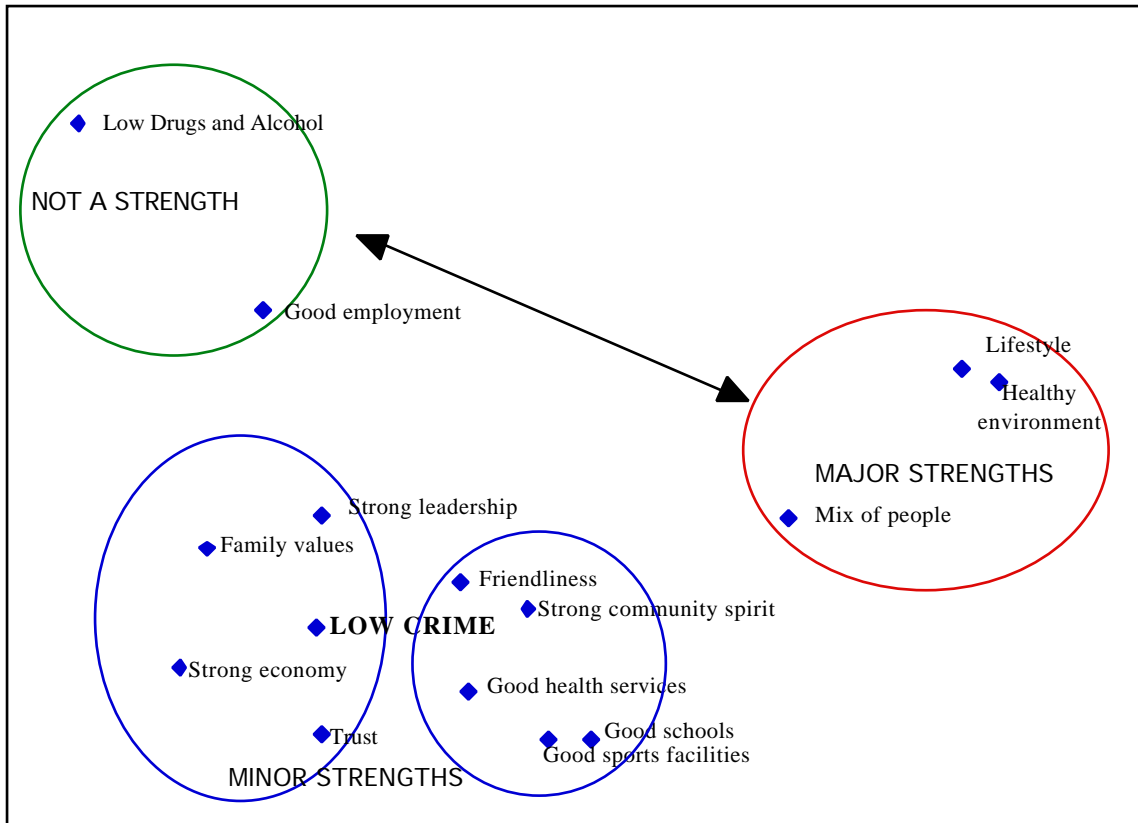
Figure 3.1b: Encounter Bay: Community problems.

NOT A PROBLEM

◆ Poor schooling

◆ Unemployment

◆ Poor community spirit

MAJOR PROBLEMS

◆ People leaving

◆ Division

◆ Drugs and alcohol

◆ Poor health services
◆ No privacy

◆ Poor sport facilities

◆ Family breakdown
◆ Poor leadership

◆ No trust

MINOR PROBLEMS

◆ Environmental hazards

CRIME

◆ Economic decline
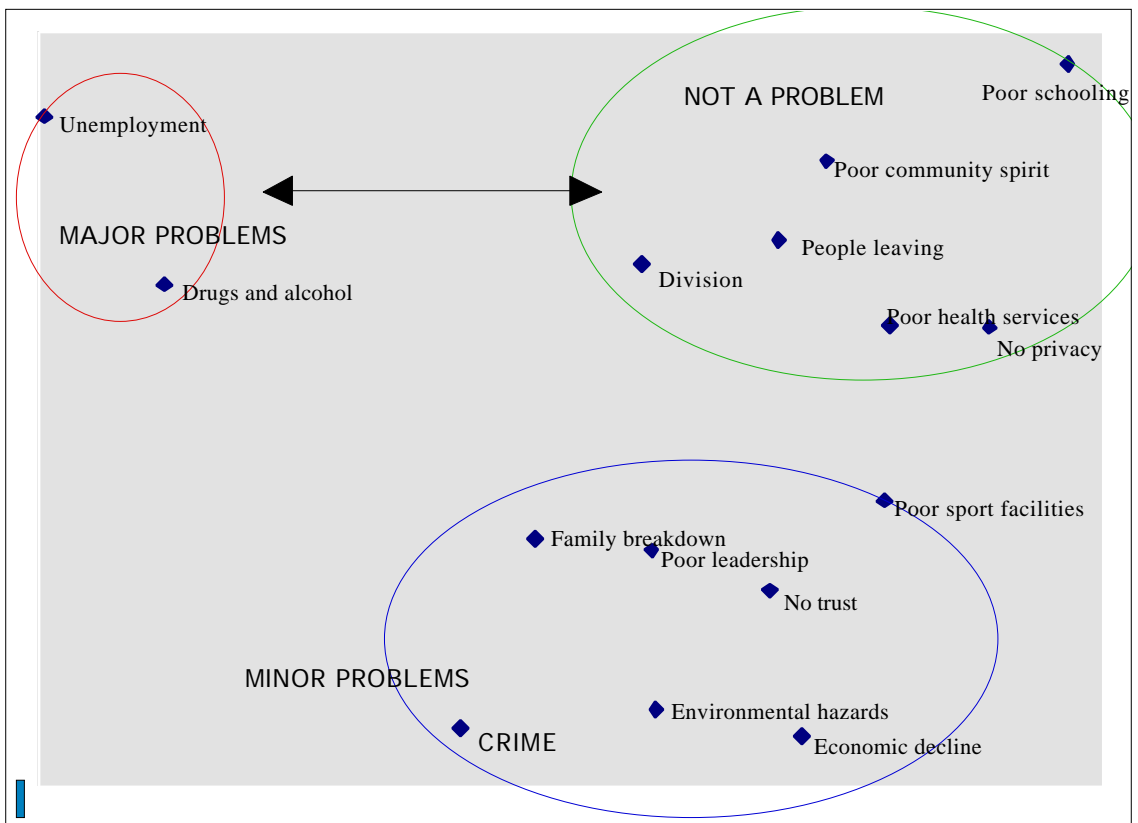
Figure 3.2a: Greenhills: Community strengths.

- ◆ Healthy environment

MAJOR STRENGTHS

- ◆ Lifestyle

- ◆ Good employment
- ◆ Low drugs and alcohol
- ◆ Economic growth

NOT A STRENGTH

- ◆ Good schooling

- ◆ LOW CRIME

- ◆ Good sport facilities

MINOR STRENGTHS

- ◆ Trust
- ◆ Good mix people
- ◆ Friendliness

- ◆ Good health services
- ◆ Strong community spirit
- ◆ Strong leadership
- ◆ Family values
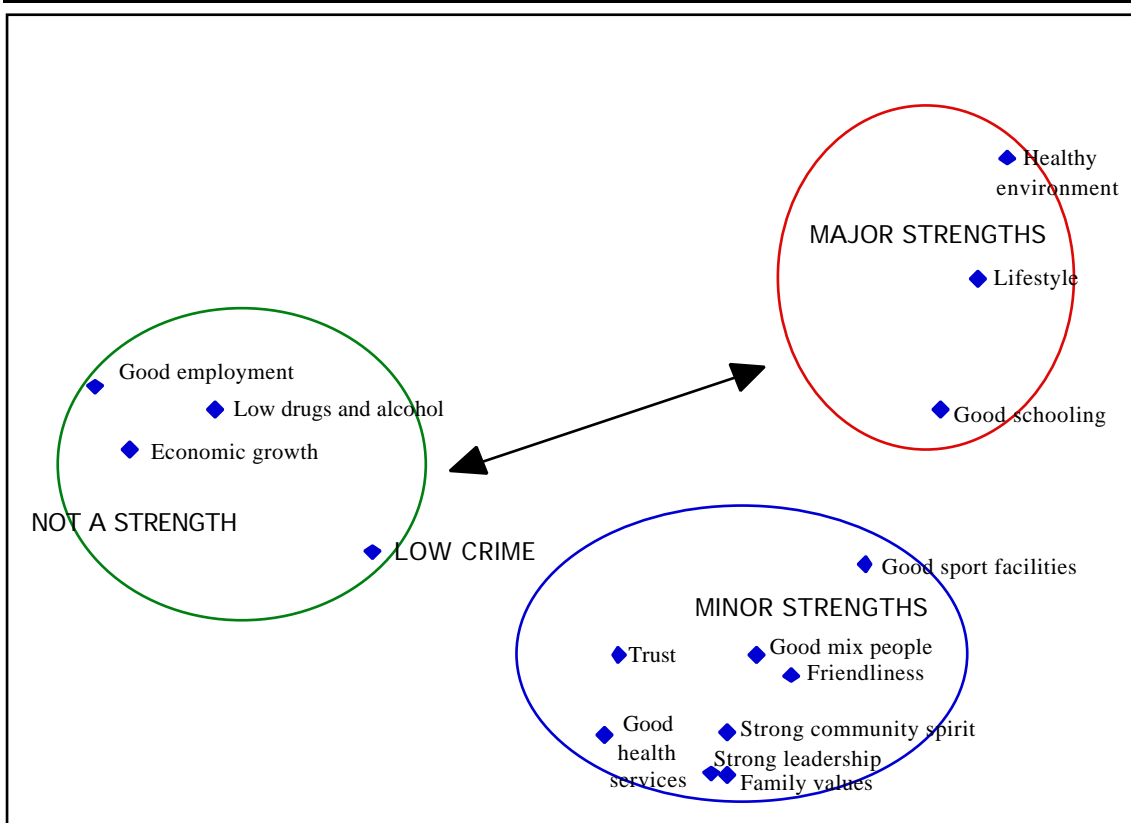
Figure 3.2b: Greenhills: Community problems.

- ◆ Poor schooling

- ◆ Poor sports facilities

NOT A PROBLEM

- ◆ Unemployment

- ◆ Drugs and alcohol
- ◆ Economic decline

- ◆ No privacy
- ◆ Division
- ◆ Poor health services

- ◆ Environmental hazards

MAJOR PROBLEMS

- ◆ Family breakdown
- ◆ CRIME

- ◆ No trust
- ◆ Poor leadership

- ◆ People leaving

MINOR PROBLEMS

- ◆ Poor community spirit

16
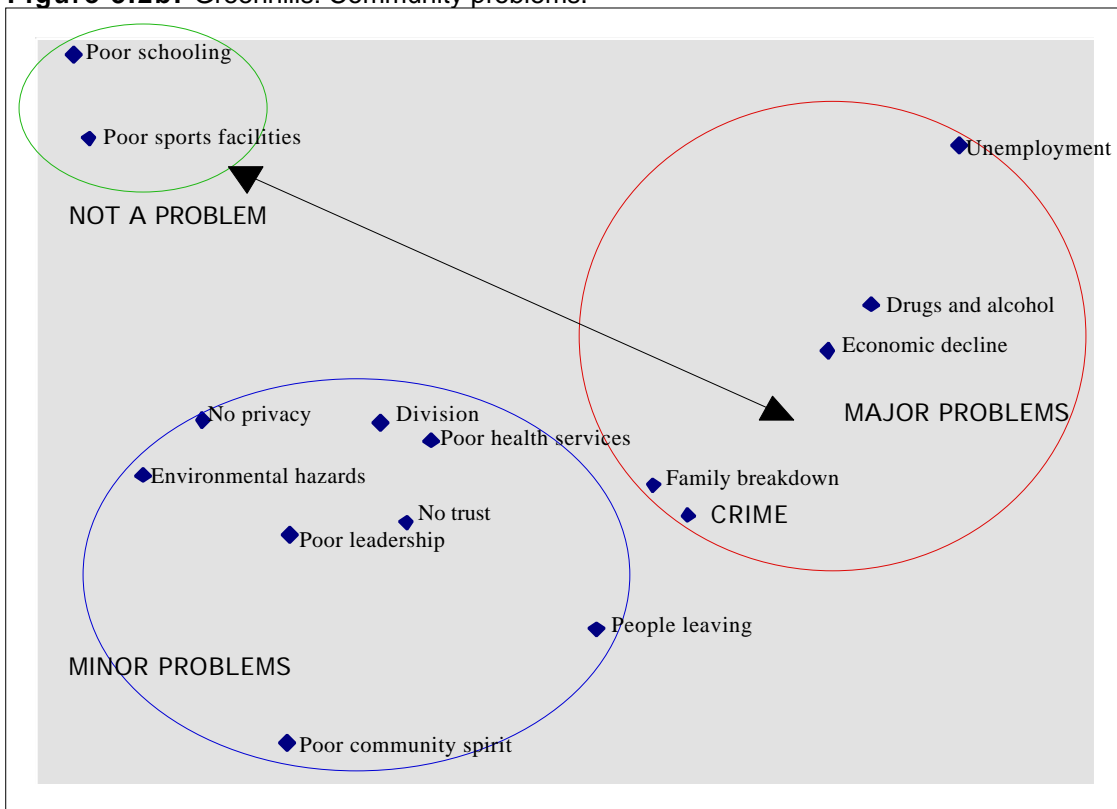
Figure 3.3a: Hillnest: Community strengths.

NOT A STRENGTH

MAJOR STRENGTHS

Healthy environment

Good employment

Good schools

Good health services

Economic growth

Lifestyle

LOW CRIME

Trust

Friendliness

Good sport facilities

Low drugs and alcohol

Strong community spirit

Family values

Strong leadership

MINOR STRENGTHS

Good mix of people
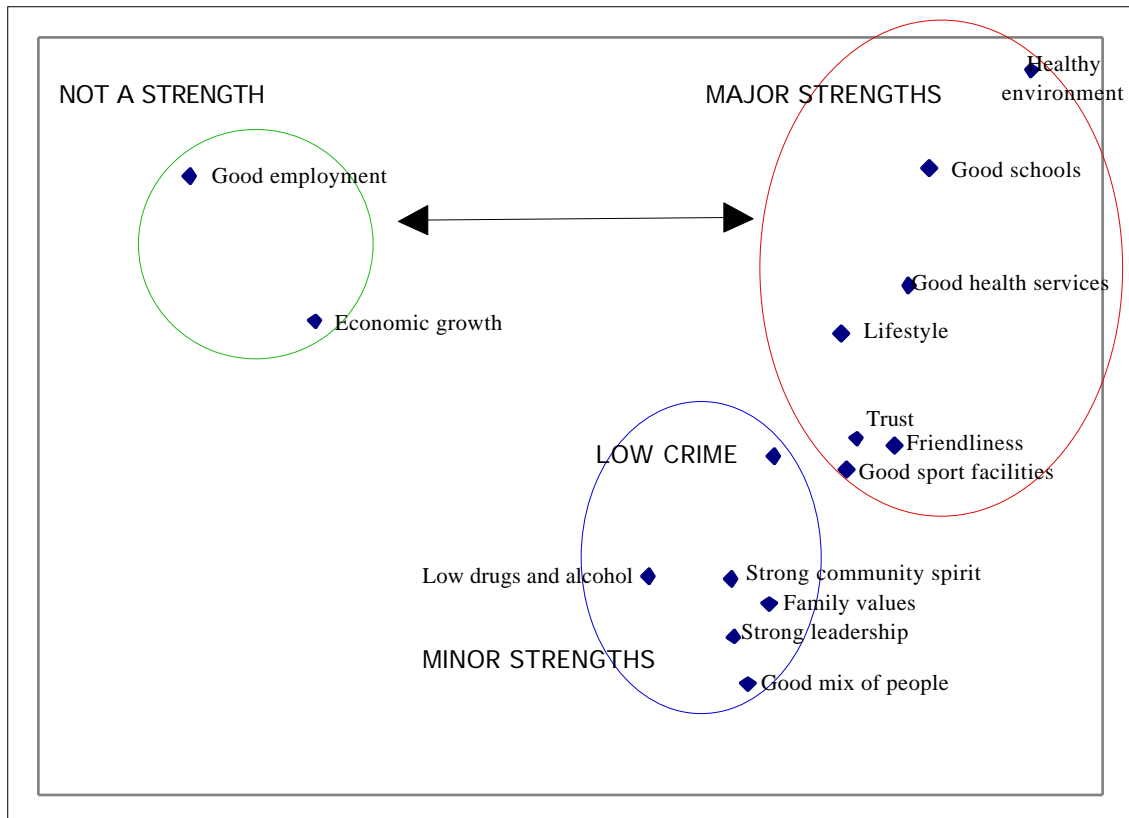
Figure 3.3b: Hillnest: Community problems.

NOT A PROBLEM

Unemployment

Poor schooling

Poor health
Poor sports facilities

Economic decline

Environmental hazards

Division

MAJOR PROBLEMS

Poor leadership

No privacy

CRIME

Family breakdown

People leaving

MINOR PROBLEMS

Drugs and alcohol

No trust

Poor community spirit

17

Figure 3.4a: Reedy Creek: Community strengths.

Figure 3.4b: Reedy Creek: Community problems.
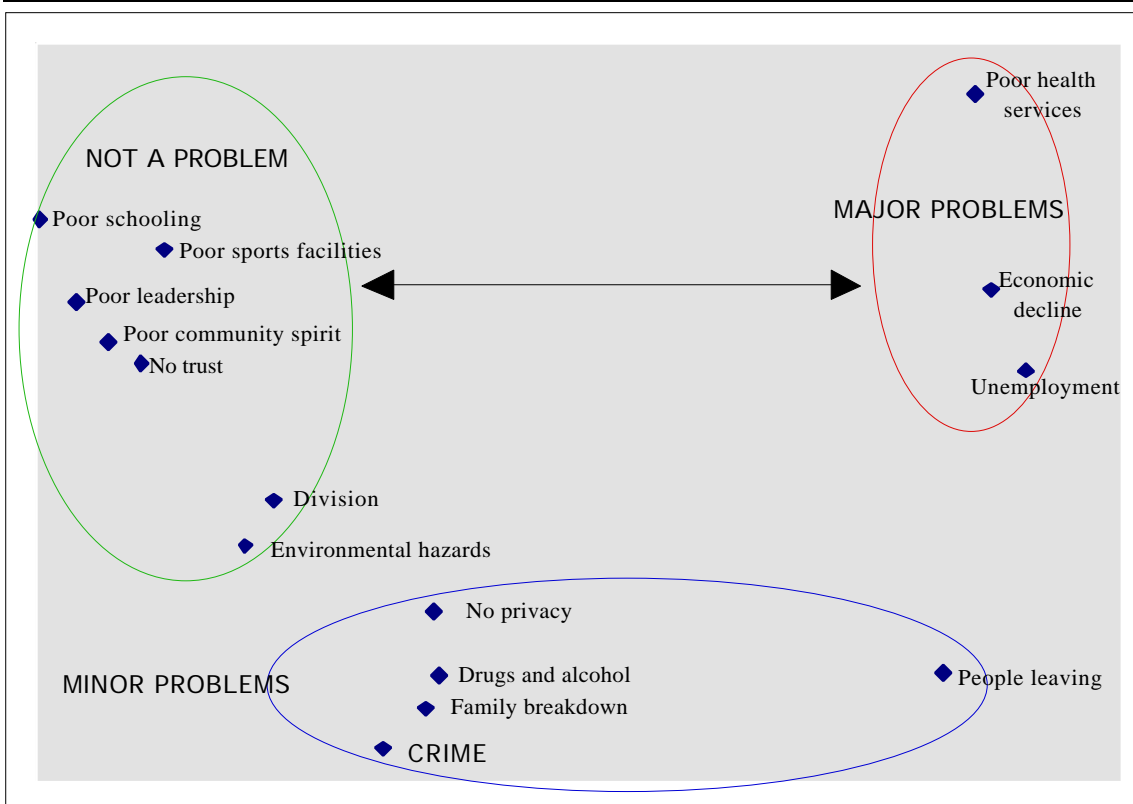
Economic decline was perceived to be a major problem for Greenhills, Hillnest, and Reedy Creek, but a minor concern in Encounter Bay. Economic growth was not listed as a strength in Hillnest or Greenhills. However, it was considered as a minor strength in Encounter Bay and Reedy Creek. This reflects the economic possibilities for tourism and rural industry respectively in these two communities.

Overall, these results suggest that the major concerns of rural people for their communities pertain to economic issues. Economy is the contemporary metaphor for explaining problems. It has come to be used as the ubiquitous cause and solution to local problems.

Third, family breakdown was noted as a major problem in Greenhills and a minor problem in the other communities. In all communities, family breakdown is in close proximity to concerns about crime. The central importance of the family in the prevention of crime was apparent throughout the subsequent interviews with rural residents.

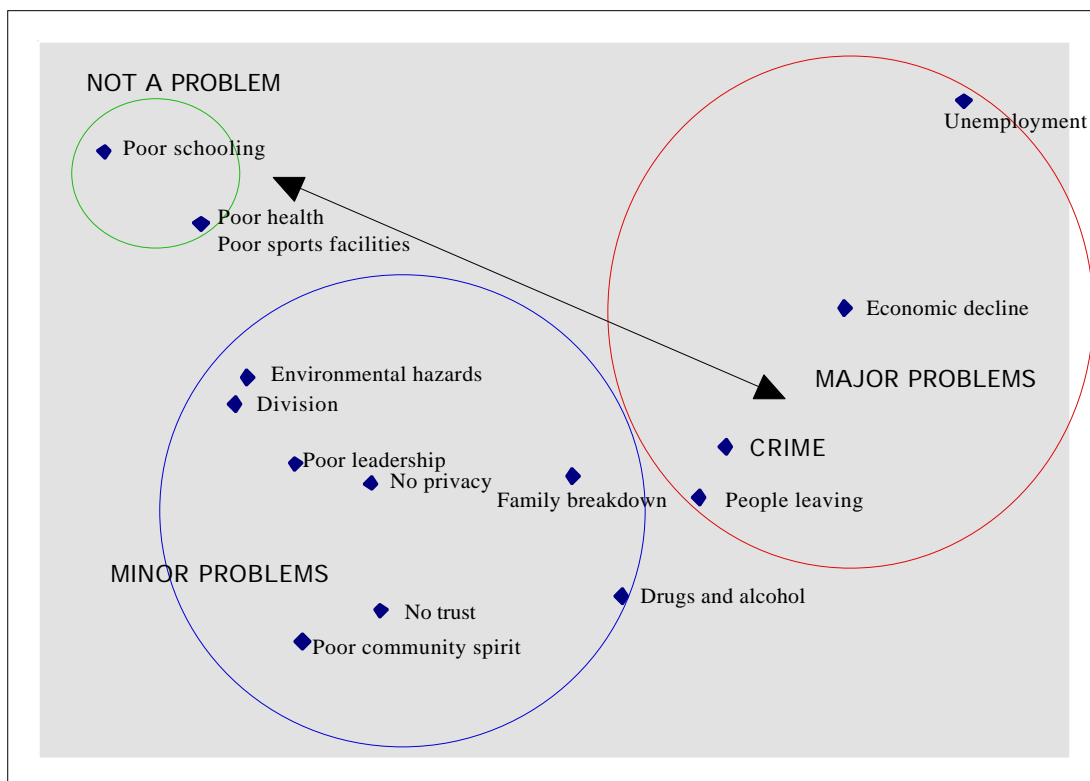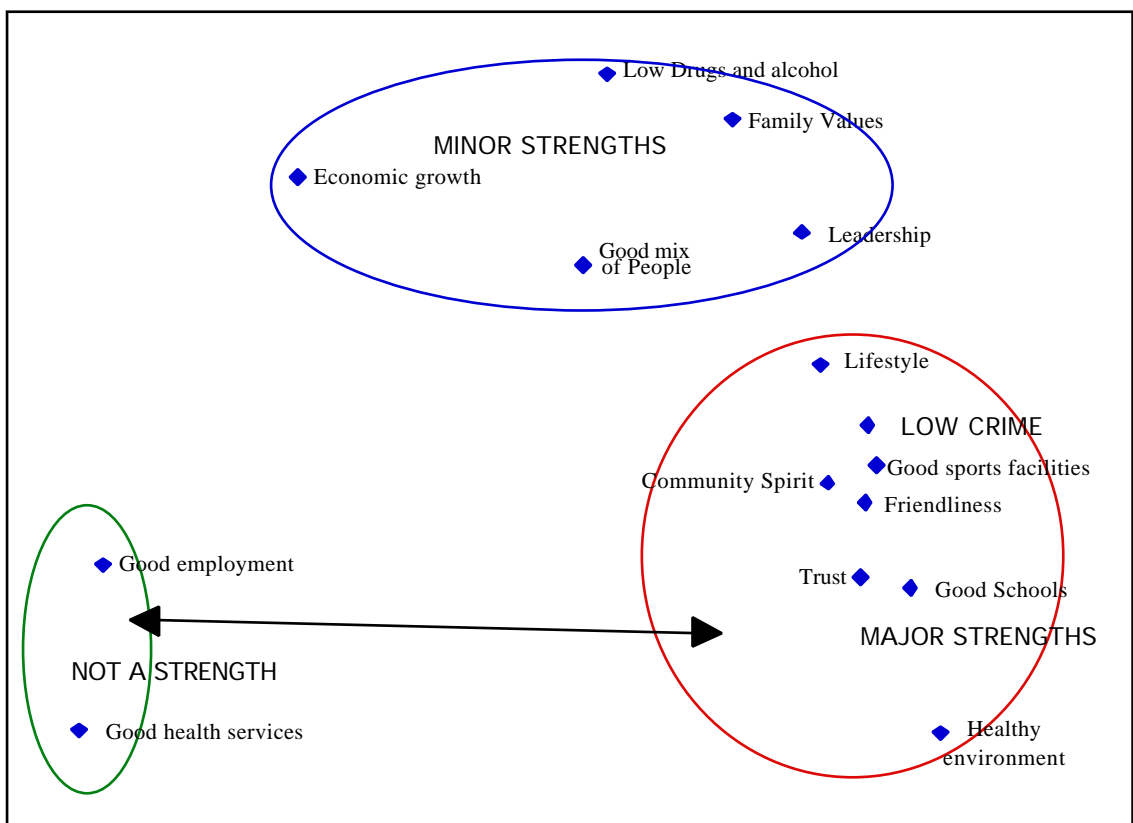Fourth, the quality of social services is a common focus in small towns. Education facilities were considered to be a major strength in Greenhills, Hillnest and Reedy Creek, and a minor strength in Encounter Bay. Local public schools typically receive positive evaluations in social surveys. In contrast to the Reedy Creek community, health services in Hillnest were excellent for a small country town and residents listed them as a major strength. Reedy Creek residents reported that 'good health and welfare services' were not a strength in their community. Health services were a minor strength in Greenhills and Encounter Bay. Sports and recreational facilities were listed as a major strength in Hillnest and Reedy Creek. Some respondents qualified their answers stating that social and cultural events were not a strength in these inland rural areas.

Fifth, strong community leadership was a minor strength in all four communities. However, poor leadership was listed as a minor problem in Encounter Bay, Hillnest and Greenhills.

Of particular interest was the relationship of concerns about crime relative to other problems in the community. Increasing crime was perceived as a major problem in Greenhills and Hillnest and a minor problem in Encounter Bay and Reedy Creek. There was a perceived close relationship between drug and alcohol abuse and crime in all but the community of Encounter Bay. Here, drug and alcohol abuse is a major problem but crime was considered only a minor issue.

Division in the community, that was a consequence of tensions between different ethnic groups, was identified as a minor issue in Greenhills and Hillnest. These communities have the highest proportions of Aboriginal populations. Division in the community was not an issue in Reedy Creek or Encounter Bay. Reedy Creek has a large proportion of long established Italian migrants and a floating population of international backpackers who seek seasonal employment. Encounter Bay has a great diversity of groups

within the community and the economy is greatly dependent upon the large numbers of international tourists who visit the area. In fact an 'interesting mix of people from all walks of life' was listed as a major strength in Encounter Bay.

Reedy Creek and Hillnest, the towns closer to the sociological "ideal" of community, exhibited the greatest number of strengths. The residents found a wide variety of personal qualities that made their communities good places to live. Trust and friendliness were included for both communities. Reedy Creek residents reported a strong community spirit as a major strength in their town. Residents in Encounter Bay and Greenhills found it more difficult to identify many strong positive qualities about their towns. Although Encounter Bay and Greenhills were reported to have wonderful external qualities, such as environment and lifestyle, they lacked the essential personal qualities that create a community. Those personal qualities are indicative of social cohesion and integration and are the foundation for low crime in a community. A lack of privacy, a common complaint in small communities, was a minor problem in Reedy Creek and Hillnest and Greenhills, but not a problem in Encounter Bay.

3.5 COMPARISONS BETWEEN THE COMMUNITIES

Cross-tabulation comparisons of differences between the four communities in their perceptions of community strengths and weaknesses were also conducted. The results of the analyses are presented in Appendix 1. Significant differences between the four regions in their residents' perceptions of community issues were found for all items except for those relating to a lack of privacy, sports facilities, and the quality of schooling. Residents in all communities were satisfied with the quality of education and sports services. While important, these objective qualities were not essential for defining 'community' within the four towns. Health services were the exception. In Reedy Creek, the proposed downgrading of the local health services was the most serious problem facing the community. Conversely, Hillnest was well supplied with health services.

Lifestyle and environment were important to all respondents, but these aspects were significantly more important to Encounter Bay residents than those in other communities. Concerns about environmental hazards were significantly greater in Encounter Bay than elsewhere.

Encounter Bay residents were significantly less concerned about people leaving the district compared to those in the other communities. High in and out migration is a common occurrence in Encounter Bay whereas in the other communities, the loss of people from the district has a serious impact upon the economic and social status of the community. Greater concerns over the loss of population were associated with a closer, more personal sense of community. The diversity of the people was viewed as a strength in Encounter Bay significantly more than in other communities.

A low crime rate was a strength in Hillnest and Reedy Creek, significantly more than in other centres. However, rising crime was perceived to be a significantly more serious problem to residents in Hillnest and Greenhills than to residents in Reedy Creek. Hillnest has experienced a sharp increase in crime since 1996, but levels of crime are still below that of Greenhills or Encounter Bay. Unemployment was a concern for all communities but Reedy Creek residents were significantly less concerned. Encounter Bay residents were significantly less concerned about economic decline in their flourishing tourism based economy and reported significantly more employment opportunities. Greenhills people were significantly less assured of economic growth in their community. Drugs were also a universal concern, but residents were significantly more concerned about drug use in the larger, less cohesive communities, Greenhills and Encounter Bay.

The maintenance of traditional family values and a low incidence of family breakdown were significantly more associated with the smaller, more cohesive communities, such as Reedy Creek and Hillnest, than the other larger more diverse communities.

Friendliness and trustworthiness were seen as strengths in Hillnest and Reedy Creek significantly more than the other two communities. Strength of community spirit and respect for leadership were reported to be significantly more important in Reedy Creek than in the other communities.

3.6 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the residents from four diverse rural communities were compared on their perceptions of a range of social issues facing their communities. Respondents identified aspects of their towns that they found beneficial or disturbing. Of particular interest was their perceptions of the impact of crime relative to other problems facing their community. Greenhills had the greater proportion of problems. Hillnest and Reedy Creek displayed the greater proportion of community strengths.

Residents in the sample clearly identified aspects of their communities that they believed were strengths and weaknesses. Many of the problematic factors that were often mentioned, such as unemployment and family breakdown, are nearly universal factors underlying crime. However, each community had a unique configuration for how those strengths and weaknesses fit together to make it a special place with a particular pattern of crime.

Residents' responses conveyed beliefs that are systematically shared within their towns. The aspects that people identified also differed systematically between the towns. For example, people in Encounter Bay believed the

diversity amongst the people in their community was a major strength whereas in other communities, it was less important.

The responses to the survey support and complement the quantitative analyses of community social structure and crime. Reedy Creek and Hillnest, selected because they more closely approximate the traditional type of community, revealed that personal qualities, such as community spirit, family values, friendliness, and trust, were closely linked to low crime. The larger more diverse, more migratory and fragmented towns, Encounter Bay and Greenhills, reported less of the personal qualities that create community and more external factors, such as the quality of the environment.

The dynamics between these factors will be further explored in subsequent chapters which outline the findings of the interviews and focus groups with the residents of the four communities.

Chapter 4

ENCOUNTER BAY

4.1	Introduction
4.2	Community Profile
4.3	Community Solutions
4.4	Summary and Conclusions

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the first of the case studies of crime in rural communities. The results present a summary of the responses of residents on their perceptions of crime and other social issues in their community. These perceptions are not necessarily accurate or immediately understandable to the outside reader, but they do provide insight into the world view of the residents about issues of safety and security in the places where they live. Encounter Bay, was chosen for a case study because it is a diverse coastal community in which drug crime, migration (both in and out), population growth, family instability, and unemployment are all of a high level. It has a small Aboriginal population and a higher proportion of residents born overseas.

4.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Encounter Bay is located on the far north coast of New South Wales. The magnificent scenery of the coastline and hinterland, excellent surf and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the community make the area one of the most popular tourist destinations on the North Coast. There are twelve large backpacker hostels in Encounter Bay to accommodate the thousands of international backpackers who flock to the area.

European development within the region began with cedar cutters and whaling in the 1840s. Settlers moved into the area in 1869 and the town of Encounter Bay was founded by 1886. In 1890, the town was assigned its first police officer and the railway arrived. A lighthouse was established in 1901, and a new Court House and the Police Station were opened in 1921. Rural industries were the principal economic base until 1983, when the meatworks closed. Since that time, Encounter Bay has been sustained by tourism and its associated businesses (Walkabout, 2000a).

Source: Encounter Baybay.net, 2000

The area was traditionally owned by the Arakwal clan of the Banjalang people and was known as 'cavaba' which some claim means 'meeting place' (Walkabout, 2000a). Today, there are very few local Aboriginal people living in Encounter Bay township itself. The Elders of the community reside in a regional centre approximately 45 km away. The community as a whole has a reputation for being vibrant and unique, incorporating a range of lifestyles and religious beliefs. The area is well known as an alternate lifestyle retreat. Yet, it is also known as an upmarket get-away-from-it-all retreat for wealthy city dwellers (Walkabout, 2000a).

4.2.1 Community services

The Encounter Bay community is closely aligned to another small community, 19 km north of Encounter Bay. The Encounter Bay Shire Council and some other services are located in this community. There are a range of State Government and Commonwealth Government community support services available to Encounter Bay, such as those provided by Community Health, Department of Community Services and Family Support. In addition, the Encounter Bay community provides a number of volunteer services, many of which are coordinated through the Encounter Bay Community Centre. Although primarily an Information and Referral Service, the Centre also provides for the social, educational and cultural needs of the community. The Centre is 95% self-funded and is staffed by a team of 40 volunteers and two part-time staff.

The Centre houses an Interagency Coalition, a network of various welfare agencies and community groups. Much of the welfare assistance is needed for the large numbers of transient people within the Encounter Bay community. There are three types of transient people in Encounter Bay: homeless non-residents who are currently staying in Encounter Bay, backpackers and tourists, and residents of Encounter Bay who have a transient or mobile lifestyle. Transient people are multi disadvantaged and require emergency relief in the form of food, accommodation, money (often for transport), and support for mental illness, drug and/or alcohol problems (Encounter Bay Shire Interagency Coalition, 1999). The welfare support is generously donated by local businesses. The coordinator maintained that

the success of the Community Centre is due to the humanistic nature of the residents of Encounter Bay. She stated:

> *People are multi skilled and are willing to act as volunteers to assist those in need. There is a sense of well being, creativity, tolerance, intelligence and forward thinking amongst the people. People take responsibility for themselves, live a healthy lifestyle and part of that outlook on life incorporates a desire to extend themselves to others and to serve their community. Such attitudes build social capital.*

Encounter Bay Community Centre, Source: Walkabout, 2000a

Some of the wide range of programs offered include:

- *For youth:* child care; youth services offering counselling, education, information, referral and other activities and programs; Time Out program for young people who are at risk of leaving school; HELP programs for after school and those who leave school early; and a youth refuge for young people between the ages 12 and 17 inclusive.

- *For adults:* adult education; a job club providing intensive job search training skills to long term unemployed people; mature workers job search assistance; mediation services for community members in dispute; and court support providing domestic violence information, moral support and practical assistance to women who are experiencing domestic violence.

- *Welfare:* advocacy, supported accommodation, education, rehabilitation and crisis support for people with mental illness; emergency accommodation for people in crisis; supported accommodation for homeless youth, drug and alcohol clients and domestic violence clients and their families; emergency assistance in the form of a cheque for food to be redeemed at the local supermarket; and regular distribution of donated food for those in need with free meals provided twice a week.

One other community initiative of interest is the Encounter Bay Safety Committee. The impact of tourists upon the community, particularly at peak holiday times such as New Year's Eve, and the need for public order and safety in the town, has led to the forming of the Encounter Bay Safety Committee. The State Government provided a grant of $130,000 for public safety measures at Encounter Bay for the celebrations for the new millennium. Previous New Year celebrations had seen some problems with a minority of the crowd. The safety committee ensured that there was no alcohol consumed on the streets, and that extra police were bought into the town. In addition, traffic diversions, parking fees and vehicle stickers were used to restrict vehicle access to the community on New Year's Eve. These measures ensured a safe and successful outcome for this event.

4.2.2 Community strengths

In the self-report mail survey of Encounter Bay, the greatest strengths of the community identified by respondents were the lifestyle (96%), the healthy natural environment (93%) and the diversity of the people within the community (73%).

Interviews with the residents revealed similar sentiments. Encounter Bay residents are committed to preserving the natural environment of the river catchments, coast and hinterland areas. Several participants pointed out Encounter Bay's great weather and beautiful beaches. Another added that the town is very central. Everything, including the beaches, is located within walking distance.

The free and easy lifestyle was identified by most of those we interviewed as a major strength. One participant maintained that people choose to live in Encounter Bay because it is a happy place. Others believed it was the people that made Encounter Bay the community that it is. One man pointed out that Encounter Bay is a young people's town and has a lot of entertainment. Several participants noted the social diversity of the community.

> *Encounter Bay has a great cosmopolitan feel:*
>
> *There is a great mix of people. Every religion and every nationality and a variety of lifestyles are represented.*

Others described the people as passionate, creative, tolerant, intelligent, forward thinking, with a sense of well-being. One woman noted the residents' openness to new ideas and willingness to take on new projects. She added, 'there is a great community support network in place'.

4.2.3 Community spirit

We asked residents whether they thought there was a strong overall sense of community in Encounter Bay or whether there were several smaller communities within the whole. Most respondents believed there was a strong general sense of community spirit in Encounter Bay. One service worker maintained that the community spirit in Encounter Bay was better than anywhere she has known. She maintained that between thirty to fifty people run for Council each election, which is unusual in a small community.

Many mentioned the diversity of the people within the community. One thought that the special spiritual flair of Encounter Bay was the resident's openness to difference. Another added that the people were very tolerant.

> *There are many diverse cultures which are accepting*
> *of each other. The community is cosmopolitan and*
> *quite unique. There is no place to compare it with.*

Others believed that there was no holistic focus, but the groups within place have a strong sense of community. One believed that:

> *..there is a strong sense of shared community, but that*
> *there is also fragmentation of groups. There are the*
> *surfers, the farmers and the yuppies from Sydney.*

One woman believed there was a good community spirit apart from the division between the environmentalists and developers. She also believed there was some parochialism between Encounter Bay and the neighbouring communities, and some dissent on a few issues between the communities. However, most of the time, the communities will compromise to achieve some agreement. Another maintained there are basically two communities in Encounter Bay: 'the established, long term locals and the ins and outs'. One person believed that overall there was a good community spirit but noted that the transient nature of the population means people are careful about the time they invest in people.

Several others believed that there were several smaller communities within the whole, though they stressed that people come together to fight the big issues. In fact, the community frequently is engaged in some struggle between one group and another over issues related to quality of life. Environmental issues encourage considerable community action. Recently, community action prevented the sale of a public lookout to developers. A demonstration by nudists in the community to protect their right to a nude beach was much publicised and was an example of community spirit in action.

We asked residents how easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community. Responses were extremely varied. Thirty-one per cent of people responded that it was very easy, 38% that it was 'OK' and

31% maintained it was difficult for newcomers to be accepted. One person believed it was extremely difficult for new people to be assimilated.

Encounter Bay's Nudist Demonstration   Photo: S Fox, Source:Bayweb, 2000.

Some maintained it was necessary to be born into the community to be considered a local. One stated: 'locals are stand-offish'. One resident observed that locals hesitate to form close friendships as people are so transient in the Encounter Bay community. People tend to remain cordial rather than develop real friends. Others had noticed some social cliques in the community but added that basically people are very easy going, non judgmental, and friendly. The authors observed that newcomers form their own community, while the longer standing members of the community are more exclusionary.

Those who described the community as friendly were mostly newcomers to town. One person stated that with so many new people coming to Encounter Bay, all seeking new friendships, that it was easy to make friends. One added that with so many diverse groups in the community, newcomers were able find a niche somewhere. Another did add that unless newcomers are introduced to people in the community, they need to join groups to become involved. Others maintained that acceptance depends upon the individual. If newcomers want to be involved, they can be.

One service provider believed acceptance was easy for senior citizens because there were established support systems in place for this age group. However, he added that single mothers have a difficult time and believed their numbers had doubled over the past ten years. Another believed that those involved with the schools adjust easily.

4.2.4 Community problems

The impact of tourism upon the community has been significant. Not all the residents welcomed, or were comfortable with these changes. Many people identified the problem of the lack of infrastructure within the

community which struggles to sustain the vast numbers of tourists that descend upon the area in the height of the summer season. The population can swell from 8000 to 40,000 in the summer.

There is a lack of parking and the traffic flow is badly congested. One long time resident reported she has an old car to drive around town as the tourists have no consideration, and accidents are common. There is an urgent need for a bypass around the town. The rubbish tip has reached capacity requiring rubbish to be transported by road to Ipswich for disposal. The sewage system is also overloaded. One resident complained that 'locals don't get anything out of tourism, they just have to pay the bills!' The Council does not have the resources to meet the needs because there are not enough employed people in the Shire for a sufficient tax base.

The mail survey of Encounter Bay's residents revealed that 77% believed that unemployment was one of the greatest problems of the community. Drug and alcohol abuse was seen as a major problem by 66% of respondents. Family breakdown was a concern of 36% of the participants. Interviews with local residents also revealed that unemployment, particularly youth unemployment, was the major concern in the region. Drug abuse was also identified as a causal factor behind many of the problems within the community, such as homelessness and drug dealing. Use of hard drugs, such as heroin, was a particular concern.

An added problem is the heavy demand upon community organisations that attempt to provide the welfare needs of the large numbers of disadvantaged people coming to the region. Unemployment amongst the transient population was seen as the main problem. Transients were defined as 'the bad tourists'. Another noted further that those who were homeless, were sleeping on the beaches, in parks, and in parked cars. The researchers also personally observed this fact. As one resident said:

> *Some of the homeless ferals park in the shopping
> centre carpark and stay there preventing local
> shoppers finding a park. Many of the locals choose to
> shop in a neighbouring town approximately twenty
> minutes south of Encounter Bay.*
>
> *The transients blend in with backpackers and there
> are too many of them. There is a criminal element
> amongst them. Families don't come here any more.
> Many locals are fed up and are leaving the district.
> The surfers are OK, they might be unemployed, but
> they live a clean and healthy lifestyle.*

Another believed the downside of tourism means crimes are brought into the community by transients, particularly drugs, sexual assault and sexual harassment. Some believed that unemployment led to criminal activity because there is a lack of things for young people to do.

Others were concerned about the extent of poverty in the area. Some noted the high proportion of single parent families within the community suggesting that they were economically disadvantaged. Some of the real estate in the town is owned by urban property developers who have city profit return expectations. Rents were expensive in Encounter Bay, which causes difficulties for small businesses and leads mixed families to move in together, causing problems. One man observed: Encounter Bay 'is made up of the greedy and the needy'. Another believed that rents must be high because transients do not care for properties, and groups of students or out of town gangs, can trash units.

Another concern raised by several residents is that there is no public transport. The Shire incorporates six postcodes which means people are scattered across the region and need transport. There is only a school bus and a train to Sydney. There are no buses to regional centres on the weekend. Many young unemployed in the area cannot afford fares, so they hitch hike, placing themselves at risk. The researchers observed hitch hiking was a common occurrence throughout the community.

Some respondents noted the rationalisation of government services which has negative impacts for small communities. For example, the district office of the Health Department had closed. Like many of the major services, management was now centralised in Sydney. Another respondent added that governments do not account for the fact that Encounter Bay is isolated in many respects and needs services in the town. One service provider believed that governments need to step through the process to understand the problems of policies in place. There are too many gaps in services in rural areas, particularly in rapidly growing tourist areas.

Another man believed one of the main problems was to maintain Encounter Bay as a village, by keeping out big business and corporations. There have been numerous clashes between developers and residents determined to regulate inappropriate expansion, such as high rise buildings. Fast food restaurants, such as Pizza Hut and Macdonald's, have been excluded in order to protect the small businesses within the community. However, another resident noted that while the community had been able to block such development, the process had also reduced opportunities for employment for young people within the region.

Some residents were critical of the community leadership. The mail survey revealed that 29% believed the community suffered from poor leadership. One stated that the Council was too focused on the environment and lacked business expertise. Another added that this focus prevents development within the Shire. The authors observed that with so many diverse interests within the community, any Council would have difficulty meeting the expectations of all residents.

4.2.5 Crime

Crime within the community, in relation to the other social problems highlighted above, was seen as a major problem by 39% of the respondents to the mail survey of the Encounter Bay community. Forty-eight per cent believed crime was a minor problem, while only 8% believed it was no problem at all. Of those interviewed, 25% reported crime in the community to be serious, 56% described crime as somewhat serious, and 19% believed it was not serious at all. Figure 4.1 presents the recorded rates of offences for 1996 and 1999.

Figure 4.1:
Rates of recorded crime for Encounter Bay LGA ,1996 and 1999.
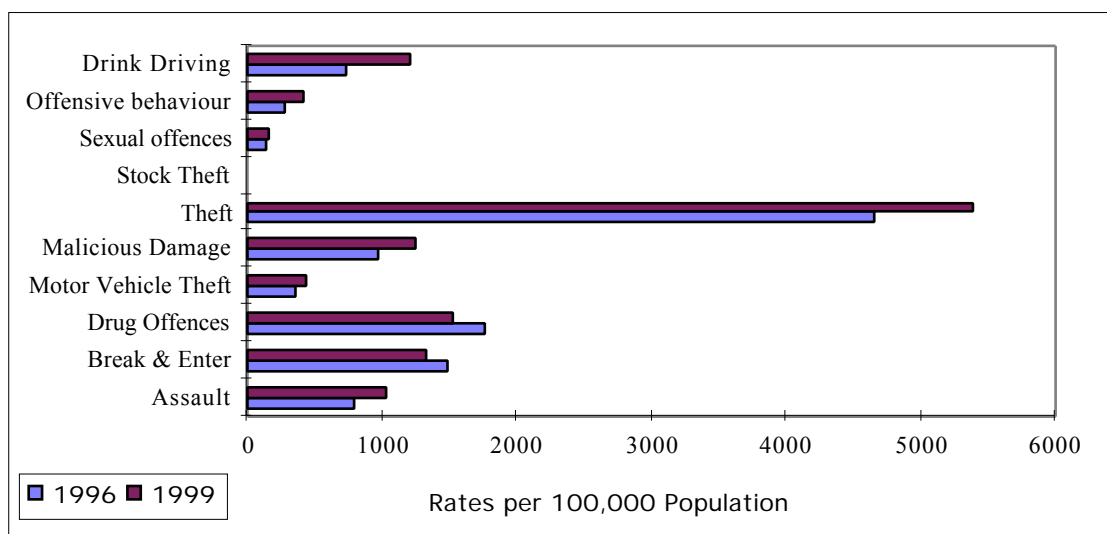
Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2000) New South Wales Recorded Crime Statistics 1999, Sydney.

Forty-four per cent of those we interviewed believed crime had increased over the past five years, while another 44% believed the crime rate had remained unchanged. None of the respondents reported a decrease in the levels of crime in the community. Yet 36% believed crime levels in the Encounter Bay community were less serious than they were in other rural communities. Others (14%) believed crime rates were much the same as other places, while 14% believed they were more serious than elsewhere. The local police described the level of crime as serious, and that crime rates had increased and were more serious than other rural centres.

A change in the types of crime that occurred in the community had been observed by 58% of participants. The majority believed there had been an increase in break and enters, theft and drug abuse, but that there was a low incidence of violent crimes. Yet another believed there had been a rise in the amount of domestic violence. Some reported knowledge of an increase in the theft of bikes and cars and break-ins to cars.

Those crimes considered to be a major problem by those we interviewed included illegal drug use (68%), break and enters (53%), shoplifting or petty theft (53%), and motor vehicle theft (36%). Other social problems that were

31

a major concern included anti social behaviour (37%), drunken behaviour (47%), rubbish in public areas (40%), begging or pan handling (33%) and prowlers (50%). Anti-social behaviour was indicated by some residents as a problem amongst the tourists and 'ferals'. Under-age drinking was also a concern.

Residents were concerned with the extent of hard drug use within the community. One resident observed that there appeared to be more younger people using drugs and more dealers in the community. She blamed the transient and tourist populations for this increase. Tourists were reported to mail packages of drugs to themselves as a method of importation. Since their crime was a single event, it was difficult to apprehend. Another maintained that with three nightclubs in town, hard drugs such as ecstasy and cocaine, are available. However, several respondents noted that many within the community do not view drug use as a crime. One maintained that even the police turn a blind eye to drug use. Another resident believed that some of the religious sects use drugs within their communes, but this did not contribute to the crime problem.

Petty theft was a problem on the beach where people leave their possessions while they swim. Theft from motor vehicles was noted as a major problem by one resident. Tourists were often vulnerable as they usually have all of their possessions with them.

Environmental crime was identified by several participants in Encounter Bay, something that was never mentioned by residents in other communities. Rubbish was a problem with so many tourists in the community. With a lack of Council funds for cleaning, there is a team of volunteer rubbish collectors who pick up rubbish in the town.

Other problems which were a minor concern to participants included graffiti (56%), abandoned cars (53%), louts or gangs (43%), dangerous or noisy driving (53%), loud parties (60%), vandalism (37%), drink driving (50%), street fights (53%), physical assault (53%), sexual assault (53%) and domestic violence (40%). Children skating in the town centre was considered a problem by some residents. One woman was concerned about child neglect.

Other respondents mentioned a perceived increase in sexual assault. Some residents believed there was much under reporting of these crimes, as many offences occur amongst the transient population. Incidents were likely to occur the night before the victim or abuser was leaving. If a complaint was even made, the violator, or victim was already leaving town. Reporting such crimes means remaining within the community to see through the process of law. Usually tourists are on a tight schedule and have to return to their own country and therefore do not report crime.

One long time resident believed nudity on the main beach was a crime. Although there is a nude beach available, nudists choose the main beach and do not seem to realise that nudity offends some people. He added: 'they don't always look so good'.

4.2.6 Blame

We asked participants who, or what, they thought was to blame for most of the crime in their community. The transient population was clearly identified as the source of crime by the majority of residents. A distinction was made between the international backpackers who bring tourist dollars to the local economy and those who are unemployed but choose to come to Encounter Bay. One resident stated that sometimes it is difficult to recognise one group from the other. Several residents maintained that the backpackers do not respect the community and carelessly leave rubbish to defile their beautiful environment.

Unemployment and the associated poverty was perceived to lead to crime in the community. As one resident noted:

> *Young people come from everywhere and are unable to*
> *claim unemployment benefits for a couple of months*
> *due to the high level of unemployment in the area.*
> *They have to live and therefore resort to crime.*

Five residents believed drug abuse associated with unemployment was linked to crime. Lack of money to buy drugs leads to drug dealing or theft.

We heard stories of transients who spend much time in the local supermarket consuming fresh food while they shop around the store. Recent market research had found this store to be the most expensive in New South Wales after Double Bay in Sydney. According to one resident, 'the locals have to pay for their crimes!'

One resident blamed the holiday atmosphere of Encounter Bay. Tourists relax and let their guard down, making them easy victims of crime. Three participants blamed modern society for the rise in crime, naming single parents who are poor, school teachers who are not doing their job, children who know their rights but not their responsibilities, the lack of police power, and the growing strength of minority groups.

We asked participants where or how they heard about crime in their community. Most participants heard about crime from friends and neighbours or from local newspapers. Another common source was through business people within the town. Radio and television were secondary sources of information for most respondents.

4.2.7 Safety and security

We sought to gauge the level of fear of crime amongst the residents as well as the extent individuals ensured their own personal level of safety and security. All of the residents we interviewed reported that they felt completely safe walking around their neighbourhood during the day while 25% reported feeling a little unsafe walking after dark. All respondents

reported feeling safe in the community parks in the daytime. However, 37% said that they would not go there at night. All but one couple felt unsafe in the shopping centre day or night. None of the respondents reported feeling unsafe home alone at night.

Of the precautions the people took to guarantee their safety and security, 38% reported that they would drive rather than walk at night. The majority maintained they would walk if they chose to. Most were happy to talk to strangers. One couple stated they were cautious and another that they would never talk to strangers. Some (25%) kept a dog for security but no one reported taking their dog walking with them for safety reasons.

However, most respondents (75%) reported that they made sure they locked their homes before going out. Sixty-three per cent have security screens and locks on doors and windows and arrange for a neighbour to watch over their property when they were away. Fifty per cent had security lights and alarms installed. Two residents commented that individuals need to be cautious and take responsibility for their own security. One of those we spoke to had been a victim of crime.

We also asked residents whether they had any safety concerns about their children, elderly family members or other family members. Three parents expressed concern about the safety of their children but in each of these cases, their concerns reflected normal parental concern about the whereabouts of their teenagers, particularly at night. One other respondent was a little concerned about his children, while the remainder had no concerns at all. One person was concerned about the safety of elderly relatives while another was worried about other family members. Overall, safety concerns for family members were not an issue for those we interviewed.

We asked participants whether the people in their street helped and watched out for each other. The majority (62.5%) maintained their neighbours do help each other, while 31% believed only some in their area cared about their neighbours. One participant noted that there were many absentee landlords in the community.

We further sought some indication as to whether residents believed that people in the community could be relied upon to call the police if someone was acting suspiciously. Most respondents (69%) believed their neighbours would be responsible and call the authorities if needed. One business owner related the story of an incident on the beach front where a young girl screamed and instantly people came running to assist. Among those who came to the girl's aid were some overseas backpackers. He believed that many international tourists to have a strong sense of responsibility.

Twenty-three per cent believed that only some people in the community could be relied upon to call the police. As one stated: 'the steady population would, but not others'.

We asked those we interviewed whether there were any areas in town which people avoid for safety reasons. Forty per cent of those who responded could not identify any unsafe area in town. The rest noted that they did avoid some areas. These included the beach area late at night and some parts of town which were not well lit, such as the park and the hinterland. One resident added that people avoid these areas because it is dark, not because they are dangerous. One resident added that it is not wise to walk about at 3 a.m. when the clubs close and there are drunks on the streets. One service provider believed that there are five separate areas within the Shire which are all equally effected by crime. One long time resident of the community believed the area has changed since she was a child and that it is not as safe as in the past. However, she did not really feel afraid, rather more cautious.

We inquired whether residents believed they were aware of any shift in the attitude of the local people over the past few years towards the problems of crime in the area. The majority of respondents (90%) believed there had been a change in attitudes towards crime in the community. One long time couple believed local people were not going out as much as they used to and have had to become more safety and security conscious. Older people were becoming more frightened. Yet, another believed there had been too much hype about the drug problems in town and thought that the fears of older residents were irrational.

Several residents referred to the extra precautions taken by the police and community organisations for the New Year's Eve celebrations. Residents were more concerned about security and maintaining control over the proceedings to ensure trouble makers were kept out of town or in control.

We asked participants whether they were involved in any of the crime prevention programs organised by the police, such as Neighbourhood Watch, Safety House, Rural Watch, Coast or Marine Watch, or Community Consultative Committees. Not one of the respondents reported being a member of Neighbourhood Watch, Rural Watch or Coast or Marine Watch. Only one participant reported being a member of a Community Consultative Committee.

One respondent remarked that he has never been approached to assist in such a program. Another noted that a Neighbourhood Watch organisation had closed down through lack of interest. One resident, who lives and works overlooking the beach front, stated he operates *Baywatch*. He maintains close contact with the police frequently ringing and reporting incidents.

We asked service providers whether they believed any of these crime prevention programs would be effective in their community. Several respondents did not know the answer to that question. One replied that Safety House and Neighbourhood Watch were worthwhile programs. Others agreed that all these crime prevention programs were beneficial. One believed there was little need for such programs in Encounter Bay.

However, several respondents referred to the Encounter Bay Safety Committee as an example of a community crime prevention program.

4.2.8 Policing the community

We sought residents' perceptions of the level of police presence within the community by asking whether the police had been observed driving around the streets, or walking around the streets, shopping centres or car parks. All who responded to this question had noticed the police driving around the community. However, only 43% of respondents reported having seen the police walking the streets, and only 38% had observed officers in shopping centres or car parks.

Residents were also asked whether they believed there were too many or too few police in their community. The majority of respondents (64%) believed that staffing levels were sufficient for the area, though 36% believed there were too few police. One noted that police staffing levels are based upon Encounter Bay's resident population. Yet in the height of the tourist season, the numbers of people within the area can more than triple. There is also enormous activity in the community because it is a holiday region. Extra police are brought in for the peak tourist periods such as the New Year celebrations. However, one resident stated that these officers have a reputation for making more arrests. Local residents resent their stricter law enforcement as they sometimes feel harassed. Some participants believed that although policing levels are sufficient, the officers are not deployed efficiently. Police seem to target petty crimes, or are consumed with paper work, and do not seem to get onto the job properly. Others maintained that more police will not really help and that residents should take more responsibility for their own and for the community's safety. Children need to be taught what is right and wrong and learn to value others.

We investigated residents' level of satisfaction with police performance by asking participants whether they believed the police were doing the best job they could against crime in the community. There were mixed responses to this question, with 31% believing that the police were doing the best job possible, and 23% believing this was the case some of the time. One resident believed the local police were very friendly and easy to approach. However, 46% of participants stated they did not think the police were doing a good job. Some believed the police were hamstrung by a lack of resources and legal restrictions that reduced their powers.

We further asked whether participants believed that the police have the crime problem in the community under control. Thirty-eight per cent believed crime was under control with one person adding that the police control as much as they are able. Another resident stated that Encounter Bay is difficult to police because the floating population makes it difficult to know who comes into the community. The majority of those who responded (54%) did not think crime was under control. One believed that the police have been demoralised and receive little support. Another

maintained that the police tend to be reactive, not proactive. Two respondents were concerned that the police were arresting people growing a few marijuana plants and did not appear to be actively pursuing the major drug dealers or dealing with the big crimes. One added:

> *Local police know the local people which creates a*
> *problem in harassing pot smokers.*

We also asked residents whether they believed there was respect for the police within the community. There was a mixed response to this question. Forty-seven per cent agreed there was respect for the police, forty-seven per cent disagreed, and one was unsure. One man qualified his answer by stating that there was respect for the local officers but those from outside the community were not appreciated.

4.3 COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Service providers were asked whether they believed that the current crime prevention or social justice programs were relevant to their community. Most agreed that they were. One respondent stated that Encounter Bay was unique in that rather than State programs, the community was developing specific programs for the needs of the community.

Our questions to residents also solicited their thoughts or suggestions about what could be done to reduce the level of crime in the community. Several respondents were proud of the local initiatives already in place which were assisting local people in need.

Several residents acknowledged that it was difficult to control tourist-related crime in the community. Another added that it was important for the community to keep law enforcement low key. One woman, who had noticed the increase in theft from cars, believed people need to take care with their possessions because such crimes are hard to police. One believed more public education of tourists to prevent theft and assault would help reduce the vulnerability of tourists to crime.

One service provider who was concerned about under-age drinking in the community could see limited solutions to the problem without changes in society, especially through education. Another, who was concerned about vandalism, believed the solution would be to restrict the numbers of tourists and transients coming to the area by ensuring they pay their own way and by introducing a bed tax.

Several people believed that more dialogue between the police and the community and more public education would lead to a reduction in crime. Others believed parents need to take more responsibility for their children. They called for more parent effectiveness training courses as parents need

more education and understanding about what parenting involves. One added:

> *While society requires the police to be the responsible*
> *group - in that they are obliged to enforce the law, the*
> *underlying causes of problems in society are parents*
> *and the community - they need to take responsibility.*
> *Government agencies can help with some programs,*
> *but individuals, parents, relatives, neighbours must be*
> *responsible.*

One man believed that zero tolerance was the solution to crime:

> *Mandatory sentencing is the way to go, three strikes*
> *and you are out is the answer. For example, if drivers*
> *lost their license after their third speeding fine,*
> *people would slow down.*

Others believed attending to the social welfare needs within the community would better address the problems of crime. One stated that rather than more policing, more welfare services would defuse the problems in the community, such as homelessness. Many acknowledged the problems in policing the community because many of the transient population are poorly socialised with little regard for societal rules.

One resident believed that the only solution to crime in the community was more available work. People need money to live and some need extra cash to pay for their habits. Also idle hands (amongst the unemployed) lead to crime.

Others believed there was a need for more resources for youth. One youth worker believed it was important not to separate youth from the older groups because it divides the community. While there was a need for special services to attend to immediate problems, such as homelessness, it was important to integrate the youth back into the community to retain a sense of oneness.

She added that youth programs do not target the 13 to 14 year age group, which tends to drop out of school. Another problem for youth workers has arisen with the age group for child protection laws now extended to 18. A police check is required for every person working with youth. This process is costly and time consuming and discourages volunteers. She maintained government policies do not account for costs in setting up youth programs in remote areas.

Service providers were asked whether they believed that service providers should have special skills or training to work with Aboriginal clients, or clients who have a non-English speaking background. Most respondents believed there was a need for people in their position to have an understanding of Aboriginal culture. As for clients who were non-English speaking, few problems had been encountered. There was a need for

patience and understanding. One service provider noted that this group were more often victims of crime, than perpetrators.

Another woman maintained that in general, governments should take a social rather than a fiscal review of rural community needs. She added, that while there is a need to take account of economic factors, the current rationalisation of services in rural areas takes the power away from communities which has long term social consequences. Governments need to be more visionary, be aware of the social responsibility and the social impact of their policies. She maintained that community volunteer organisations understand the problems within the community and policy makers should take heed and use local expertise in planning policies and programs.

Several residents believed the local government must give direction and control. The need for Council to address the poor street lighting in some parts of town and the lack of public transport in the community was highlighted.

Community responses to these concerns have seen the development of the following initiatives.

- **The Uncle Project**
  The 'Uncle Project' aims to assist the emotional development of boys aged 4 to 15 years who do not have a father present in their lives. The 'Uncles' are carefully screened male volunteers who develop constant, supportive relationships through one-to-one interaction with the boys to assist them to become emotionally mature, responsible members of society. The program has also developed "Uncles for a day". These volunteers do not undergo the full screening process but work within structured supervised group activities with the boys. This practice does not require a full commitment from the volunteers but it gives them experience in the responsibilities and benefits of the program. The program has now been running for three years. Currently the project has 12 Uncles and 180 clients.

  The coordinator maintained that boys in single parent families are most at risk and are more likely to become involved in gangs, drugs, crime, and anti social behaviour. He believed that this process could be avoided if men in the community would commit to helping these children. The greatest limitation of the program is that requests by single mothers for 'Uncles' to help their sons have been much greater than the availability of acceptable volunteers. Advertising for volunteers has not elicited much response. Articles in newspapers and magazines have been more effective. However, these efforts have also brought more clients. The demand for assistance has been so great, the program is now seeking funding in order to expand.

The program also aims to encourage the emotional development of the male volunteers in developing intimacy with children. Australian culture does not encourage close relationships between males and the coordinator believes there needs to be a turn around in our society for the sake of the emotional health of men. Many men respond that there is a lack of time for them to be involved. Yet the coordinator questioned: 'Is it lack of time... or economic factors... or is it an excuse?'

He acknowledged that jobs are scarce and money is tight but believes these factors interact with a lack of confidence in relationships when men decline to participate in the program. He believes this is the greatest challenge for the Uncle program.

- **Mullwise**
  One joint State and community program was developed to concentrate upon protecting youth from harm while using cannabis. The program was based upon the findings of a survey of local youth to investigate what they believed was needed in the community. The program accepted the fact that children are using drugs and focused on harm minimisation rather than zero tolerance. Initially the program trained local youths to be peer leaders in drug education. The training emphasised healthy alternatives to drug use. Youths chosen as peer leaders included drug users, youth on parole, private school children in year 8, and clients of a local drug and alcohol counsellor.

  In the second phase of the project, a comic featuring drug education was produced using the talents of local children. The idea for the comic came from local children themselves when asked what type of resource in drug education would be appreciated by children. A competition was held between schools in the region to find those children with talent for drawing. The children who were successful proved to be children who were sometimes in trouble themselves and were not the most successful students. Participating in the comic provided them with a great sense of achievement. The children were allowed to choose what they drew and what they wrote. Sydney based *Street Wise Comics* personnel presented a three-day workshop with the children and were most impressed with their talent. The finished comic was trialed amongst other school children in New South Wales before 10,000 were distributed Australia wide. The project also produced drug information cards which could be hidden in a pocket or wallet.

  Evaluation of the program found that it was important to investigate the needs of youth and develop programs around these needs. Furthermore, it is important to begin drug support programs for children aged nine and over. The evaluation also found that sustainable youth programs need to be refreshed because success does not come from one off programs. The idea of children

producing a comic for other children was successful. Children relate best to peer groups rather than adults.

4.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has provided an overview of the insights of the residents of Encounter Bay on the social problems facing their community with a particular focus on crime. Encounter Bay is a beautiful, colourful, exciting, fun place to be. Consequently, many people are drawn to the area.   The impact of so many people places a great strain on the town's infrastructure and creates problems for the community, including increasing crime. The objectives, humanism, and generosity of Encounter Bay residents who work tirelessly to meet the welfare needs of transient people, are to be applauded. However, there is a clear need for more government support for communities such as Encounter Bay, which have become popular tourist destinations, yet do not have sufficient resources to sustain such a large influx of people.

The residents of Encounter Bay have been drawn to the region primarily because of the beauty of the environment. However, with so many people seeking the same goal, it is becoming an increasingly difficult task to preserve that environment.   Much community action is directed to maintaining the status quo. Given their notions of crime are linked to the nature of the community, perceived damage to the environment was cited as a crime by many of those we interviewed.   Long time residents of Encounter Bay resent the changes that have occurred, and lament the loss of the community they once knew because of the growing presence and diversity of so many people.   Even the relatively new residents we interviewed, desired a sense of united community and cited numerous initiatives as evidence of the presence of community. However, Encounter Bay is a polyglot of people, most of whom want to define what they and different people want. This is the opposite of the relative homogeneous agreement upon how to live and what rules to live by that typifies community. Though many people become involved, they participate in one of a few specific activities, such as welfare assistance or environmental issues, but they are not part of an integrated community, because no such community exists.

Encounter Bay presents a number of paradoxes that emerge because it is not a cohesive and integrated community in the sociological sense, although the residents want to believe that it is. Encounter Bay has relatively high crime, probably considerably higher than official records indicate, yet residents generally do not see a crime problem in comparison to other places. Another paradox is that while people do not see crime as a major problem, a majority believe the police do not have local crime under control. Few were concerned about safety or security. Still another paradox is that although people object to crime, they are not particularly concerned about strict law enforcement against many crimes.

Perhaps because the goal of most of Encounter Bay's residents is to enjoy the peace and beauty of the environment, it is difficult to focus upon some of the harsh realities of life, such as increasing crime. However, when asked, residents were able to objectively identify drug abuse, break and enter, and assault as being problems in the community. Furthermore, crime was associated with the transient population, notably unemployed youth. Yet, these issues were not considered to be serious.

Encounter Bay is one unusual and unique example in the vast heterogeneity of rural communities in Australia. The community has sought to incorporate and meet the needs of a diverse range of people and lifestyles. This is a daunting, admirable and probably impossible task given that the demands of the mobile population outstrip the publicly funded resources they require. Local tax initiatives, such as a bed tax, would be one mechanism for generating local revenue to help pay for essential public services.

Chapter 5

GREENHILLS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings of the case study for the community of Greenhills are presented. Greenhills is a coastal region with high levels of in and out migration, low population growth, a high proportion of Aboriginal people located within the community, a high unemployment rate, a high proportion of single parent families, the lowest median individual income, and the highest crime rate of the four case study towns.

5.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Greenhills is located on the mid-north coast of New South Wales. The town lies 35 km inland from the coast and is the commercial centre for the region. The Shire covers an area of 3,335 sq km and incorporates 50 km of beautiful, clean, largely unspoiled coast line and a diverse hinterland of rich farming land, mountain forests and national parks (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000).

Source: R.J. Burling, Northern New South Wales Region, 2000a.

Greenhills was first settled by European cedar cutters who moved into the area in the late 1820s. The township was founded in 1836 when a punt service was established across the river. Cedar cutting ceased in 1842. The district began producing beef, sugar cane, maize and dairy cattle. The railway reached the town in 1917, but Greenhills, like many towns along the New South Wales coast, was still being served by coastal ferries until 1960. Greenhills was sustained by the dairy industry until the 1970s. Today, the main rural industries are beef cattle, dairying and timber. Other industries, such as the Akubra hat factory, also contribute to the economy. The region is popular for its natural beauty, mild climate and relaxed lifestyle, making tourism a major industry (Walkabout, 2000b).

Source: R.J. Burling, Northern New South Wales Region, 2000a.

The 1996 Census showed a population total for the Greenhills Shire of 26,428. The township has a population of 8,630 (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000). The unique feature of this Shire is the number of villages and settlements scattered throughout the area, resulting in more than half of the total population residing outside of Greenhills township. These outlying communities have experienced relative growth and development in contrast to a decline in population in the Greenhills township (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000).

Greenhills and the surrounding district, was originally inhabited by the Dunghutti people. Today, Aboriginal people comprise 6.8% of the total population of the Shire, which is 5% higher than the State average. The Aboriginal community is a distinct group and very proud of their strong Aboriginal heritage in the area (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000).

5.2.1 Community services

Until the 1990s, Greenhills was the location for many services and institutions. However, these are gradually being eliminated or moved elsewhere. For example, the local affiliate of ABC Radio is being relocated from Greenhills. However, offices for several government services are still located in the community. These include Community Health, Community

Services, Family Support, Housing, Juvenile Justice, and Probation and Parole. A range of local community support services are available which include neighbourhood centres, a community care centre, domestic violence court support service, and emergency shelters.

There are also many community and service groups in the district which have been developed to address the unique needs of the community.

- **The Uptown—Downtown Committee**
  This committee was formed in response to local concerns about the negative publicity in the media about the social problems within the Greenhills community. The committee aims at promoting Greenhills and initiating community development programs. A laneway in the central business district which had been subject to graffiti, was turned into an art gallery to display the work of local artists. The community hosts many talented people, including Aboriginal artists.

- **The Greenhills Assistance Patrol**
  This service provides a bus patrol which operates nightly to ensure that children and other people at risk are not on the streets late at night. Children are taken home or to a safe house, and others are taken to a shelter or hospital as needed. This initiative involves volunteers from the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community.

- **Greenhills Youth Refuge Disadvantaged Youth Driver Program**
  This program provides young people with five to six driving lessons for a fee of $5.00 for each lesson. The money is then kept aside to go towards the cost of the provisional licence for the driver. This program provides an opportunity for youth who would otherwise not have an opportunity to obtain a driver's licence. The opportunity enhances their self esteem and ensures that these future drivers receive adequate tuition.

There are a range of services and community organisations for Aboriginal people including three Land Councils and two Aboriginal Corporations, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, education units, an Aboriginal Legal Service, a sobriety house, a resource van, neighbourhood centres, and an Aboriginal Medical Service.

- **Durri Aboriginal Medical Service**
  Of particular importance is the highly successful Durri Aboriginal Medical Service which has been operating for 22 years and employs 40 people. The service provides high quality primary health care, medical, clinical, and dental services. Services include drug and alcohol support, sexual health, eye health, telemedicine, diabetes, maternal and neonatal health, as well as a comprehensive range of early intervention programs and outreach services to isolated communities. There is an Aboriginal doctor but most of the medical

staff are non-Aboriginal. However, training is provided for the Aboriginal staff. Durri AMS maintains an advocacy role on behalf of the Aboriginal community in relation to social, environmental and cultural development and support. The health centre is also a social hub for the local Aboriginal community.

An Aboriginal youth worker who is extremely popular with local Aboriginal school children, is attached to the service. He provides health information and advice, drug and alcohol counselling, transport, and sports activities and training. The youth worker also networks with other youth services in the community and is involved with cautioning support with Juvenile Justice. He brings in Aboriginal Elders to assist and reinforces the cautioning of offenders.

- **South Greenhills Neighbourhood Improvement Project**
  One other service which contributes to the health and welfare of the local Aboriginal people is the South Greenhills Neighbourhood Improvement Project, which is a neighbourhood centre that provides a range of programs and activities for the Aboriginal community in South Greenhills. The centre has been operating for six years and has two part time staff and one part time coordinator. These women were deeply committed and work tirelessly for their community. There are playgroups, kids clubs, programs for women and for men, and initiatives for the unemployed, such as landscaping the neighbourhood. A large prayer group comprising children and adults, meets once a week through the Aboriginal Catholic Ministries. The coordinator believes this group has been very beneficial for the community. The centre also provides advocacy on issues of housing and transport, and networks with other welfare agencies in the community.

  One of the Aboriginal elders conducts a cultural awareness program for groups, professional bodies and school children. The program covers local Aboriginal history and displays paintings by her artist husband. She also works with Bush and Beach camps which are week long cultural education camps for children teaching history and bush skills.

5.2.2 Community strengths

The mail survey revealed that Greenhills's residents perceived the major community strengths to be the lifestyle (68%) and the environment (78%) and the quality of schooling (56%). Good sport facilities were identified as a major strength by 40% of those surveyed. Twenty-seven per cent saw friendliness as a major strength.

Several of those interviewed believed Greenhills was a friendly place. One man noted the relaxed pace of life appeals to him. Others perceived the

town's geographic location to be it's major strength. Certainly the town's situation along a beautiful river and its close proximity to great beaches and the mountains in the hinterland, contributes greatly to the appeal of Greenhills. Many people move to work in Greenhills but choose to live in the beach areas or in the hinterland. Some residents appreciated the town's location being midway between Sydney and Brisbane. Another respondent saw the town as a good size for a community. One other maintained that people can find everything they need if they look for it.

Three of those interviewed identified the excellent sporting facilities as a major strength. A new skate park which was built for local youth to encourage them away from skating in the main business area, was mentioned as an example. The large river flats that are susceptible to flooding within the town, are utilised as sporting grounds and parks. A major flood in 1949 had swept most of buildings on the flood plain away. Since that time, the only development on that land that has been permitted has been parks, gardens and sporting grounds. This provides a considerable expanse of well kept lawn areas which add to the aesthetic appeal of the town.

5.2.3 Community spirit

The community spirit in Greenhills was considered as a minor strength by 53% of those we surveyed. Only 17% reported it as a major strength. Of those we interviewed, some believed the community was strong and united in the face of diversity.

Participants identified several different communities within the Greenhills. These include the pastoralists who were mostly Irish Catholic families who settled the district and have been there a long time. There are the professionals who are known as the 'blow ins', and those who retire to Greenhills. There are alternate life stylers who live in the hinterland. Greenhills also attracts lower socio-economic groups because housing and property costs are relatively low.

There is a large Aboriginal community with a strong Aboriginal heritage in the area. The Aboriginal community has four distinct groups. Some participants believe there were new Aboriginal families moving into the district who have no familial attachment to the area. Several residents noted the division between these different groups.

Many of those we interviewed remarked upon the generosity of the people within the community. Charities are very well supported, even though there is not a lot of money within the community. There were several fundraising activities for a local Paralympian. The residents were very proud of her achievements and believed she was a good role model for youth in the town.

We asked how easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community. Forty-four per cent reported that it was easy to settle in and be accepted in Greenhills, 13% believed it was 'OK', while 38% believed it was difficult to find acceptance. One resident saw the community as friendly but acknowledged there were obvious cliques.

One notion frequently expressed by residents, was that "acceptance depends upon the individual and what they expect from the community". One participant thought that acceptance depended upon the person and their circumstance, and the reason he or she moved to Greenhills. Another reported that newcomers face opposition if they try to change things as soon as they arrive. Newcomers need to accept local standards and not expect city standards. Several participants stressed the importance of joining clubs and organisations, such as a church. The authors observed that the role of churches appeared to be quite strong across all sections of the community.

One young mother said it took her four to five years of involvement with sport in order to become a part of the community. Another participant, who had been widowed at a young age, found acceptance as a single woman was very difficult. She still did not feel like a local after twenty years of living in the community. One service provider stated that:

> *Greenhills is very parochial and it takes twenty*
> *years before people are accepted. Although*
> *newcomers are not ostracised, they just aren't included*
> *in social life.*

Another agreed that people are cordial but an outsider is never really accepted. Another maintained that people are friendly but cautious. One service provider believed attitudes towards single mothers were very intolerant.

Several respondents believed that acceptance was easier for those with money and harder for the unemployed poor. Professional people find it easier because they have a job and can join the professional community. Those who are unemployed and move to be near the beaches may find it more difficult. One stated:

> *There is a strong work ethic in the community and*
> *those living on welfare at the beach stand out.*

5.2.4 Community problems

Of those surveyed by mail, 93% believed that unemployment was the major problem facing Greenhills. Seventy-nine per cent identified economic decline as an associated problem. Drug and alcohol abuse was a major issue for 83% of respondents, 64% were concerned about the rising crime, while 59% believed family breakdown was a major problem.

These concerns were reinforced in the interviews. The poverty associated with unemployment was a major concern to those we spoke to. Some noted that a large proportion of the community was on welfare support. While housing and rents are cheaper in Greenhills, two participants noted that this attracts more lower socio-economic status groups to the town. Participants believed that the boredom and idleness associated with unemployment also contributes to a high rate of crime and drug and alcohol abuse.

The ongoing loss of services and industries from the district was an added concern because it exacerbates the unemployment situation. Government departments have been downgraded or eliminated. Industries such as King Gee, Telecom and United Dairies had closed. The local linen service had moved to Tamworth. Loss of industry and population has led to economic decline in the town with several local businesses having recently closed down.

Others were concerned because people were leaving Greenhills, stating that almost anyone who wants work has to leave town. Some were particularly concerned about the continuing legacy of the loss of youth as they leave to pursue tertiary education or better career opportunities. One consolation is the proposed new jail to be built in Greenhills. Most people in the community agree that the jail will be beneficial, providing approximately 150 jobs and increasing employment opportunities in the wider community.

Racial intolerance between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities was identified as an issue by several residents. The white population resent the lack of policing of antisocial behaviour and alcohol and hard drug abuse, which they associate with the Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal population resent the disadvantages and prejudice they believe they experience from the non-Aboriginal community.

Another concern noted by residents and included in the Council's recent social plan, is that professional people and newcomers to Greenhills choose to live in the outlying coastal or river settlements. This means that the Greenhills township misses out on the contribution from this economically successful sector to community organisations, service clubs, activities and cultural events, as well as their direct economic contributions. In addition, the imbalance in the growth of these scattered communities creates significant logistic problems in service delivery and efficient allocation of resources throughout the Shire (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000).

5.2.5 Crime

Crime within the community was seen as a major problem by 64% of the respondents to the mail survey of social issues. A further 33% believed crime was a minor problem while only one respondent believed it was no problem at all. Of those interviewed, 33% reported crime in the community to be very serious, 33% described crime as serious, 17% described crime as

somewhat serious, and 17% thought it was not serious at all. Figure 5.1 presents the recorded rates of offences for 1996 and 1999. The data reveal that there has been increases in break and enter, theft and assault crimes in 1999.

Figure 5.1:
Rates of recorded crime for Greenhills LGA 1996 and 1999.
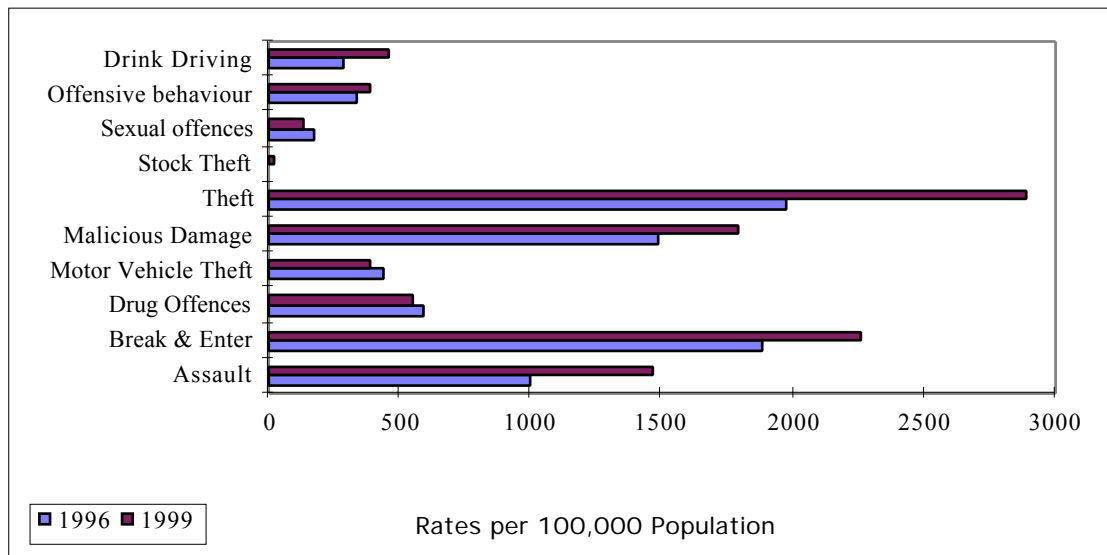
Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2000) New South Wales recorded Crime Statistics 1999, Sydney.

Those we interviewed believed that Greenhills was suffering from high levels of most types of crime. Crimes considered to be major local problems included illegal drug use (78%), break and enter (82%), shoplifting or petty theft (81%), bag snatching or pick pocketing (90%), motor vehicle theft (75%), and domestic violence (83%). Other major problems included anti social behaviour (70%), verbal abuse (62%), vandalism (50%), drunkenness (82%), and street fights (56%). Of those we interviewed, 80% had been a victim of crime.

Other minor concerns included graffiti (60%), graffiti that was racial (50%), louts and gangs, (87%), dangerous or noisy driving (75%), drink driving (50%), rubbish in public places (75%), and prowlers (50%).

Several respondents believed drug abuse, particularly the increased use of heroin, was the most serious problem. One service provider believed 85% of people use marijuana. Others believed alcohol was the major problem. Several respondents maintained that sexual assault and violence were often under reported. Other problems identified included a lack of respect for authority in the community.

Some resident believed crime was serious in certain parts of town and for certain types of crime, such as break and enter, petty theft, robbery and assault. Break and enters seem to increase at Christmas time. Yet another believed break and enters are often due to the carelessness of the occupants. Petty crime was a problem among younger people largely due to drug abuse

and poverty. Others identified violence as a special problem between Aboriginal groups.

One business owner noted that perceptions of the seriousness of crime vary amongst business people. It was especially dependent upon whether they have been a victim or not and how the police responded to the incident. He complained that the police rarely report back to business owners on the outcome of the report of a crime or the prosecution of the offender. Residents seeking some follow-up information were sometimes deferred. He believed it was important for people to have some feedback so that they have some sense of closure and a belief that justice is being done.

Of the people we interviewed, 77% believed crime had increased over the past five years while another 23% believed that crime had remained unchanged. None of the respondents reported a decrease in crime levels in the community. One man thought that there seemed to be more crime but the local police had assured him that was not so. He added that everyone knows about a criminal incident in a rural community. Another acknowledged crime had increased but noted that so had the size of the population.

A change in the types of crime that occurred in the community had been observed by 78% of participants. The majority of respondents believed there had been an increase in break and enters, petty theft, car theft and drug abuse. Heroin, cocaine, alcohol and methadone have increased. However, there were less street offences, such as drunkenness and vandalism because of the implementation of the Greenhills Assistance Patrol. One resident maintained there was more car theft because there were more cars.

Others noted more domestic violence in the community. One service provider believed that the use of Apprehended Violence Orders (AVOs) have been abused, particularly amongst the lower socio-economic groups who have poor negotiating skills.

Thirty-nine per cent of people believed crime levels in Greenhills were more serious than other rural communities. Two thought Greenhills's crime rates were much more serious than elsewhere. Others (33%) believed crime rates were much the same as other places, while 17% believed they were less serious than elsewhere. Some residents named other towns which they believed had higher rates of crime than Greenhills. Yet these comparisons were with high crime towns rather than all rural towns in New South Wales. The local police described the level of crime as very serious and maintained that crime rates were consistent and were more serious than most other rural centres. One resident responded:

> *I don't give a hoot about other places. I am only*
> *concerned with what affects us here.*

Finally we asked residents where, or how they heard about crime in their community. All respondents stated their principal source of information was the local newspaper. Co-workers were another common source of information for 80% of respondents.

5.2.6 Blame

We asked residents who, or what, they thought was to blame for most of the crime in their community. Most respondents blamed drugs for much of the crime problem in Greenhills. They were particularly concerned about the increased use of heroin. Drug abuse was linked to the high incidence of break and enters. Others added that alcohol abuse was to blame for the number of assaults that occur.

Several respondents reported that there is a tendency amongst the residents to associate crime with Aboriginality. Low socio-economic status among Aboriginal, as well as non- Aboriginal members of the community, was also linked with local crime. Some locals resented the hand outs to Aboriginal people for education and housing, suggesting that houses given to Aboriginals were not taken care of. Some described it as discrimination in reverse. One high school student added that the support Aboriginal children receive causes resentment among other students. Schools put on a barbecues for Aboriginal children. They also receive free sandwiches for breakfast or lunch and pay no fees for school excursions. Meanwhile, children from poor non-Aboriginal families often have to go without because their families receive no assistance. One women added that even some of the Aboriginal people recognise that poor non-Aboriginal families were disadvantaged in not receiving the same degree of assistance. Another participant observed the tendency amongst residents to define 'us' and 'others' which leads to a breakdown of community.

Service providers we interviewed reported that Aboriginal people comprised about 50% of their clientele. One reported far fewer problems in dealing with Aboriginal people than with the rest of the community. He stated that while Aboriginal clients may initially be resentful of authority, they soon come around to work with the service to better their situation.

Others identified unemployed youth, particularly Aboriginal youth, as the main perpetrators of crime. Another agreed there was a bad element in town amongst the youth. One man claimed juveniles believe they are untouchable by the law and have no respect for institutions in society. He perceived that those in authority were reluctant to take action against juveniles and that there was a lack of appreciation by governments of this social problem. Another added that Aboriginal children were no longer respecting their Elders or any authority. Disputes between Aboriginal groups in the community were also a problem.

Parental irresponsibility was noted by some respondents as being responsible for the extent of juvenile crime in the community. Parents were not

educating their children on right and wrong, nor spending time with them. Children were often left to their own devices and were not regularly attending school. Family breakdown was identified as a precursor for juvenile crime.

Several maintained that unemployment leads to boredom, drug and alcohol abuse, low self esteem and no direction or purpose in life. Another blamed the inequity in society with the increasing gap between rich and poor. Others saw crime as an outcome of the way society has evolved. Individuals need dignity and education and income. Society cannot provide these to everyone and therefore, there is crime. One service provider maintained that people expect and want too much.

5.2.7 Policing the community

The level of perceived police presence in the community was ascertained by asking participants how often they saw police driving around the streets, or walking the streets, or in car-parks or shopping centres. The majority of respondents (75%) reported they saw police driving around the town and many (44%) had occasionally noticed officers in shopping centres or car parks. Only four people reported seeing officers walking the streets. This we found surprising as there are 52 officers based in the area and in the few days we were in Greenhills, we observed they had a marked presence on the streets.

Most respondents believed there should be more patrols. One noted that police patrols have been instigated in west and south Greenhills, the perceived trouble spots in town. Some believed that with the lack of resources, sick leave and annual leave, there were never enough staff for foot patrols. It is easier to cover the area in vehicles. While the need to be seen was important, it was not always possible.

Staffing levels for police in Greenhills were perceived by 71% of those we interviewed as low. Two respondents believed there were enough officers in town while three could not say. Three participants maintained a town can never have too many police and Greenhills could have more. One believed there were never enough officers in town because many were on stress leave. He added that police have too much paper work and constant frustrations. One woman believed the town could do with more police but she had found police were very prompt when they called for the break in at the units she was living in.

One man pointed out that sometimes police presence can exacerbate trouble. Police patrolling where there are groups of drunks on the street can prompt people to start fights or throw rocks. He believed it would be a good idea if police used unmarked cars.

We also asked whether residents believed the police were doing the best job they could against crime. Fifty-three per cent of respondents agreed the

police were doing the best job they could, 17% believed this was the case some of the time while another 17% did not think the police were doing a good job. Many thought the police were successful, considering the resources they had to draw on.

Only 29% believed the police had the crime problem under control in Greenhills while 53% did not believe the police were on top of the situation. Several acknowledged the police had a difficult job and were often caught in the middle of the troubles in Greenhills. Although the Council had introduced alcohol free zones in the town, offenders were defying the orders and the police were having difficulty enforcing them. One believed the officers were hampered by laws which favour the criminal. Some thought officers were disillusioned and many were leaving the force. One resident believed there was prejudice amongst the police against Aboriginal offenders, particularly the youth. Another thought that the police were wary about the danger of going to some Aboriginal areas.

However, 53% believed the police did have respect in the community, while 35% thought there was a little respect for the local officers. Many of these respondents qualified their response by stating that respect depended upon the officer. Aboriginal residents identified some officers who were well respected by members of the Aboriginal community. Only two people thought there was no respect at all for the law.

The local officers reported that one of the greatest difficulties related to policing the community involved the conflicts between different Aboriginal groups and between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the community.

5.2.8 Safety and security

The fear of crime amongst the residents and the measures individuals took to ensure their own personal level of safety and security was investigated. All of those interviewed reported that they felt completely safe walking around their neighbourhood during the day, and only two people reported feeling a little unsafe after dark. All respondents reported feeling safe in the community parks by day, but 71% reported they would not walk around these areas at night. All but one person felt completely safe in the central business district by day while 71% felt unsafe at night. All respondents felt safe at home alone at night.

Of the precautions the people took to guarantee their safety and security, 71% preferred to drive or take a taxi rather than walk at night. However, most (71%) would talk to strangers. Only one person was sometimes cautious in this regard. Two people kept a dog for security, while two others sometimes used their dogs for security reasons. Another two people sometimes took their dogs walking with them for safety reasons.

The majority (71%) ensured their homes were locked before they went out and all but one arranged for a neighbour or family member to watch over their property if they were out of town. A large percentage of respondents (71%) had security screens and locks on windows and doors though only 28% had gone to the further trouble of installing alarms or security lights.

We also asked residents whether they had any safety concerns about their children, elderly family members, or other family members. Twenty-eight per cent were quite concerned about their children's safety, 14% were a little concerned, 28% were not concerned at all. The remainder had no children. One mother ensured her children travelled together when they were out in the community. One teenager felt unsafe at night and always travelled by car to go out and informed her mother of her where-abouts. Those who had elderly family members in town were not concerned at all about their safety. Only one person was concerned about other family members in the community.

We asked participants whether the people in their street helped and watched out for each other. The majority (62%) assured us that people did help and watch out for each other, 31% thought only some of the people were caring in such a way while one person did not believe neighbours were concerned about each other. Several respondents believed the majority of people in Greenhills do watch out for each other but added that this depended upon the area.

We also asked whether residents believed that their neighbours could be relied upon to call the police if someone was acting suspiciously on their property. Just over half (53%) maintained people would call the authorities, while 40% believed that some of the people in the community could be relied upon. One person did not think people would bother to report incidents to police. Again, respondents noted that neighbourhoods vary greatly in Greenhills.

One person believed that because police have been slow to respond to complaints, local people are disillusioned and do not bother to report many crimes. These respondents acknowledged that the police were under-resourced. Some people accused police of having racist attitudes in responding to complaints. One person noted that sometimes people were afraid of the repercussions of reporting crime. The local police were aware of these concerns. They believed that there was a need to reduce fears of reporting crimes.

We asked those we interviewed whether there were any areas in town which people avoid for safety reasons. All of those who responded could name at least one part of town which they considered to be unsafe.   The most frequently identified place was South Greenhills. Others mentioned other Housing Department areas. Several included the central business district at night where there had been some bag snatching. Others avoid the hotels and clubs late at night when there are drunks on the street.

One elderly lady said she was aware of the perception of South Greenhills as an area that one should not frequent. Yet, she was not at all fearful and accepted that crime is a part of life. She had security measures put in place as a sound practice.

We asked whether residents believed there had been a shift in the attitude among local people during the past few years towards the problems of crime in the area. All but one person believed there had been a change in peoples attitudes regarding crime in the community. People within the community were more aware of crime. Many had installed security systems and were taking more care to lock up.

One participant believed there had been both positive and negative attitude changes within the community. Local people were more anxious, fearful and committed to action to resolve the problems. Some residents reported that local bikie vigilante gangs have taken it upon themselves to retrieve stolen goods.

Others thought that people were more accepting of the status quo because crime was simply a part of life. Some residents believed the local people have become despondent about reporting crimes to the police because nothing appears to be done. People have also lost confidence in the judicial system.

Others believed there had been a positive shift. Police had been requested by community groups to work with them to solve problems. Several service providers believed there was more sensitivity to problems and community solutions being developed, such as the Uptown/Downtown committee.

We asked participants whether they were involved in any of the crime prevention programs organised by the police, such as Neighbourhood Watch, Safety House, Rural Watch, Coast or Marine Watch or Community Consultative Committees.   Only two people reported that they were involved in Neighbourhood Watch. One other believed the community needs Neighbourhood Watch schemes. Another noted that Retail Watch was being developed for the central business district in order to encourage business people to watch out for their own security.

We asked service providers whether they believed such programs would be effective in their community. Those who responded were equally divided on this question. One long time resident believed such programs were worthwhile because they involve the community. He added:

> *The more responsibility people take for themselves,*
> *the better. However, some people cannot help*
> *themselves and the community needs to support those.*

One service provider who had been quite involved in neighbourhood watch programs in the community observed there were always the same ten people who were frustrated by what is happening, yet their monopolisation

of groups excluded involvement from other people. He believed such groups were largely symbolic since they have no authority to act against crime.

5.3 COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

When we asked what could be done to address crime in the community, four participants could see no solution to the problem. One noted that a concerted effort was needed by all members of the community to try and improve the situation. Another remarked that improvement would be a slow process. Several applauded the local initiatives such as the Greenhills Assistance Patrol. The Council in cooperation with the police, had placed pressure on local clubs and hotels to provide free food and transportation for their patrons, refuse service to those who were intoxicated and observe closing times.

The majority of respondents blamed the breakdown of society for the problems of crime in the community. One participant believed that there needed to be improvement in standards of living and in levels of employment. Another believed that creating more jobs was unrealistic for Greenhills because the markets were not there. One main claimed:

> *People need opportunities in life through education and income to give them dignity. In modern society, a job gives a person an identity. Self esteem courses for the unemployed are ridiculous. Without a job, a person does not fit in. Property has value and property value equals money. If an individual has no property, it is easy to vandalise or graffiti another's property. Furthermore, if people valued their community, they would not vandalise it. Welfare hand outs do not give people a sense of value. Consequently, those who vandalise have no sense or loss for those they victimise.*

Another noted the inequity in society, particularly the large gap between rich and poor.   Others added family breakdown, racial tension, and unemployment were to blame. Some saw a need for better education for parents and better discipline in homes. Another agreed, saying there should be Parental Responsibility Acts introduced as well as increased police alternatives to battle juvenile crime.

One resident maintained that our society is pessimistic. She added:

> *If people were not so limited in their thinking, a lot of problems would disappear. For example, with the unemployment problem, there needs to be more job sharing. Dole recipients could be employed as church attendants.*

Another agreed saying that society needs a rethink. People need to appreciate what they have, share more and benefit others instead of complaining.

Three respondents believed that the breakdown was within the criminal justice system. One believed the courts are too lenient. There needs to be more fairness as well as stricter enforcement of laws. One service provider believed that the police were very concerned with Aboriginal deaths in custody and were therefore very cautious about arresting juveniles. He believed the police need to get tougher and make more arrests.

We asked service providers whether they believed that the current crime prevention or social justice programs were relevant to their community. Most believed that they were. One praised the time and effort put in by residents to develop the crime prevention plan for Greenhills in conjunction with the NSW Attorney General's Department. One respondent thought that the programs were adequate, but that there were far too many organisations in the town. There was a need for better coordination in Greenhills to avoid one family being the clients of seven different organisations. Some of these organisations could be combined to increase funding opportunities and streamline support programs. Another respondent believed initiatives should be more punitive. Offenders now get five to six chances before punishment is implemented. He believed that punishment should be swift on the initial offence to prevent re-offending.

Others believed that the current programs were inadequate. Although the police, welfare organisations and the courts were working hard, their efforts appear to be fruitless. One respondent believed that better communication between the Department of Community Services and the Police would facilitate the success of such programs.

We asked service providers whether they believed that service providers should have special skills or training to work with Aboriginal clients, or clients who have a non-English speaking background. Eight out of the ten service providers agreed that such skills were very necessary. Most respondents believed that service providers need a knowledge of the cultural and historical background of the local area in which they work. One added that there were very different Aboriginal communities in the area, each with a different background. One added that all providers need sensitivity, and respect for others.

One Aboriginal worker believed that workers do not necessarily have to be Aboriginal. However, non-Aboriginal workers need to learn about Aboriginal culture and history to have an understanding of the needs of Aboriginal people. She added that workers need respect for people as there is too much labelling. One Aboriginal youth worker maintained that many Aboriginal children relate better with Aboriginal service providers.

One service provider has found that working with Aboriginal people took time and patience. She noted that service providers who were Aboriginal,

work extremely hard and were constantly on call for local Aboriginal people. They were also personally affected by crime and loss within the Aboriginal community.

One service provider maintained that much can be achieved within the local Koori inter-agency group which comprises representatives from most organisations in the community. One respondent maintained that there was a need more Aboriginal liaison police officers, particularly a female officer.

5.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The issues facing the Greenhills community as perceived by the residents were described in this chapter. Greenhills is a community struggling with several problems that most people acknowledge are there. Parts of Greenhills were clearly believed to be sufficiently dangerous that many people avoid them. As a consequence, many of the service providers prefer to live in outlying communities. Their concerns personify the dilemma of Greenhills, and towns like Greenhills, regarding how to respond to these problems. The underlying social causes of crime and other problems are so embedded in the community that many service providers do not want to expose themselves or their families to them. A wide variety of well intended and funded corrective programs exist largely because of external resources. The service providers are therefore not of the community. The services are extensions of the formal society, but operate within the context of the informal community. However, just as the Encounter Bay community cannot change the fact that tourists and short term residents populate their community, the Greenhills community cannot alter the fact that many people will be temporary residents who prefer to live in outlying areas. The consequences of this dispersed population has consequences for community within Greenhills itself.

Crime was a major concern to those we interviewed. Compared to other communities, Greenhills residents were more aware of crime and were more active in taking steps to ensure their personal safety and security. They were aware that the problems of crime arose from the high unemployment, poverty, family breakdown, and drug and alcohol abuse that exists in the community. They believed that the reinstatement of government services in rural areas, such as Greenhills, would go a long way to providing more employment in the region while providing more support for those in need.

Greenhills residents were acutely aware that there was division between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities and that racial tension impeded the progress and well being of the community. Some people believed Aboriginal people were disproportionately responsible for crime in the community. Interviews with service providers revealed that this was greatly exaggerated. As Hobbs (1994) pointed out, when communities are

divided into 'good people' and 'those people', the sense of community is diminished. Yet, within both these sectors, we found there were residents who were genuinely interested in working together to overcome many of the problems. The Greenhills Assistance Patrol is an example of such a joint venture.

The residents of Greenhills were realistic. They were facing the issues that confronted them and earnestly seeking solutions. We were greatly impressed with the number of residents who were deeply committed to their community. They were generously and actively involved in community services trying to alleviate some of the problems that exist there. The Council members and their staff were similarly committed, and were striving to seek and provide solutions for the community. The Council in conjunction with the New South Wales Attorney General's Crime Prevention Division and in consultation with many community groups, has developed a crime prevention plan to guide the community in dealing with crime. The plan offers several practical initiatives in crime prevention while acknowledging that young people should be given the freedom to enjoy all aspects of community life and not be forced out of public areas (Greenhills Shire Council, 2000). With such clarity of vision, Greenhills is a community with all the best intentions to succeed in their ideals of a safe community.

Chapter 6

HILLNEST

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the case study of the small inland agricultural community of Hillnest are presented in this chapter. Hillnest was selected for study because it had a low crime rate, high family stability, a high proportion of Aboriginal people and a negative population growth rate.

6.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Hillnest is situated in central inland New South Wales. The district produces wool, fat lambs, wheat, sorghum, corn, lucerne, safflower, sunflowers and cotton (Walkabout, 2000c). Rural industries produce $95 million annually for the district and employ one third of the   local population (Hillnest Shire Council, 2000).

Source: R.J. Burling, Northern New South Wales Region, 2000b.

Although the region was discovered by Europeans in 1818, settlement did not begin until an access route was discovered through the Liverpool

Ranges in 1823. The town was gazetted in 1856. The district was opened up to small settlers in 1861. The arrival of the railway in 1877 made Hillnest the service centre for the surrounding district. Following the establishment of two new inns, locals petitioned for a police presence. In 1866, the local inn was bailed up by the bushranger, Thunderbolt, and his gang. In 1880, bushrangers, Bradshaw and Riley, robbed the Commercial Bank which had set up a branch at the Bird-in-Hand Hotel and kept the 'safe' on the hotel verandah. A police residence was built in 1877; the courthouse in 1884. Today, the town of 3000 people is a service centre to the surrounding agricultural and pastoral area of the approximately 10,000 people (Walkabout, 2000c).

Source: R.J. Burling, Northern New South Wales Region, 2000b.

The area was originally occupied by the Kamilaroi people. According to the 1996 census, there are now 309 Aboriginal people living within the Shire, representing 6.34% of the total population. There is also an Aboriginal settlement called Walhallow, some twenty kilometres to the west of Hillnest. Walhallow has been an Aboriginal settlement for a hundred years and receives services, social and community infrastructure from the Hillnest Shire. Currently, Walhallow has 290 residents (Hillnest Shire Council, 2000).

6.2.1 Community services

Hillnest is serviced by government services such as Community Services, Juvenile Justice, and Probation and Parole from offices based in a regional centre approximately an hour's drive away. Health services in Hillnest are exceptional for such a small rural community. There are five doctors, a well equipped hospital, community health, an ambulance service, and an aged care hostel, all located in the town.

The Hillnest community also has a Police Citizen's Youth club (PCYC) in the town, one of 32 clubs in country New South Wales. The PCYC provides a range of sporting, cultural, educational, welfare and crime prevention services for local youth.

6.2.2 Community strengths

The mail survey of Hillnest Shire revealed that most respondents thought the community had numerous desirable qualities, such as a healthy natural environment (80%), great lifestyle (53%), the friendliness (53%) and trustworthiness (50%) of the people, as well as excellent health services (61%) and schools (67%).

Those we interviewed echoed these values. Four participants stressed the size of the town was one of Hillnest's greatest assets. It was described as a small, personal, friendly and informal town that provides everything a community should have. The people are very supportive of each other and everyone knows everyone in the community. Another added that the residents are very conservative, well behaved, and support good behaviour in others.

Two respondents regarded Hillnest as a safe place to bring up children, because there was very little crime. There are excellent education facilities and some work prospects. Children have access to music, a variety of sports, a swimming pool, PCYC, and church youth groups. One older participant maintained that Hillnest was a great place for retirees. He said seniors enjoy the wide variety of activities and services provided for them. He had chosen to retire to Hillnest for these reasons.

One service provider believed the town had potential which was yet to be utilised. Tourism could be better promoted because there are so many beautiful places on local farms which could be opened up to the public.

Several participants stressed the excellent relationship between the Aboriginal community and the wider community. The Aboriginal residents were almost universally regarded as exceptional community members. One respondent stressed the uniqueness of the Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal relationship in Hillnest. He (and probably others) believed in the success of this relationship which in turn is likely to create the social environment for the perpetuation of these positive attitudes in the future.

The Aboriginal people of Walhallow are extremely proud of their community and of their achievements. The settlement is located in a picturesque rural setting and has beautifully maintained buildings and gardens. It has won the community a tidy town award and three healthy community awards. The community has 38 new homes, four units for elderly residents, a school, a new health post and a community centre. Recent upgrading and rebuilding of homes and community buildings, water and sewerage systems, roads and street lighting, allowed many local people

to receive accreditation in plumbing, building and tiling. When we asked a community leader what was the best thing about their community, she replied that 'Walhallow stands as a role model for the rest of Australia'.

The Walhallow community has consistently been progressive, forward thinking and hard working. Years ago, when communities were providing roustabouts for shearing, Walhallow was supplying shearing contractors. Currently, there are 62 residents participating in local employment schemes such as: a Murray Grey cattle breeding program; a feasibility study on growing grapes for supply to the Hunter Valley wine industry; development of the community's worm farming enterprise; contract forestry and farm work; a wood chopping enterprise supplying fire wood to the local district and a large retail outlet in a regional centre; and running the community store.

6.2.3 Community spirit

We asked residents whether they believed there was a strong sense of community in Hillnest. Most respondents described Hillnest as a typical small country town comprising several different groups which unite when faced with a major cause. Some of these groups include long established rural families who have enjoyed considerable wealth in the past, professional people, working people, and the Aboriginal community. The churches are strong, supportive, and work exceptionally well together. One participant stated that like many small country towns, everyone knows everyone else's business.

Several stressed that residents of Hillnest support their neighbours, irrespective of race or religion. Aboriginal people are included in all the sporting and social clubs. Young Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are inter-marrying and successfully raising families.

Community fund raising schemes, such as raffles and community functions, are well supported by the community. Recently, residents rallied to raise money for a bionic ear implant for a child who lost his hearing following a serious illness. One resident [who was far from wealthy], stated that she often spent up to $10 on community causes when she does her weekly shopping. She is happy to do this as they are all worthy causes.

However, not all participants were convinced of the togetherness of the community. One resident believed there is still a 'squattocracy' effect from the past which renders the community *a little cliquey*. Another stated that the community spirit was not that strong and that residents do not support projects as much as they should. He seemed to imply that nothing less than universal support would be satisfactory. He thought the community was not fragmented, rather individualistic. One long term resident believed certain groups monopolise committees and the organisations become very closed off. There is a lack of cooperation and communication between organisations, which often leads to a conflict in the timing of community

functions. The local Council has now instigated a community events coordinator to compile a calendar of important dates which committees can consult when planning events. The resident believed that some events should be combined as a small population cannot support too many functions. Again the implications seemed to be that not only should events be coordinated but that every aspect of the community life should act in cohesion.

One Walhallow participant described her community as very united. While there can be an occasional split, the community comes together to solve problems. Everyone in Walhallow is invited to have their say. For example, a recent community meeting invited the youth to make a list of what they would like to see there.

We asked residents how easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community. Of those who responded, 32% believed it was difficult for newcomers to find acceptance in Hillnest, 47% believed it was 'OK', while 21% reported that it was easy. Most participants maintained that acceptance depended upon the individual. If people want to be involved, they can be. One added that newcomers need to meet the community half-way but then they will find that most people are very friendly. One person pointed out that some people alienate themselves immediately, while others are immediately accepted. A story was related to us about a teenage girl who was new to town, who was immediately accepted by the local children because when she was harassed by the local bully, she punched her in the nose.

One resident added that it depends on what newcomers do. If they have an occupation, or join sports groups or service groups, acceptance is easier. Another thought that children and young people and their families are accepted very quickly, while it is a little harder for older people. One man had found acceptance easy moving into a new job, but his wife was quite lonely until they had children.

Others maintained that it takes a while to settle in. One woman stated she knew of people who left because they could not fit in. She added that finding work is difficult because employment depends upon who you know in the community. Another maintained people have to be in Hillnest fifty years before they are accepted.

Of those who believed it was easy for newcomers to settle in, one stated Hillnest was the easiest and friendliest community he has ever been in. One lady found that on her arrival, neighbours come over with cakes and food and to help the family move in. She stated that the people were good to her and she has loved living in Hillnest.

In the Walhallow community, newcomers are expected to fit into the existing community ethos. If they do not, people resent them and insist they maintain the standards set down by the community.

6.2.4 Community problems

The mail survey showed that 87% of respondents believed unemployment to be the greatest problem facing their community. The next most serious problems were economic decline (69%), increasing crime (52%), and people leaving the district (48%). Unemployment was identified by most of those we interviewed as the most significant problem facing the community. Unemployment was also associated with economic decline and people leaving the district. One participant noted that there was a lack of employment for any age group, not just the young people. There were many people on welfare support. One resident noted that along with the rural downturn, the community was not as wealthy as it used to be.

The community has lost several major employers over the past five years including a large feed lot, a turkey factory, an electricity provider, and the railway. Farmers facing tough times have cut back on employees. A loss of services has also been detrimental to the economy of the town. Two banks have closed and have been replaced with agencies. One respondent, a young mother, has to commute daily to a regional centre for work. A workers bus leaves at 7.00 a.m. and returns at 7.00 p.m. which makes a long day. With the expense of travel, some people earn less than the dole. The fact that there is only one taxi available in Hillnest was also a concern.

The manager of an Aboriginal corporation that manages a large recycling plant was concerned over the lack of government support for work programs in rural areas. The plant used to provide employment for school leavers. However, recent cut backs in funding for CDEP schemes has led to a reduction in the number of people employed. He stated that in the last month, he had to turn away twenty people seeking work. Although he has work contracts to fill, there is insufficient funding to employ people. The manager believed governments should put more emphasis on employment and should develop more schemes in rural areas because jobs give people self esteem.

One woman was concerned over the lack of opportunities for young people to gain skills. Employers require qualified workers which precludes young people from the opportunity of gradually learning a skill. Another woman was concerned because the number of available TAFE courses had been reduced, which makes it hard for local people to get ahead. However, another respondent, an educator, believed that local people do not value education. Nevertheless, the high school has a high completion rate notably among Aboriginal youth.

The loss of people from the community also affects local organisations. There are not enough volunteers to run the various groups in town and those who do the work quickly burn out. One respondent remarked that professional transients seem to run organisations and when they leave, the organisations cease.

Unemployment was also linked to an increase in drug and alcohol abuse and a rising crime rate according to several participants. One maintained that drug use is the worst problem facing the community and has led to an increase in the number of thefts and assaults.

6.2.5 Crime

In the mail survey, increasing crime within Hillnest was seen as a major problem by 52% of the respondents, while 39% believed crime was a minor problem, and 9% respondent believed it was no problem at all. Among those we interviewed, there was a clear distinction made between the considerable concern about the recent rapid increase in crime and the overall degree of seriousness of crime in the community. Only one person reported crime in the community to be very serious, 16% described crime as serious, 32% described crime as somewhat serious, and 47% thought it was not serious at all. However, the majority (72%) believed crime had increased over the past five years. Twenty-two per cent believed the crime rate had remained unchanged and one person thought crime had decreased in that time. One service provider noted that Hillnest used to have one of the lowest crime rates in New South Wales. Figure 6.1 reveals that these residents were correct in their perceptions. The data of 1996 and 1999 recorded crime rates shows there has been a large increase in rates of all crime types with the exception of offensive behaviour. Drug crimes in particular have greatly increased.

Figure 6.1:
Rates of recorded crime for Hillnest LGA 1996 and 1999.
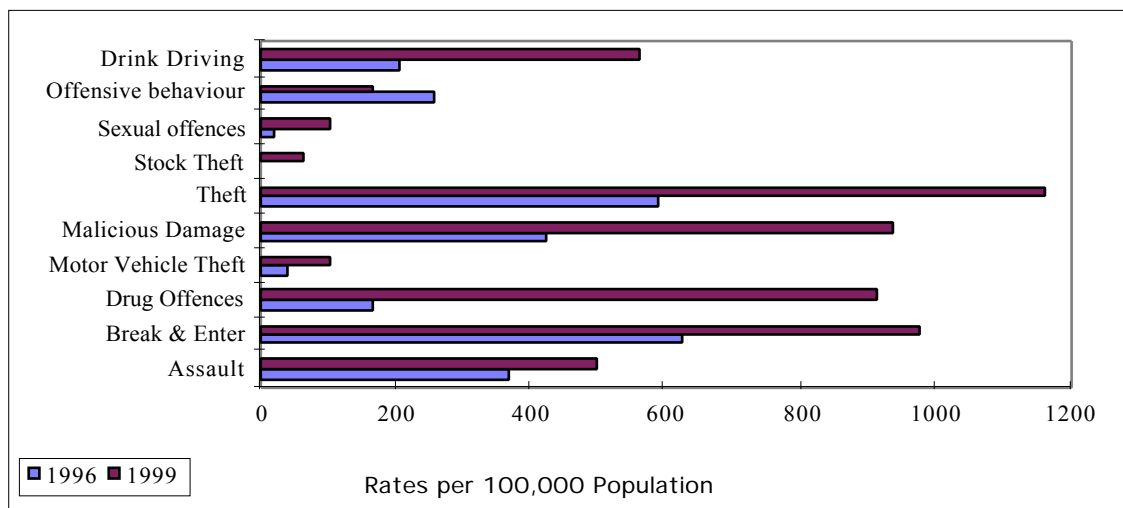
Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2000) New South Wales recorded Crime Statistics 1999, Sydney.

Residents had noted that there had been an increase in break and enter, petty theft and vandalism. One believed the major problem was alcohol and drugs, which leads to mindless vandalism. There had been a recent incident where eleven cars had their tyres slashed.

Some residents noted that local crime is cyclical. For months there will be no trouble, and then for five to six months, there are break and enters occurring every two weeks. One service provider claimed that the local police know everyone in town, particularly the trouble makers, which means that crime is quickly dealt with. However, he observed that when crime occurs, local people react. For example, residents were outraged when trees were pulled out by vandals. Compared to serious crimes elsewhere, such incidents are relatively benign.

When participants were asked to define those crimes they considered to be a problem in the community, only a few identified specific crimes as being a major problem. Most crimes were described as being a minor problem. These included illegal drug use (64%), break and enter (62%), drink driving (54%) shoplifting or petty theft (40%), stock theft (46%) and physical assault (39%). Other problems in the community causing some concern included louts or gangs (46%), verbal abuse (33%), anti social behaviour (57%), drunkenness (57%), dangerous or noisy driving (54%), vandalism (69%), rubbish in public places (62%), prowlers (54%), child abuse (50%) and domestic violence (44%). One other problem identified was children being left unattended while their parents are drinking in a hotel. Only one participant had been a victim of crime.

Sixty-nine per cent of participants had observed a change in the types of crime that occurred in the community over the past five years. The remaining 31% had not observed any change. An increase in break and enter and drug crimes were the most frequently mentioned change. Others observed there had been an increase in assault, vandalism, and petty theft. Several mentioned the incident of tyre slashing, but most noted that this was a new type of crime in Hillnest.

Most people (74%) believed crime levels in Hillnest were much less serious when compared with other rural communities. Others (11%) believed crime rates were about the same as other places. Sixteen per cent could not answer this question. One person stated that he would like to know and guessed that crime was possibly the same as elsewhere, but that it would depend on the size of the town. One service provider maintained that there is a bigger drug problem in Hillnest than local people realise. He claimed that there were two places in town where drugs were available and could not understand why the police did not make any arrests.

We asked residents where they received information on crime in the community. All participants reported that they heard about crime primarily through friends and neighbours. Seventy-five per cent identified the local newspaper as the major source of information, and 50% reported that local television was also a source of knowledge about crime.

6.2.6 Blame

We asked residents who or what they thought was to blame for crime within their community. Unemployment and drug and alcohol abuse were the most frequent responses. Lack of something to do for the unemployed was linked to alcohol and drug use as well as vandalism. Drug users who need money were linked with theft and break and enters. One service provider believed that the current reductions in government funding for employment schemes, exacerbates unemployment related problems in rural areas.

Most residents believed that the main perpetrators of crime were outsiders who come to town. One resident added there were only about five local trouble makers and when they are in jail or out of town, the incidence of crime drops. One service provider claimed he has a feeling about some strangers and if they associate with known trouble makers, they are usually trouble as well.

Some residents perceived that those trouble makers who were Aboriginal, were associated with fighting and drinking and do nothing for the reputation of the local Aboriginal community. One resident observed that young, unemployed Aboriginals think differently and see themselves as victims. He added that such notions lead to trouble because they prevent people from taking responsibility for their own behaviour.   One resident noted that Aboriginals who bring trouble to town are shown the door very quickly by the local Aboriginal community. However, those Aboriginal newcomers who do the right thing and comply by community standards are left alone by the local Aboriginal people.   Local authorities leave the Aboriginal Elders to manage these issues.

However, one service provider observed that there were consequences to these practices. For example, one Aboriginal man who was caught with a stolen television and was sent to jail, found on his release that he was no longer accepted by the local Aboriginal community.   He then went to Sydney, where it was reported that he attacked a woman. The respondent believed that perhaps being cast out creates more anger and consequent reaction.

6.2.7 Safety and security

We also investigated the extent of fear of crime amongst the residents and the safety and security measures they employed. All participants reported feeling completely safe walking around their neighbourhood and their community parks during the day but half reported feeling unsafe walking after dark. All but one person felt completely safe in the local shopping centre by day while 63% believed this area was not safe late at night. All participants reported feeling safe at home alone at night.

Of the precautions the people took to guarantee their safety and security, only two would drive or take a taxi rather than walk at night. The remainder were happy to walk at night. Only one person was hesitant to talk to strangers. Three people kept a dog for security. None of the respondents took their dog walking with them for safety reasons.

The majority (88%), locked their homes before they went out. One respondent occasionally locked his home. All respondents reported that they arranged for a neighbour or family member to watch over their property when they were away for any period of time. A majority of respondents (75%) had installed security screens and locks on windows and doors, but only 25% had gone to the further trouble of installing alarms or security lights.

Residents were questioned as to whether they had any safety concerns about their family members. Two were very concerned about the safety of their children, 37% were a little concerned, and the remainder had no children. Those who were worried about their children's safety maintained that this was normal parental concern. One couple ensured that neighbours were aware that their teenage children were home alone before they went out. One young mother reported that she is cautious about where her children are and who they are with. One person was very concerned about the safety of elderly family members and two others were a little concerned. None of the respondents reported concern about other family members in the community.

We asked participants whether the people in their street helped and watched out for each other. Most respondents (79%) believed Hillnest people do help and look out for each other, 16% believed some of the people care, and only one maintained that people keep to themselves. One added: 'everyone knows and watches out for everyone else'. One respondent once accosted two children trying to get in a neighbour's window only to discover they lived there but had forgotten their key. Another resident told of an occasion where he had told his neighbour he would be away for a week, but returned early. His neighbour apologised the next day for not coming over to acknowledge he knew he had returned.

We also asked whether residents believed that their neighbours could be relied upon to call the police if someone was acting suspiciously on their property. Eighty-four per cent maintained people could be relied upon to call the police in such an event while three people thought that some people would. One service provider believed that when people in a community are well known, a stranger is conspicuous. That makes it easy to identify trouble makers and to solve crime. However, another service provider believed local people tend to ignore suspicious noises or occurrences. One shop had an alarm that had been malfunctioning which neighbours unfortunately ignored when there was an actual break-in.

We asked those we interviewed whether there were any areas in town which people avoid for safety reasons. Four people named some areas in

town which they felt were unsafe. These included the creek lands, a location said to be frequented by drug users, some back blocks which are very dark at night, and Friday or Saturday nights around the hotels. However, most people (73%) believed there were no dangerous areas in Hillnest. One service provider maintained there is a general feeling of safety bordering on naivety amongst local residents which renders them vulnerable to crime. Women walk in all areas of the community quite unconcerned about their safety.

We asked residents whether they had noticed any shift in the attitude of local people towards the problems of crime in the community. The majority (68%) had noticed a change, (32%) did not report a change and 2% could not say. Of those who had noticed a shift in attitude towards crime, many maintained residents had become more security conscious. They were now locking their doors and installing alarm systems. Others noted that car and property theft had increased because of drifters in town and that now people have to lock their cars and homes.

Others believed residents were more frightened and do not feel safe in their own homes. They believed the high population of elderly in the community were more apprehensive and were locking themselves in their homes. One service provider noted that a recent incident (an attempted rape) had caused a knee jerk reaction within the community. A national security firm introduced an intense advertising campaign two weeks following the attack, and had sold many security alarms. The participant believed the alarms were over priced, and that many local people could not afford them. As crime in the community is minimal, he believes people fed off each others' fears.

One participant believed people were becoming less tolerant about crime in Hillnest. One thought that people seem more concerned about deviant behaviour, the lack of responsible care of children, and single parenthood.

We asked participants whether they were involved in any of the crime prevention programs organised by the police. One person was involved in Neighbourhood Watch, two in community consultative committees, and one in the Safety House program. A consultative committee had been organised specifically to handle problems of alcohol abuse.

Several respondents noted that Neighbourhood Watch had been in place in the community but suffered from lack of support. There been a committee for juvenile crime which managed community service orders in the community, but it had folded. Such programs were seen as irrelevant in the Walhallow community, as problems are dealt with as they arise by the whole community.

We asked service providers whether they believed such programs were effective in their community. Of the nine who responded to this question, three believed crime prevention programs were worthwhile community services. One stated that Neighbourhood Watch would be effective in the

community but emphasised that such organisations need to have the right people involved. Often the wrong people control such groups, which can deter others from participating. One service provider thought these groups only provided a social outing for residents.

Others believed such organisations were irrelevant in their community as there was not enough crime in Hillnest to warrant such programs. Another agreed, but observed that there may be more need for such programs as more people move into the district. One service provider, who was involved in the establishment of Neighbourhood Watch and Safety House in the community, had come to the conclusion that such programs were unnecessary. There was little to discuss. Meetings were dull and often involved watching videos on security. Factions within the groups also discouraged members.

6.2.8 Policing the community

Five police officers are based at Hillnest station to service quite a large regional area. In addition, there are two highway patrol officers. One officer is in charge of the local Police Citizen's Youth Club. The officer interviewed stated that there were no particular problems policing the community. He praised the local Aboriginal community for their openness and support.

The questions to residents regarding the level of police presence within the community revealed that all but one agreed that they noticed the police driving around the streets. Officers walking the streets were noticed by 17% of respondents. Only two people had observed police in shopping centres or carparks. Those who noticed officers on foot remarked that this was not a common occurrence. Two residents stated they would like to see more foot patrols but another recognised that the police do not have sufficient staff to carry out these duties. Two recalled times in the past when police seemed to patrol frequently, providing a sense of reassurance to the community.

Forty-one per cent of those interviewed believed that there were too few police officers in the community, while 58% believed there were enough. Of the latter, two remarked that the staffing levels were adequate for the size of the town but that the numbers rostered on duty were not always sufficient as there is a large area to cover. In addition, the neighbouring town has only two officers which requires Hillnest police to cover that region as well. One respondent noted that a community can never have too many police officers. Another thought there appeared to be too many highway and breathalyser patrols.

Several respondents remarked that it is difficult to contact the local police as all calls are directed through a regional office. One believed that the local residents would like the police to be more accessible. Another respondent noted that there had been a reduction in staff and the station was no longer operating twenty four hours. Consequently, when the station is unattended at night, the police are not readily available in times of emergency or when

they are required to control incidents of vandalism. One participant reported that one night he called the station because he saw a woman being threatened. The officers took forty minutes to respond to the incident, which occurred only two blocks from the station.

One service provider believed that police were stuck within a framework of procedure which should be streamlined. He was concerned that if he found himself in a dangerous situation that he would not get police support for at least 15 minutes. Police have to go to the station, sign their weapon out, and get the vehicle out of the garage, all of which takes time. If the emergency was out of town, it would take longer for police to attend. In contrast, the State Emergency Service officers have to be ready in their vehicle in one minute.

Most of the residents (56%) believed the police were doing the best job possible against crime in the community, 25% believed that was the case some of the time, one disagreed, while the remainder could not say. Two commented that for the most part, the local police handle specific events with people very well. They are very helpful given their limited staffing numbers and resources. One was concerned about the numbers of officers leaving the force. She thought that extra staff were needed to ensure there were two officers to attend a dangerous situation.

Many of the participants (67%) believed the crime problem in Hillnest was under control. However, one qualified his answer by stating that crime was under control because of the quality of the people within the community, not because of effective policing. Others commented that the police were trying hard and that crime control was better than it had been in the past. Three people did not think crime was under control and two others were unsure. One maintained that the police were more reactionary, less preventative, and did not appear to be apprehending the real criminals.

We asked residents whether they believed there was respect for the police in the community. Most, (53%) believed the police were respected, 29% believed there was respect to some extent, one believed there was no respect, and two could not say. Two believed that there was a lack of respect for the police amongst some of the youth, though older people were more respectful. One man thought that the lack of police power in enforcing outcomes in court contributes to the lack of respect in younger people. Another respondent believed people lose respect because they report crimes and do not see any outcome. He believed people were not bothering to report incidents.

Several residents noted that there had been a changeover in staff at the local station in the beginning of the year. One believed the police were more visible and doing a better job. Others noted that the new officers were yet to introduce themselves to the community. One resident stated that to gain respect in the community, the officers should live in the town and be part of the community rather than out of town, as some have done. Again there was mention of the security of times past (namely the 1950's) and a sense of

trust which has now diminished. Members of the Aboriginal community believed the level of respect depended upon the officer.

6.3 COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

We asked service providers whether they believed that the current crime prevention or social justice programs were appropriate for Hillnest. Responses were equally divided on this question. Several respondents believed that community service orders are ineffective because offenders fail to report for duty with little consequence. One respondent believed that boot camps for juveniles with supervised farm work were a better option. Another reported that conferencing with adults did not work as there were pay backs in a small community.

One service provider believed that the best prevention is community social pressure; exclusion to bring deviant behaviour into order. He noted that some local trouble makers in Hillnest seem to have someone who will take them in and support them when they should be ostracised.

We also asked service providers whether they believed that service providers should have special skills or training to work with Aboriginal clients, or clients who have a non-English speaking background. Seven out of the eleven we interviewed agreed that service providers should have skill and training to work with such groups. One respondent maintained that workers need to be more aware of Aboriginal culture and be especially sensitive with older Aboriginal people.

One respondent disagreed stating that he objected to the fact that the country treats Aboriginal people as if they are a separate group. He treats all people the same and has no problems in working with Aboriginal clients. Another respondent had a completely different view, believing that skills and training were important because Aboriginal clients are different and cannot be treated the same. Aboriginal people have different expectations and priorities and view life differently. He believed service providers learn from experience. Another respondent maintained that service providers need to know how to talk to Aboriginal people. However, Aboriginal people need to stop the 'them and us' attitude. 'Reconciliation will require education on both sides of the fence', he stated.

Two community initiatives have been introduced by the local Council to combat problems in the town. The Council introduced civil fines of $45 for riding bicycles on a footpath after an elderly person had been knocked down. An agreement between the Council, police, clubs and hotels ensures that trouble makers in bars are banned from all clubs and hotels in town if they are banned from one.

Local Aboriginal people have formed a liaison with police in the district to work together on solutions to problems that occur. The Walhallow

community has a good relationship with the police and has signed a treaty to allow officers to come into the community in the course of their duty. The Walhallow community believed they were the only Aboriginal community with such a treaty. An observer noted that the success of the Walhallow community in controlling crime is due to their ability to make their own rules.

The Aboriginal community in Walhallow ensures that any problem behaviour amongst their people is immediately addressed by community leaders. If young children are in trouble, the parents are held accountable. A youth committee meets regularly to organise activities for young people. The children have been encouraged to have their say and list what they would like to see there. The children are encouraged to organise discos and take responsibility for fund raising for such events. Some of the older girls catered for a lunch for the Elders to raise money to buy a video for the community room. Debutante and fancy dress balls are regular fundraising events. To teach the children responsibility and care for the environment, each child has been encouraged to plant and maintain a tree in the community.

We also asked Hillnest residents what they thought could be done to address crime in the town. One resident believed there was a need to reintroduce Neighbourhood Watch. Another thought the public could be more security conscious and ensure they lock up their homes and cars. One service provider believed police should encourage businesses to employ security measures. Insurance companies could support such a scheme by offering discounts to those who do secure their properties and equipment. Insurance companies would benefit from such policies in the long term. However, he believed that these policies should be put in place without legislation to ensure costs do not increase.

One resident maintained cans of spray paint should be banned to stop the occurrence of graffiti. Others thought the Council should clean up graffiti immediately after it occurs to dissuade offenders. One service provider observed that if vandalised areas are cleaned up quickly, it does seem to be a longer time before it occurs again. The visitor's centre at the town lookout suffered graffiti. The Council treated it with anti graffiti paint and the area has not been attacked again. He observed that children vandalise for a dare and to show off their art work. If the damage is cleaned up immediately, no one sees it, frustrating the offenders. He wipes off fresh graffiti or picks up tuned over garbage bins to thwart the offenders. By removing the damage, the rewards are gone.

Others thought crime control would be improved if officers' length of service in the community were extended. Police also need more power to effectively police. Several respondents believed penalties should be made tougher. One believed 'capital punishment should be reinstated and rapists should be *castrated*'. One added that there needed to be tougher penalties for minors. Others believed parents rights should be reinstated over children's rights. Parents are held responsible for children's actions and yet children

are so aware of their rights they are no longer afraid of reprisals for their actions. Parents should be allowed to chastise their children. Another respondent suggested parents should be fined if they fail to give their children breakfast or lunch. One respondent believed that efforts should be made to make society more morally conscious. Children should be taught manners, beliefs, and values. Another thought there should be more community education for children. Others thought there should be more support for people to encourage and reward good behaviour.

One respondent thought there should be more activities and jobs for youth as there is little for them to do in town. While the town does have a PCYC and sport, not everyone plays sport. Another thought there should be more support for the PCYC club to provide additional activities to keep children occupied.

One service provider believed that a lack of parenting skills is a problem and can be a precursor to juvenile delinquency. Service providers have difficulty in getting information across to those who need it. Young mothers do not attend regular check ups with their babies. She suggested that a baby health clinic should be located in the main street to be more accessible. She was also concerned that literacy levels have fallen which can negatively impact upon a child's progress at school. They can become dropouts and get into trouble. A lack of preschool, too much television, and working mothers not having the time to read to their children and be with their children, were identified as leading to problems.

Several residents believed more employment opportunities would solve the problems in town. There is a need for more money to be put back into rural areas with more employment schemes, such as work for the dole. One woman thought there were a lot of things the unemployed could do, 'like clean up their own properties for a start'. She maintained idle hands get into trouble. One service provider believed the unemployed are criminalised. They have to have health care cards and other benefits just to survive and society looks down upon them.

One service provider lamented the decline of volunteer work which has meant a loss of support services throughout the community. He believed that people have not been taught how important it is to do things for others. Hillnest has a great high school but there is a lack of parental involvement. Most seem to be more involved with primary school and younger children. Many parents are working. Grandparents are often taking over parenting roles. Many women have to work or are enjoying working and volunteers are lost from the community. He maintained that people are brainwashed that they do not have the time for volunteer work. He also believed that community service orders makes volunteer work a punishment. Thus once-honourable community work is devalued and seen as undesirable.

6.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented an overview of the perceptions of the residents of Hillnest on the social problems and crime within their community. Unemployment was perceived by residents to be the greatest problem facing Hillnest. Clearly the loss of funding for employment schemes, particularly for Aboriginal youth, seriously effects small agricultural towns like Hillnest. When community schemes are successful, providing employment and hope where it would otherwise not exist, the social rewards would be well worth the economic costs to government.

The other main problem in Hillnest was the high increase in the rate of crime during the past year. Residents were most concerned about this. Drug abuse was blamed for much of the crime in town and crime data show that drug crimes have tripled since 1996. Although less effective than in the past, crime is curtailed through measures of social control that pervade the culture of this community. Residents prided themselves on being well behaved, and expected, even insisted on similar behaviour in others. Being a small community with everyone knowing everyone else, deviant behaviour is quickly recognised. Newcomers to Hillnest have a difficult time being accepted into the community if they do not conform to the standards that are in place. Yet, this same sense of community also provides a great deal of support for the people within Hillnest. Residents care for each other and also take very seriously, the need to watch over their neighbours property.

This community must be commended upon the success of this approach to life. It works. Problems are contained within the community. Crime is clearly associated with outsiders. Whether legal, or ethical, or not, there are mechanisms in place to move such trouble makers on.   The Aboriginal Elders ensure trouble makers who are Aboriginal, leave town within three or four days.   An agreement between the hotels, police and Council proscribes any trouble maker from getting a drink in town. It may be the case, that the increase in crime may also be an artifact of increased reporting by residents whose level of tolerance of deviant behaviour is conceivably lower than other communities.

This community must also be congratulated upon the integrated relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the community. This is due largely to the fact that the Aboriginal people have been long established in the region and have attachment to the land and to the history of the community. However, interviews with the Aboriginal people revealed that their attitudes and values closely reflected those of their conservative non-Aboriginal counterparts. This unity of opinions and lifestyle and belief in the successful relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, establishes the ideal of 'community' for Hillnest and provides the power to impose social controls.

Chapter 7

REEDY CREEK

7.1	Introduction
7.2	Community Profile
7.3	Community Solutions
7.4	Summary and Conclusions

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the findings of the case study of Reedy Creek are presented. Both Reedy Creek and Hillnest are in many respects, very representative of all small towns in New South Wales. They are small, agricultural communities with all of the economic and social problems facing such places, such as declining populations, a loss of services, and increasing rates of unemployment and suicide. However, Reedy Creek was included as one of the small inland rural communities in the study because it has some unique characteristics. There were relatively high levels of crime, a low proportion of Aboriginal people, high in-migration, and a low unemployment rate. It is more typical of small towns in that there is a high proportion of family stability and low average population growth. Recent data of recorded crime for 1999 (BOCSAR, 2000), shows an average fall in the levels of crime since 1996, with rates more typical of safe rural communities. This high variability in the crime rate is indicative of fluctuating crime in small communities which has implications for the community, as well as policy makers and analysts.

7.2 COMMUNITY PROFILE

Reedy Creek is located in southern central New South Wales. The Reedy Creek shire covers a total area of 3375 square kilometres. The region produces wool, wheat, rice, and vegetables, and is the centre of the largest merino stud area in the state (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000a).

Squatters moved into the area during the land rush of the early 1840s and established large cattle stations along the creek. The village was gazetted in 1865, the public school opened in 1868 and the courthouse in 1869. The merino studs, for which the district is famous, replaced the cattle stations in the 1880s. However, the selectors failed and the land reverted to large holdings. More recently, irrigation has provided the means for the growth

of the rice and vegetable industry and the construction of two tomato-processing plants in the shire (Walkabout, 2000d).

Reedy Creek is famous as the site of one of the most notorious and daring raids of bushranger Ned Kelly, whose character and story has enchanted and influenced the views of Australians on subjects such as law and order, class, ethnicity and criminality. At the time of their raid on Reedy Creek, the Kelly gang were already wanted for the deaths of three policemen and a major bank robbery, and had £1000 reward on their heads. On Saturday evening, 8 February 1879, Ned, his brother Dan and two other gang members rode into town and bailed up the two officers at the police station, locking them in their own cell. The following day, two of them, dressed in the policemen's uniforms, strolled into town. At midday on Monday the 10th, the four (two again in police uniform) rode into town to the Royal Mail Hotel which also housed the Bank of New South Wales. There they held thirty people hostage in the bar room while they robbed the bank of £2140. While holding up the bank, Kelly passed a note to the teller which explained and justified his actions. It voiced a deeply felt sense of grievance, injustice and disrespect for the Victorian police, whom Kelly believed had consistently wronged his family and whose actions had precipitated the killing of the three policemen in 1878 and the subsequent outlawing of both himself and his brother (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000a; Walkabout, 2000d). The post office, which existed at the time of Ned Kelly's raid, is still in existence and now houses the local museum.

Reedy Creek Post Office Museum. Source: Walkabout 2000d

Currently, the town has a population of 900 persons with the total population for the Shire being 1960. There are 32 Aboriginal people in the shire, only 1% of the total population (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000a). The Aboriginal people are well respected within the Reedy Creek community. One Aboriginal woman owns a very successful coffee shop and restaurant with an Aboriginal art gallery attached. The gallery exhibits the work of other family members who have successfully established themselves as Aboriginal artists.

Apart from the overseas backpackers who come to Reedy Creek for seasonal work, there are few non-English speaking local people within the

community. There are several long established Italian families in the region.

7.2.1 Community services

As Reedy Creek is a small community, most government services are based in the larger regional centres and staff visit the region on a regular basis. However, Reedy Creek does have a relatively new, fully equipped, 16-bed hospital with 12 staff, a retirement home, and an Ambulance station. Community Health provides some locally based services to Reedy Creek with the majority of services being delivered on a weekly basis from the larger centres. Reedy Creek has no court house, but there are two locally based police officers.

There are no structured community support programs. This is probably due to the fact that such services are not really needed. The local neighbourhood support networks operate well in the community, making the need for structured services irrelevant. However, many residents and service providers we spoke to, did note the lack of services for youth, especially troubled youth, in the region. There is no juvenile support, and no youth support or youth advocacy.

The Reedy Creek Shire's Community Plan revealed that for the 14.2% of youth residing in the shire, there is very little in the way of developmental support services from education to counselling. Those attending secondary school or TAFE must do so outside the shire, in neighbouring towns or at boarding schools in larger urban centres (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000b).

7.2.2 Community strengths

The mail survey of Reedy Creek Shire revealed that most respondents believed the community's greatest strengths included a healthy natural environment (68%), great lifestyle (50%), a strong community spirit (54%), the friendliness (56%) and trustworthiness (59%) of the people, and the fact that there was a low crime rate (54%). The residents also applauded the local community leadership (46%), the quality of the local schools (61%) and the sport facilities (56%).

Those interviewed echoed these values. Residents were proud of the Billabong Creek area which has been developed into a lake with well maintained parks and gardens and several new homes established along its shores. An abundance of water and a desire to win the Year 2000 Tidy Towns competition has resulted in most homes and gardens being well maintained.

Reedy Creek's Lake and Billabong Creek Source Walkabout 2000d

One participant described life in Reedy Creek as 'easy'. Others added that the community is friendly because it is small. Everyone knows everyone else, and also their business. People accept each other for what they are and are very supportive of each other.

It was also described as a safe community, an excellent environment in which to raise children. Another added that there is always a guaranteed income. While wages were not high, there was always work around within the rural industries. Another added that there were advantages for the community being located on a main highway, as freight was cheaper and there was potential for tourism.

7.2.3 Community spirit

Most participants emphasised the strong community spirit within the town. Of those surveyed, 53% believed that the spirit within the community was a major strength. Evidence of this is clearly visible. Community service clubs, specifically the local Apex club, have traditionally been very strong within the community. Since the 1970s, the Apex club, has raised an extraordinary amount of money through raffles of cars, trucks and even a light aircraft, to help build a sport's centre, an ambulance station and a retirement village, and to transform the Billabong Creek into a lake to beautify the town. Being on a major highway, the sale of raffle tickets was enhanced by truck drivers and others passing through town.

Residents stressed that the town's people look after their own. There are a number of elderly people in the district and with a lack of services for the aged, neighbours fulfil that role. Several examples of community support for those in need came forth. One family, who lost all their possessions when their home burnt down, were provided with a home in the town. Around $10,000 was raised from the community for the family. Currently, the community is raising money to support a 15 year old cancer patient.

There is a saying that if you live in a small town and there is ever a moment that you feel you don't know what you are doing, someone else can tell you. Such is the case in Reedy Creek. Although there are over a 150

organisations and committees within the town, the same people are represented on many of them. Dempsey (1990) found this cross over between community groups was a common feature of small rural communities. This leads to strong community cohesion within the wider community. Most residents emphasised the unity within the community in times of crisis.

We asked residents how easy it was for newcomers to be accepted into the community. All but one person believed it was very easy. There has been a loss of farm families from the district with the decline in rural industries through years of drought and low commodity prices, particularly in the wool industry. Those farmers who remain have bought up their neighbour's properties. The withdrawal of government services from rural areas has also resulted in a loss of families from the district. Thus, newcomers to Reedy Creek are welcomed. As one participant stated, 'we just need a few more people so we can make up a tennis team'. The number of students at the local public school has been reduced from 200 to 80, and the school now needs three more children to qualify for one extra teacher.

Those interviewed stressed that although there are some long established families in the area who have a set group of friends and family, most people in the community are very friendly and very welcoming. One local woman has made it her task to make a cake and personally visit each new family to welcome them to town. One newcomer found the locals arrived as he did, and helped him move his furniture into his new home. Another reported that he found the whole experience almost embarrassing as people arrived with food for his family. Backpackers are welcomed within the community as they are a vital source of labour for the local vegetable industries.

Some participants noted that a newcomer's inclusion into the community depended upon his or her personality. Newcomers need to meet people half way and aim to become involved in the community. Others believed getting to know people is possibly easier for those with children at kindergarten or school, or for those who join sporting groups or churches. Newcomers employed in service provision, for example teachers or nurses, find they get to know people very quickly.

7.2.4 Community problems

The mail survey of the Reedy Creek community revealed that the main problems were unemployment (54%), economic decline (57%), and people leaving the district (41%). However, the greatest problem in Reedy Creek according to 62% of the respondents was poor health services. When those we interviewed were asked to define the major problems in the community, the struggle to maintain the local hospital was salient in most people's minds. The Area Health Service froze new hospital admissions after the town lost its doctor in February 1997. Two elderly patients remained in care but when they became seriously ill, they were transferred to another

hospital, the closest 35 kilometres away. Later, the hospital was reduced to a Monday to Friday service and the elderly patients were transported to the hospital in the neighbouring community for the weekend.

Reedy Creek residents united to fight for their health service, lodging an application in 1999 for it to be changed to a smaller multi-purpose service with 12 aged-care beds and three in-patient beds. The local town council actively pursued the recruitment of a new doctor offering a guaranteed annual income, as well as a house and a surgery. This they achieved in March 1999. However, the area health service would still not allow the new doctor to admit patients to Reedy Creek Hospital, although he could do so at the hospital in the neighbouring community. Those with a serious accident or illness had to be transferred to base hospitals in regional centres, at least 90 minutes away.

After persistent lobbying by the community, in February 2000, the announcement was made that the hospital would be made a multi-purpose service. Despite the successful outcome, residents we spoke to remained nervous about the assurance of this announcement.

One other health concern of those interviewed was that pregnant women in labour are being rushed to the base hospitals (a ninety minute drive away), often at excessive speeds in order to reach the hospital in time. This is a common occurrence in rural areas since most babies are being delivered at base hospitals. Local midwives are not always available.   The escalating costs of insurance for obstetricians means more and more general practitioners are electing not to cover obstetrics. There also is a need for available theatre and emergency services in case of complications. Consequently, many labours are being induced in rural areas.

According to one service provider, the major concern in rural health is the lack of mental health support. Although there is a psychiatric help line, it is not available after hours. Consequently, the emergency services have to cope with any psychiatric emergency that occurs and they do not have the expertise required. In his view, country doctors do not have the time or the expertise to effectively manage psychiatric illness.   There had been five youth suicides in the region. All five were receiving psychiatric treatment. Two were drug users.

The lack of public transport was also a concern in this region.   There is limited community transport for the elderly. The lack of public transport severely limits the mobility of youth in this region.

A major economic problem facing the community was the reduction in water allocations. It is having a serious impact upon irrigators, particularly those in the rice industry. Concerns over growing salinity problems have seen more water allocated to environmental areas while irrigators' water licences have been restricted to 23% of their original quota. Reedy Creek farmers have been forced to buy water from farmers in South Australia or accept a huge reduction in production and income. Properties purchased

with water licences have now lost considerable value. With the region simultaneously recovering from the drought years of the 90s and the decline in the wool industry, many of those interviewed expressed serious concerns over the economic future of the area. Several farm families were taking off-farm employment to support their incomes.

Fortunately, unemployment was not such an issue in Reedy Creek as it was in other communities we visited. There is always seasonal work available with the labour intensive vegetable growing industry. At the time of the interviews, there were 600 backpackers in town. Most of these were overseas tourists. The residents welcome these people to the community because they are essential to the town's economy.

However, residents were concerned that there are limited career opportunities for local youth in the region. Since most young people leave town once they leave school to pursue tertiary education or a career, unemployment for this age group is significantly below the state average according to census data. However, unemployment for young women aged 20 to 24 years is above state average. Of those young people who leave, few return to Reedy Creek. The council has recognised the high priority of establishing supervised social activities for youth, particularly those aged 12 to 18. (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000b)

7.2.5 Crime

So where does the issue of crime fit against the major concerns in the minds of the residents of Reedy Creek? It doesn't. 'Crime is not serious at all', was the response by 87% of participants who were asked to rate the seriousness of crime in the community. Two others thought crime was somewhat serious. Only three respondents to the mail survey thought crime was a major problem while 54% believed the low crime rate was a strength of the community. However, seven of those we interviewed had been a victim of crime. Figure 7.1 presents the recorded rates of offences for 1996 and 1999. These data show a fall in rates of crime for 1999 with the exception of malicious damage and drink driving.

Participants perceived the major crime problems in Reedy Creek to be break and enter (42%), drunkenness (30%) and drink driving (30%). Those crimes that participants described as minor problems were stock theft (50%), drug use (42%), drunkenness (30%), and vandalism (30%).

Most participants acknowledged that drugs were brought into the community by the seasonal workers and the truck drivers. One service provider noted that there had been some drug use discovered at the High School located in a neighbouring community. However, most of the people we interviewed saw drugs as an 'outside problem', one that did not really effect them personally.

Figure 7.1:
Rates of recorded crime for Reedy Creek LGA 1996 and 1999.
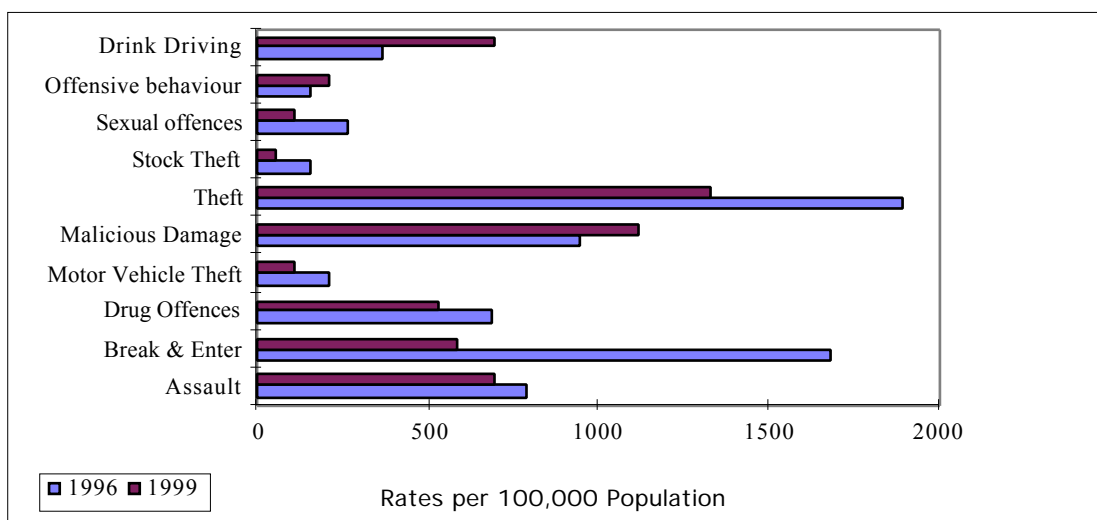
Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2000) New South Wales recorded Crime Statistics 1999, Sydney.

One participant had been the victim of car theft, though this appears to have been an isolated incident. There had been some minor incidents of vandalism around the lake area.

Excessive alcohol consumption and drink driving, appeared to be the main concerns of residents in this community. Social drinking is a popular pastime in rural areas, particularly among youth. Brawls around the hotels mainly during football season was the main complaint. One couple was very concerned with the extent of binge drinking among the youth. They maintained social functions, such as debutante balls, foster underage drinking. They did acknowledge that there is not much for youth to do in the district. Yet, the concern to these residents was the pervading culture that 'you can't do anything without a drink'. Another woman believed attitudes are changing. She noted that many of the local youths now walk to the hotels and that those attending social functions often use a designated driver.

The council had introduced alcohol restricted areas in public places within the town to give police powers to act on trouble makers. This policy had been very effective. However, local police face a dilemma in how to effectively police drink-driving offences among local residents. There are no taxis and no public transport and many residents have to travel some distance to attend social functions. People come in from properties two or three times a week to socialise at the hotels or the club. Police perceive that most of the older people do regulate their drinking. Although they may be just over the .05 limit when they leave, they are not a real danger to the community. Younger people, however, are of greater concern. When work on the land is halted because of rain, and the workers come to town, trouble is inevitable.

To be effective in the community, police need to be able to enlist the support of the local residents to access information. Therefore, it is important to

85

keep the community on their side in order to ensure a good working relationship. Consequently, the local police must use discretion when policing drink driving. They prefer police from neighbouring towns to come in and arrest local identities for drink driving. As is typical among officers in small towns, they walk a tightrope in trying to be a good citizen and a good law enforcer. These pressures can lead to lower crime rates in some rural communities.

Police were also concerned about the level of fatalities on the road. There had been seven deaths during a recent four to five month period. Although most accidents have been the result of speeding along the long straight stretches of highway on either side of Reedy Creek, or due to driver fatigue, local police have come under pressure from the community to address this issue.

Two participants believed domestic violence was a problem in the region. The local Council's social plan also found domestic violence levels, which were estimated from hospital and medical statistics, to be high. Council believes there is a need for community focus and discretionary intervention to address this issue (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000b). One participant related a concern about one possible case of child abuse. She believed the family should have been reported to authorities, while simultaneously expressing concerns about the possible implications of doing so. Although confidentiality in reporting is technically assured, Reedy Creek is a small community. The reality is that few secrets are kept. The family, and eventually the wider community, would soon know who reported them.

Break and enters were reported by almost half of those interviewed as being a major problem. The break-ins that have occurred have primarily affected town businesses. The perception within the community is that these crimes are not committed by local people. The perpetrators are believed to be professional criminals from Melbourne. Such offences appeared to occur in waves, with a spate of break and enters occurring in neighbouring towns and Reedy Creek around the same period. Fortunately, such incidences of break and enter had declined over the past two years.

The local police officer was most concerned about the level of crime on farms in the district. In his opinion, local farmers were not sufficiently security conscious and did not appear to check their stock often enough. Cases of theft of four to five hundred head of sheep or cattle had been reported. The occasional loss of one or two animals is a common occurrence on the land and is usually accepted as part of life. Straying stock is a common problem, though most farmers return stock to their neighbours when they are discovered. One farmer reported that there were always sheep carcasses at the town rubbish tip. It was suspected that the town's people occasionally help themselves to farm stock. Farmers seem to be ambivalent about such incidences and do not report these losses.

Two of the four farmers interviewed had been victims of stock theft. It was interesting that when first asked about their personal experience of crime,

their initial response was none at all. Yet, later in the interview, incidents of stock theft came to mind. The financial loss can be significant and it is surprising that more concern was not expressed. One farmer reported the theft of over a hundred sheep *(just a truckload)* and a separate incident, in which sheep valued at $3000 had been stolen. Another farmer had stock taken by a drover. He confronted the drover and managed to get his stock back. Another farmer reported that he had lost some calves ten years ago.

Although they stressed that crime was not an issue, all of the farmers interviewed had heard of theft from other properties in the district. Items such as tool boxes and radios were taken from vehicles or sheds. One told the story of how a mob of sheep disappeared from a paddock and were returned some days later minus their wool!

One participant personally had a chain saw stolen. The local police were concerned that large machinery, such as headers, are left in paddock during the off-season. Springs are taken from disk ploughs. Header lights, and radios from vehicles or tractors, are stolen. Another farmer believed that such incidents should be well publicised to raise awareness and make farmers more security conscious. One farmer believed his property was secure as it was some distance from the road and most of the sheds, fuel and equipment were near the house. Although his machinery was never locked, it was not visible from the road.

Two farmers saw no point in spending money on security measures or taking precautions. 'People will take things anyway', they said. One saw no reason to lock a tractor to prevent theft because it is more expensive to replace a tractor window than a radio. He believed there is greater security among the smaller holdings in the district than in areas with larger properties.

Three other farmers did take precautions. One locked farm utilities and made sure tractors and fuel were not left near the road. He also has insurance. When his brother who lives on the property goes away, he moves out there to keep watch. Another, who did not lock machinery, did ensure that tractors were not left near the road.

When asked about other security concerns, the farmers expressed a dislike of strangers on their properties. Trespassers can leave gates open and farmers were suspicious of their motives for being there. When confronted by the farmers, trespassers excuses ranged from their belief that they were on a public road to being lost. Farmers found these defences suspicious as there are so many ramps and gates on the roads. One farmer put up a 'Private Property' sign to deter such trespassers. Most of those interviewed reported that they, and their neighbours, kept a watch out for strangers in the area.

Shooters were of particular concern. In the past, one farmer had to padlock gates to keep them out. The presence of shooters varies with the price of fox skins. One farmer added that with foxes currently being in such high numbers, and the consequent loss of lambs, shooters were sometimes seen

as a lesser of two evils. Another farmer said she did not mind people on the property if they come to the house to seek permission to be there. Shearers usually spread the word of an owner's policy on shooters on farm.

Local police were concerned that locals do not report crimes immediately and often wait until three weeks after the incident has occurred. One officer is now using the local newspaper to encourage reporting. He was concerned that if the community does not call upon him, they will loose the service.

When asked whether crime had increased or decreased over the past year, 36% participants perceived that there had been a increase in crime, (45%) believed that the level of crime had remained unchanged and 18% believed there had been a decrease in crime. A review of the recorded crime in Figures 7.1 and 2.4 reveals that the incidence of break-ins had been much greater in previous years. Most participants (60%) maintained that crime in Reedy Creek was very low compared to that experienced in other rural areas. Being a small town, it has a low crime rate. Three others thought crime was much the same as other communities. Only three people thought there had been a change in the types of crime that occurred. Two believed drug crimes were more prevalent. One thought crime was less violent than it had been previously.

However, when crime occurs, it can strongly affect the community.   One farmer related the story of how a couple renting one of the farm houses on their property had been murdered. Although this incident occurred over fifteen years ago, it had been a very traumatic experience for her family as well as the wider community. She had watched with interest the reaction of the community to the event. She found she could not re-let the house because it was known as the 'murder house'. The community believed it had been a murder suicide. It was only through clever detective work by the police that the murderer was identified. The family of the man who was charged included seven children. They were said to be so devastated by this event that they all had to leave the district.

7.2.6 Blame

When asked who or what was to blame for crime in the town, most participants identified the transient population as the source of much of the trouble in town. As in Encounter Bay, Reedy Creek residents distinguished between the overseas tourists and the 'bad element' amongst the transient population. The local police officer also identified the transient population as the source of trouble and stated that most crime was drug related. He also distinguished between those trouble makers, most of whom were Australian, and the overseas tourists who were there to work and earn money. Sometimes the overseas backpackers were victims of crime because they carried their money and possessions with them. The officer observed that the residents of the town appeared to be willing to put up with the higher risk of crime in order to have the workers available.

The serious break and enters were perceived by several respondents to be the work of criminal gangs from Melbourne. They were certainly not seen to be the work of locals. Participants reported that local crime seemed to be addressed immediately. As one long time resident said: 'if anyone does anything wrong, we all know about it - and that's a good thing'.

Unemployment and boredom amongst juveniles were also highlighted as potential causes of petty crime. The seasonal work is difficult, conditions are hard, wages are average, and many young people choose not to do such work. With a loss of services from the district, other employment alternatives are not available. Some residents believed that the availability of welfare support did not encourage youth to seek employment. Drugs and alcohol use were also listed as causes of much of the crime that does occur.

Several participants related the story of the incident of vandalism at the local public school, where computers and rooms had been damaged. Parents were annoyed that the perpetrators only received a warning because they were very young children. One parent was concerned that the message this was giving to other children was that violators can get away with anything. Her children were angry that they could not use the computers and angry that nothing was done. They believed that some punishment should have been metered out.

We asked participants where or how they heard about crime in their district. Most participants (80%) heard about crime from their friends or neighbours. Some residents (44%) gained information from local business people, others (44%) from local newspapers, while two heard about crime in their workplace. The regional newspaper was not well regarded as a source of information. The local police will not publish police reports in this paper as the information is sensationalised. They perceived that the media generally over-dramatise crimes against women or elderly and that there was a need for guidelines for the media to prevent this practice.

7.2.7 Policing the community

In a small country town like Reedy Creek, policing can be an extremely complex task. Police face a problem common to many service providers in rural areas; getting away from the job can be difficult. The people the police must sometimes deal with in the course of maintaining law and order, are the same people they live next to and socialise with. There are never-ending knocks on the door at all hours because the locals do not acknowledge their days off. Even when they go to relax at the local hotel, they can be approached. The officers are a husband and wife team. They said that it was necessary to leave town if they want to have a break. Their desire for normality conflicts with the fact that they live in the town and need be a part of it. For effective law enforcement, it is essential for residents to accept the officers in the community. The current officers had been in Reedy Creek for three years and felt that the local people were only now beginning to open up and confide in them.

Community consultation in the development of the council's social plan found that law enforcement was acceptable although the area to be policed was large and required substantial out of town time. The absence of an available officer was a concern, particularly in an emergency (Reedy Creek Shire Council, 2000).

We also asked residents for their views on policing within the community. The extent of perceived police presence was similar to that found in other communities. Most participants (80%) reported that they were aware of the officers driving around the town but no one reported seeing them walking the streets. Only one person reported noticing an officer in the shopping centre. Several participants noted the police presence in the hotels and clubs. One participant reported that an officer on foot was such a rare sight, that on one occasion, when he did see one walking down the street, he presumed his car must have broken down and stopped and asked if he would like a lift.

There was some resentment of the level of highway patrols in the region. Reedy Creek, being on a major highway in an area which is prone to serious accidents, is well covered by highway patrols. However, locals objected to being frequently stopped for breathalyser and speed checks and charged for what they perceived to be minor offences.

Several respondents reported that they would like to see more police presence on the streets at times when children are coming home from school. A greater presence on the streets would create better public relationships and would prevent trouble before it happens amongst the transient population. Others recognised that the officers do not have enough time to patrol. One believed that it was not necessary for officers to patrol on foot, as they are better able to respond to an emergency if they are in a vehicle.

Twenty per cent of respondents believed there were enough police in the town, while 67% thought there were too few. The main concern of residents was that calls to local police were usually answered by the police service in regional centres, almost two hours away. One participant reported that trying to contact local police to report a lost bracelet took three days. Another reported that one night, when there was a brawl at one of the hotels, the police had to come from a regional centre. By the time they arrived, everyone had gone home. One local businessman who experienced a break and enter had to wait for police from other towns to investigate the crime. It was six hours before fingerprints were taken which meant he effectively lost a day's business.

The local people have found these delays most frustrating. They have led to a feeling of uneasiness about possible delays in assistance in times of emergency. Police from other centres have no knowledge of the local area, such as road conditions or the locations of rural properties. The police have a network of support between neighbouring communities. Three of these communities, including Reedy Creek are only 30 minutes apart.

Emergencies in any of these regions require attendance by police from neighbouring towns. At these times, local stations are often left unattended. Unlike the Ambulance service, there are no relieving officers available in these regions. One resident believed that ideally there is a need for three officers in town which would allow one to be at the station at all times.

The Reedy Creek Apex Club gave the local police mobile phones so that they could be contacted more dependably. However, the Police Service would not allow their use. This annoyed the residents. Many believed this had been an excellent precautionary option for isolated areas. One farmer had the number programmed into his phone in case of emergency.

One participant lamented the loss of the local Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) office, which used to be housed at the local Police Station. This service, regularly used by local people, particularly farmers, provided ongoing contact with the local police which encouraged the sharing of information. O'Connor and Gray (1990) in their study of crime within a rural community in the town of Walcha, also found this blend of police and RTA services facilitated excellent public relations within the community although the police officers found these duties time consuming and arduous.

Residents were asked whether they believed the police were doing the best job they could against crime. Sixty per cent of respondents agreed the police were doing the best job they could, and 13% believed this was the case some of the time. Forty seven per cent believed the police had the crime problem under control in Reedy Creek while the remainder could not say.

Several participants expressed sympathy and understanding for the difficulty of the task of policing, given the limitations of the law and the lack of resources within the service. Participants believed it was a shame that country police have lost the ability to do community service. Police appear to have so much paper work to do that it limits contact with the public. One man maintained that a high police presence on the streets gives people a feeling of security. With a lack of funding and the fact that police are restricted to an eight hour shift, they did appreciate that any extra service officers provide is in their own time. One participant believed that essential services such as the police service, should not be run like a business. Officers should not have to conform to stringent guidelines. Residents said that the service appeared to have more flexibility in the past, which created better police/community relations.

Participants were also asked whether they believed there was respect for the police in the town. The majority of responses (67%) indicated that the police do have respect but one added, 'perhaps not from those they have had to deal with'. Several participants noted that respect depended upon the officer. As one observed, like most service providers, some police officers can be very dedicated and give of themselves all the time, while others just do the bare minimum. The local officers currently in place were very much appreciated for the fact that they are involved in the local community. They

had attended local functions and had been instrumental in raising $13,000 with a golf day. Community participation by the officers appeared to be important to the residents. At the same time, it was also important that officers maintain their respectability within the town. 'They cannot afford to let their hair down in the local hotels', said one resident.

Another respondent observed that nowadays officers are not left in a community long enough. In his opinion, those who are well accepted into a community are transferred to another place. Three years seems to be the time limit. The perception is that official policy discourages officers from joining in and from being too friendly. Therefore, officers generally tend not to get as involved in the community as the residents would prefer them to be. He believed that as a consequence, local youth do not make an effort to cooperate with the police.

One participant observed that policing seems to be more observation and communication, whereas in the past it seemed to be action leading to conviction. The criminal justice system appeared to take too long to process the law. In his view, police seem to have to build up a portfolio on criminals before any action is taken.

Two respondents did not believe the police were respected. One observed that the police do not appear to have the respect they commanded twenty years ago. Police, like doctors, are not seen as strong role models today. There was again reference to the old days when police used to take young trouble makers twenty kilometres out of town, give them a stern talking to, and make them walk back to town. There was concern that police have lost the authority they used to have.

7.2.8 Safety and security

We investigated the residents' fear of crime and the extent they ensured their own personal level of safety and security. All of those interviewed reported that they felt completely safe walking around their neighbourhood, community park or shopping centre during the day, and only one woman reported feeling a little unsafe walking after dark. One other felt unsafe at the park area at night. This woman recognised that this was largely because of her experience of living in the city. Two farm women reported feeling unsafe when alone, at home, at night.

Only two people identified an area of town that they would avoid for safety reasons. Both these participants said they would avoid the hotels and bars where the seasonal workers gather to drink, particularly at closing time.

Regarding the precautions residents took to guarantee their safety and security, two people reported that they would drive rather than walk at night. One was an elderly person, the other a farmer. This was almost an irrelevant question to ask in Reedy Creek. With so many people living out of town and no taxis available in the community, it is necessary to drive.

None of the respondents reported that they would avoid talking to strangers. Only one respondent living in town had a small dog which barked at strangers. None of the participants took their dog with them for security when they walked. Most farmers had dogs but these were working dogs. Although they did alert the family to the presence of strangers, security was not foremost in the minds of their owners.

Only three people reported that they usually locked up their homes before going out. Two reported that they sometimes locked up. The remainder never locked their homes. This fact made Reedy Creek quite unique. Most farm families left their homes unlocked. One farmer acknowledged that if someone wanted to steal anything from his property, they could just walk in and take whatever they wanted. If he and his family were in town, for example, on Saturday afternoons at the football, it would be common knowledge their place would be left unattended.

One family who came from the city, rented a home in town which did not have any keys. Although it was a little difficult to get used to not locking up, they felt completely safe. They emphasised the safety of the community for their two small children. Others reported they left the keys in their car even when they parked in town.

Yet these respondents were also concerned about security on their properties if they were away for any length of time. The majority (64%) made arrangements for someone to watch over their homes and businesses when they were out of town. For those on properties, this was necessary since they had animals which needed to be checked daily. This mixture of being unconcerned and concerned was an interesting contradiction.

Four respondents had installed security doors or had security locks or screens on their windows. Of these, two had been victims of crime and another was an elderly person. One service provider was aware that several people within the community had installed security doors but that nobody locked them. He believed people are aware of the possibility of criminal activity but are very complacent. One person had an alarm system which they considered was ineffective because there was no direct connection to the police at Reedy Creek.

We also asked residents whether they had any safety concerns about their children, elderly family members, or other family members. Two parents expressed concern about the safety of their children though in both cases, their concerns reflected normal parental concern about road safety. One farm family worried about their children getting off the school bus and waiting on the highway when they were not there to meet them. The other, a family living in town, worried about the children crossing the main highway on the way to school. None of the participants reported any concerns about the safety of their elderly family members or other family members in the district.

We asked participants whether the people in their street helped and watched out for each other. The majority (87%) stated that people do help and watch out for each other.   Only one woman reported that her neighbours kept to themselves but this was because they were all elderly. Generally, it seems people were very interested in their neighbours.

We also asked whether participants believed that their neighbours would call the police if someone was acting suspiciously on their property. The majority (87%) believed people would call the authorities. As one person stated 'neighbourhood watch happens naturally'.   People know what is going on in the district. Everyone knows everyone else and their vehicles. Consequently, strangers in town are very obvious. [Although we did not inform the community of our arrival, or who we planned to interview, where we had been or who we had met with, it soon became common knowledge].   One service provider believed that the locals were very complacent about crime. Even though there had been some break-ins in the town, when the alarm was activated at the local Golf Club, no one took any notice. One business owner who had previously been a victim of a break-in, routinely informs the police when he is out of town and asks them to watch over his business premises and his home.

There was very little community participation in policing and safety. Three of the farmers interviewed reported that they were members of Rural Watch or Neighbourhood Watch.   They appreciated the value of such organisations and the information they received. Yet, although there were large bill boards advertising the presence of Neighbourhood Watch in the town, there were no organised groups in operation.   There had been an effort to establish a group in the past but no organisation eventuated due to lack of support. The local police office had become concerned about the increasing occurrences of stock theft and other crime on farms. He was in the process of developing a Rural Awareness group for farmers to meet every four to six months to discuss these issues.   The editor of the local community newsletter had published some information on Rural Watch and was surprised that so few of the readers had heard of such an organisation.

Two service providers maintained that organisations such as Neighbourhood Watch were not well suited to small towns. They claimed that: 'the wrong people get involved'. Busy bodies can monopolise a group or one faction may close other community members out. Most participants maintained that organised structures were not necessary in Reedy Creek since people looked out for each other and would be alert to any suspicious activity on or near their neighbour's property. Etiquette between farmers means advising neighbours before lighting fires and advising of any potential problems via two way radio.   As one farmer stated, 'neighbourhood watch is a natural phenomenon and that cannot be improved on'.

We asked residents whether they were aware of any shift in the attitudes of the local people towards the problems of crime in the area over the past few

years. Only two reported noticing a change in people's attitudes to crime. One participant noted that her elderly parents, who were living in town, now lock up their home whereas they would not have bothered five years ago. Others had advised them that they should be more aware of security.

In general, the residents of Reedy Creek were very comfortable with the feeling of safety and security that pervades their community. They were aware that crime does occur in their town but the assumption was that such occurrences are isolated incidents that target local businesses. They were also aware that there is drug use in the town as well as alcohol abuse. However, that behaviour was seen to be confined to the hotels which they avoid late at night. They indicated that personally, they were not affected by crime.

One participant, who had moved there from the city, believed that local people were naive about local crime, particularly about the extent of drug use. She believed that they shut their eyes to the fact that the transient population and the truck drivers use drugs and can leave syringes around the lake area. Being on a national highway, Reedy Creek is not immune from this danger. A council worker had received a syringe prick collecting rubbish a few months earlier. As a manager of a local business, this respondent instructs cleaning staff to be wary of the danger, and not to push down on the waste paper baskets in the rest rooms.

As a new backpackers hostel is being built next to the school, she was concerned about the danger discarded syringes could pose to her children, as well as the other children. She raised her concerns at a school meeting and encouraged the school to hold a drug awareness session for the children. Still, she is not convinced that people are sufficiently alert to the seriousness of the issues.

7.3   COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

Service providers were asked whether they believed that the current crime prevention or social justice programs were relevant to their community. All replied that such programs were inappropriate for Reedy Creek. One respondent stated that as there is no set crime pattern, measures in larger towns are not applicable to Reedy Creek. One respondent reported that juveniles on Community Service Orders had refused to mow the lawns around his work place because they do not do it at home. Consequently, such programs were not a punishment.

Service providers were asked whether they believed that service providers should have special skills or training to work with Aboriginal clients, or clients who have a non-English speaking background. Responses were divided on this question. One service provider noted that it would help to have cultural awareness training but added that the local Aboriginal people will give advice if needed. Another believed that rather than training,

experience is the best education. He treats people as he finds them and believed this approach was better than singling some groups out.

We asked the residents whether they or other members of the community had formed community groups or developed initiatives to deal with the problems of crime in the region. The main concerns of residents centred around the lack of substantial employment and activities for youth which leads to boredom and idleness and potential trouble. One participant maintained that government services should be re-established in rural towns. There is also a need to provide incentives for industries to come to the bush for the economic survival of rural towns such as Reedy Creek.

One participant observed that the media often presents a picture of doom and gloom in rural Australia. Consequently, rural children grow up receiving few incentives to stay and achieve within the community. The perception prevails that life is harder than it was in their parent's time. Although she recognised that there are few job opportunities in rural areas, she believed children should be educated that there are opportunities in life and given a more positive outlook.

Concerns were raised over the lack of support for youth in the town, identifying a need for a youth worker and more activities for youth. One participant suggested that there should be blue light discos held for local children. The nearest community where such functions are held is an hour away by road. A private committee had formed to plan an under 16 bluelight disco to be held regularly in Reedy Creek in order to provide an activity for the young people and make use of the sports centre facilities.

One recent successful initiative for youth in the area was a camp held in a regional centre which was attended by 1200 teenagers from across the district. The camp was led by a Melbourne football hero who was concerned about youth suicide.

The local Catholic Church had started a youth group. A youth coordinator from a parish in another community visits regularly. The group also buses the youth to neighbouring centres to participate in youth activities. Local youth had appreciated these opportunities and supported these activities.

Due to the loss of families from the district, there is a loss of support for sporting teams for the children who remain. Although there is a large sporting complex available, due to a lack of funding, it is open for selected periods only and is closed during the winter. The centre is now managed by a business located in another town. Some locals have had to lobby residents to use the facility when it is available to ensure it will remain open.

One participant pointed out that although there is a scout hall available, the local troop is no longer functioning due to lack of parental support. There is one father willing to run the troop. However, laws prevent a group from operating with only one male leader. She believed that current concerns in Australian society about child abuse discouraged men from volunteering to

assist. The participant suggested that this is probably the situation in many small towns and that such laws needed to be more flexible in rural areas. She believed there is a problem in society with the lack of adult male role models, and this was certainly the case in Reedy Creek.

The suggestion for the solution to the problem of excessive alcohol use was that social functions, such as Balls, should be more regulated to control underage drinking and excessive drinking. Alcohol advertising should also be regulated, like smoking. Media use of celebrities in alcohol advertising was seen as encouraging the popularity of drinking amongst youth.   The Anglican church youth group had a committed goal of arranging activities to keep young people out of the hotels. The strong emphasis on sport in the community was perceived as a healthy alternative for youth.

One local woman who had disability as the result of an accident with a drunk driver, works with the police and the Roads and Traffic Authority giving talks on the consequences of drink driving in schools, service clubs and hotels throughout New South Wales.

There had been some incidents of vandalism in the town around the lake area. The council's policy of attending to the damage immediately seems to deter any further damage. Past experience had shown that when vandalism or graffiti is left, it seemed to encourage more damage.

One service provider believed that the local community should provide social support for the transient population of seasonal workers.   The seasonal work is difficult and can be prone to accidents. The climate can be extreme, facilities are minimal and workers are often on their own for much of the time. Overseas backpackers often feel very isolated and need help, particularly in times where there are concerns about their family at home.

The problem of crime on farms was being addressed by the local police who were establishing a rural awareness group for local farmers. An excellent suggestion made by one farmer was that it would be a good idea for police and other emergency services, to make themselves familiar with properties in the district. If they knew where the front gates of farms were and where the main house and sheds were located, time would not be wasted finding a place in an emergency. Another farmer added that the Victorian system of codes for roads was commendable in that it enabled emergency services to quickly find roads and properties.

7.4   SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

It is easy to pass through Reedy Creek driving between Sydney and Melbourne, and give little thought to such a small town. However, if one stops to look, one cannot help but admire the achievements of this community. There is a feeling of warmth and friendliness throughout the

town. The residents we spoke to exhibited a genuine regard for people and attachment to their community. In spite of the fact that many of the residents are long established members of the community, newcomers are warmly welcomed.

The lack of structured community support services in the town is overcome by established informal community support. Most of the needs of the aged, the disabled, the sick, the lonely and the disadvantaged, were ably provided through the care and concern of the people within the community. This quality is not something that can be put into place through policies or programs. It represents a special mix of people, community structure, and environment that exists less today in rural Australia than it did in the past.

In spite of the strength of this community, Reedy Creek was selected for study because it experienced high rates of crime in 1996. Fortunately, crime levels had fallen by the time we visited there in 2000. Nevertheless, seven of those we interviewed had been victims of crime. However, Reedy Creek residents are not swayed by crime. They tend to accept crime as part of life and are nonchalant about safety and security. From their perspective, crime is not of the community. Rather, crime is something that happens as a consequence of living on a main highway. There is complete trust of those within the community.

What threatens Reedy Creek and concerns the residents, is the erosion of the existing community structures, such as health services. As one farmer said:

> *Rural towns don't need subsidies for farmers. What they need are basic services-health, education, and police.*

The rationalisation of government services has meant a detrimental loss of families from the district, a loss of employment opportunities, as well as an inconvenience in service access for local people. Residents tenaciously cling to those services which remain. The local police are greatly appreciated. However, as in Hillnest, the re-direction of all calls to local police through regional offices is disliked by local residents. Rural people want the assurance of having police available when required rather than at the discretion of a dispatch.

Reedy Creek can be described as the quintessential country town. Such communities are vitally important to rural Australia. The residents choose to live there. They accept that there are compromises that have to be made for that choice. They appreciate that not all services and facilities will be available. However, basic fundamental services, that sustain the fabric of the community, are justifiably expected and warranted.

Chapter 8

VALUES

8.1 INTRODUCTION

At the conclusion of the interviews within the four rural communities, residents were asked to evaluate nine attitude statements relating to issues currently affecting the criminal justice system. Participants' opinions were sought on a range of topics including, drug laws, family responsibilities, criminal justice, social justice, community responsibility, and policing. The purpose of this exercise was to identify any significant patterns in the ethical and moral viewpoints of rural residents across, and within, the four communities. The questions addressed topical issues that have serious theoretical and policy implications. The first six questions focussed on crime and how the criminal justice system should respond to it. The last three questions addressed factors that underlie the causation of crime. This chapter provides an overview of participants' evaluations of these topics.

8.2 ATTITUDE STATEMENTS

Participants were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with nine value statements on criminal justice and social issues. The statements were designed to encourage discussion to gather a deeper understanding of the participants' viewpoints.   The majority of respondents were keenly interested in these topics. Most had previously formed an opinion which they shared along with some additional thoughts on the issues. Answers were categorised on a five-point Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree.   These responses were subjected to quantitative analyses to investigate whether there were any significant differences in residents' attitudes between the sample communities.

Chi square analysis found significant differences between the four communities for only one of the items. This was a surprising finding, given the apparent diversity between the communities.   Further statistical specification investigated whether there were any gender or age differences in these value judgements. No significant differences were identified.

Examination of the variables revealed that all items presented a normal distribution of responses. There appears to be a balanced array of opinions that are equally reflected across all four communities.

The results may be an artifact of the sampling methods used for this study. The sample size was small. There were 101 participants questioned on these value statements, approximately 22 in each community. The sample comprised service providers and local residents who were established members of their community, and interested enough in local community issues to agree to participate in the study. This demographic cross section of the communities may have been more homogeneous in their perspectives on life. However, it had been expected that the residents of Encounter Bay, a community which could not be described as conservative, would have been far more liberal in their responses.

Alternatively, the results may also reflect the presentation and structure of the items. These outcomes are most interesting and emphasise a need for a more thorough investigation of people's values across a range of issues relating to crime prevention.

As there was little difference between the communities in the responses of residents, the following section presents an overview of the combined results for all four communities.

8.2.1 Policing

Community attitudes concerning methods of policing were investigated with two questions. The first, examining views on police powers, asked whether participants agreed that:

> *Police should 'have the right to take any action*
> *necessary' to deal with public disorder, rather than*
> *having to be politically correct.*

Most people (52%) disagreed with this statement and a further 15% strongly disagreed. Eighteen per cent agreed that police should have the right to take necessary action, 8% strongly agreed while 8% could not say. Table 8.1 displays the frequencies of responses to this statement across the four communities.

This was the only statement which produced a significant difference in the responses between the communities (^{2}=12.86, p<0.05). Although divided on this issue, more Encounter Bay residents disagreed with this statement compared to those in the other communities.

Table 8.1:
Residents' responses to increasing police powers.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	35%	27%	7%	27%	27%
Greenhills (n=30)	24%	53%	0	18%	6%
Hillnest (n=24)	16%	63%	5%	16%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	15%	52%	8%	18%	8%

Many of those who opposed this statement qualified their answers by saying that they agreed with the police having more power to control public disorder—to a point. Most respondents believed police should have more power to be more effective. However, there was a need for some restraints to ensure officers do not abuse such power. As one woman said:

> *...police should be free to do their job. Yet, there needs*
> *to be standards in place. Police should not be allowed*
> *to please themselves.*

One person believed that the police unconsciously discriminate against some sectors of society. He observed, 'Aboriginals in trouble become a self fulfilling prophesy'. One added that police need to be educated about society and be sensitive to cultural differences. Some referred to the corruption within the police force which has been the focus of a judicial inquiry. It was important to these respondents for police to be reliable and honest.

Others thought that law enforcement should depend upon the circumstance that confronts the officer. They claimed that police should use their discretion in their dealings with the public. One woman raised the issue of the danger that police face in the course of their duties. She believed the personal safety of officers has to come first because police are often set up. Another observed that there are not enough police, especially when there are street fights.

Those who agreed with this statement believed that there was a need for tougher controls over public disorder. One person thought that too often, offenders rights are given precedence over the rights of the people within communities. In this respondent's view, some people live in fear. Another stated:

> *Police are responsible for keeping order but they are*
> *hamstrung. They can't do the job properly. There are*
> *damned if they do and damned if they don't.*

Others were concerned over the lack of respect for the law, particularly among young people. One respondent observed that children are aware that an adult can be charged with assault if they strike a child. Therefore, many

juveniles think they are untouchable and have no respect for institutions. In addition, police are reluctant to take action against juveniles. Another added that children now are taught that they have the right not to give their identification to the police. He added:

> *It would be much better if juveniles were open with police. The police should be respected. That way, juveniles would only fear them if they were doing something wrong.*

Another woman added that children have to learn to conform to society. These respondents believed that there is a lack of appreciation by policy makers about these particular problems. They maintained that policy makers need to readdress the legal messages being given back to the community.

Several respondents recalled the 'good old days' when police had more authority. Juveniles in trouble were given a good talking to, some were more severely disciplined, or driven out of town and made to walk home. These respondents believed these practices were effective. As several said:

> *Gone are the days when kids got a boot up the backside- it gave them a fright.*

> *Political correctness has gone overboard.*

Police officers we interviewed were grateful for recent legislation that granted them more flexibility to apprehend trouble makers.

Participants' views on zero tolerance were ascertained by asking participants whether they agreed that:

> **Police should strictly enforce even the most minor offences in order to catch serious offenders.**

Of those who responded, 28% agreed with this statement, 3% strongly agreed, 48% disagreed and 11% strongly disagreed. Nine per cent were undecided. Table 8.2 presents the responses across the four communities.

The majority of respondents who agreed with this statement believed there should be more control over drug crimes. One person stated that stricter policing methods would be justifiable if such efforts resulted in the conviction of drug dealers. Another thought that the police should focus more on arrests of the small drug dealers to break the chain between the big dealers and the drug users. Yet, one farmer pointed out the difficulties of such police activity in rural areas. When police targeted drugs in his region, locals were annoyed at being frequently stopped and searched.

Table 8.2:
Residents' responses to stricter policing.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	7%	20%	7%	33%	33%
Greenhills (n=30)	6%	19%	12%	56%	6%
Hillnest (n=24)	0	44%	12%	39%	6%
Reedy Creek (n=24)	0	27%	7%	67%	0

One believed that there was a need for tighter control because juveniles are overly protected by laws. Others observed that the police have their hands tied and should have more freedom to keep juveniles out of trouble.

Other respondents were more reserved in their answers, stating that there was a need for leniency in dealing with minor offences. One believed stricter policing was good practice within reason; police should not be too controlling.

Those who disagreed with this statement believed that rather than punishment, a warning should be issued for minor offences, particularly where the offenders are juveniles. One service provider raised the concern that police need to be sensitive with some juveniles with youth suicide being a concern within the justice system. There was a risk increased policing may exacerbate problems.

Some believed policing should be concentrated on the more serious criminals. One stated: 'We have to draw a line somewhere, we can't lock everyone up'. One service provider believed that increased police activity may be seen as harassment of the general public and a waste of resources. One respondent noted that the police were already overworked. Another believed that such measures were not necessary in rural areas because most country people are honest.

This statement also invoked discussion on mandatory sentencing. At the time of interview, mandatory sentencing had been the focus of media attention and was salient in the minds of participants. The majority of people who were in favour of the statement, believed mandatory sentencing was an excellent solution to crime in the community. Several maintained that 'three strikes and you are out' was a good idea. 'Penalties need to be tightened up. Punishment has to be a deterrent'. One thought that there should be zero tolerance for repeat offenders.

Two participants believed mandatory sentencing had received negative publicity in the media. One man believed the Northern Territory is a frustrated community. He claimed, 'the people there want the punishment

to fit the crime and they want action'. Others agreed, but were more cautious, stating that mandatory sentencing would be effective as long as common sense prevailed. One added it was important that the punishment fit the crime. Another believed mandatory sentencing should not be applied to petty offences.

Two respondents were strongly opposed to mandatory sentencing. One participant maintained that such policy was poor use of police and criminal justice resources. Another believed police should use discretion in their dealings with the public and referred to recent media reports that revealed that the success of zero tolerance in New York is diminishing.

The above comments express the fundamental quandary that characterises social justice today. The issue is whether to enforce laws tighter, or benignly neglect them. Stiff law enforcement is hoped to nip crime swiftly in the bud. Benign neglect hopes that by replacing law enforcement and diverting offenders, they will not be drawn into more serious crime. This dilemma is nowhere more evident than with regard to drug use.

8.2.2 Drug laws

Participants' opinions on the topic of the legalisation or decriminalisation of soft drugs, such as cannabis, were assessed by asking whether they agreed that:

> *Using soft drugs (like marijuana) should not be classed as a crime like stealing.*

Responses were very divided on this question. The most common response (44%) was to disagree. Another 7% strongly disagreed. Thirty-six per cent agreed, 5% strongly agreed and 10% were undecided. Residents' responses across the four communities are presented in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Residents' responses to the legalisation of soft drugs.					
Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	7%	50%	0	29%	14%
Greenhills (n=30)	7%	27%	27%	33%	7%
Hillnest (n=24)	6%	39%	6%	50%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	0	27%	7%	60%	7%

Although no significant differences were found, there were trends in the data. Residents in the smaller communities, Hillnest and Reedy Creek were

less in favour of the decriminalisation of drugs. Encounter Bay residents were more in favour of the softening of drug laws.

Respondents clearly differentiated between drug users and drug dealing. Most believed dealers should be severely dealt with by the law. Of those who agreed with this statement, most believed marijuana use was quite acceptable if smoked in the home for relaxation purposes and did not harm anyone else. One man thought that unless people are mugged to get drugs, it was not a problem. 'There are a lot more serious things happening', he said. Many believed marijuana use should be permitted as a pain killer for those with serious illnesses, such as multiple sclerosis.

Others were against the legalisation of marijuana but thought that it should be decriminalised. One woman believed that the law should not include soft drug users with heroin users. Yet, drug use should be policed to a point. Others agreed that the policing of drugs should focus upon hard drug users, while marijuana users who have the odd plant, should be ignored. Some believed marijuana use by young people should remain illegal.

One service provider maintained that if the government set up a system where there would be no profit in marijuana, it would be acceptable to legalise it. It would only work if the dealers, 'the parasites', were out of the system. He believed the law should pressure drug users to give up their supplier or be prosecuted. Many respondents could not understand why the police do not prosecute more drug dealers.   Furthermore, there were perceived inequities in sentencing, with many small time users receiving harsher punishments than dealers.

Of those who disagreed strongly with this statement, many believed that the use of soft drugs precipitates use of hard drugs and drug dealing.   Some service providers stated they had observed this fact among their clients.

Those who disagreed were mostly concerned about the psychological effects of marijuana use.   One service provider stated that he has 'brain dead' clients and was convinced that drug use causes psychiatric illnesses. Several participants believed marijuana was now more potent. One Encounter Bay woman noted that hydroponic marijuana was reported to be very strong. Another claimed that marijuana mixed with harder drugs, such as cocaine and heroin, can cause psychological problems.

It was expected that residents of Encounter Bay would be more supportive of this statement. Certainly, trends in the data show that they were. However, we found that many of the Encounter Bay people we interviewed were just as negative about marijuana use as those in other communities. One father, who had a fifteen year old son who smoked marijuana, was most concerned about the effect the drug had upon his son. His son, once a healthy, sports-minded child, had become quite indifferent. He stated: 'dope is a perfect word for it because that's what it makes them'.   He was concerned about the health of all young drug users and the fact that marijuana use can lead to

harder drugs. However, he believed that more policing of marijuana users was not the answer.

Many respondents added that they were not in favour of the needle exchange program for drug users. It was perceived as a waste of resources. There was anger over the fact that people with real health problems, such as diabetes, must pay for their syringes. One respondent believed drug addicts should have to pay at least fifty cents a syringe. Another added that the exchange system is not working; children step on needles in the park. While he acknowledged that the AIDS rate has dropped, there has been a cost to the community. His local service station has to lock their toilets because it is located opposite the community health centre where drug users get their needle packs.

Only one health worker believed in the effectiveness of the needle exchange program. He maintained that if the program was removed, only 10% of drug users would buy needles. Consequently, more people would share needles and health problems would increase.

Several people believed alcohol abuse was a bigger problem than drug use among youth in rural areas. One person noted that some parents allowed underage drinking in their homes. One stated that there was a need to ban alcohol before marijuana. However, he concluded that prohibition would not work because it would encourage more use. One service provider maintained that alcohol abuse causes 90% of the work load for police. Alcohol was often the catalyst for domestic violence and vandalism. He maintained that the legalisation of marijuana would only create more problems.

8.2.3 Criminal justice

Participants' satisfaction with the criminal justice system was investigated by asking whether participants agreed that:

The courts are too lenient with criminals.

The majority of respondents either agreed that the courts are too lenient (45%) or strongly agreed (14%). Nineteen per cent disagreed and 3% strongly disagreed. Twenty per cent gave a 'Yes and No' answer to this question. 'Yes', the courts are too lenient with some criminals and for certain crimes but 'No', the courts are tougher for others. Table 8.4 displays the responses of residents across the four communities.

One respondent noted that the media certainly provides the impression that the courts are too lenient, particularly for serious crimes, such as drug offences. The majority of those who commented on this statement condemned the apparent inconsistencies and inequities in the judgements of the courts.

Table 8.4:
Residents' responses to the leniency of the courts.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	20%	20%	27%	27%	7%
Greenhills (n=30)	12%	35%	36%	12%	6%
Hillnest (n=24)	16%	53%	16%	16%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	7%	71%	0	21%	0

Some remarked that: 'the judgements for petty crimes are frequently severe while some seem to get away with murder'. Many perceived Alan Bond to be a perfect example of a white collar criminal who had 'got away 'with his crimes. Others, who are not as rich or powerful, become labelled in the system.

One participant believed that the public is angered when serious offenders get away with their crimes. An offender in his community had broken three bonds and nothing seemed to be done about it. Another added there should be no tolerance for rape and murder and serious drug offences.

Some thought the sentences awarded by the courts appear to depend upon the judge. Others believed that it was the law that sometimes confines magistrates. One noted that the jails are full and magistrates need to look at other alternatives. One man believed that:

> *...what the Australian criminal justice system needs is*
> *a Judge Judy because her methods are perfect for*
> *dealing with petty crime.*

One service provider believed that law makers are out of touch with what society is like and are unaware of what some offenders are capable of. One man stated that when he was sixteen or seventeen, the police would severely discipline juveniles, which was a better alternative to going to court. Yet, he concluded that such practices would be irrelevant today.

One respondent thought that the courts should be humane in their judgements. The circumstances of the offender should be taken into account. However, repeat offenders should have tougher penalties. A solicitor remarked that it is important for lawyers to present the family history of their client carefully. She added: 'if they are diligent in this task, the courts are more sympathetic'. She believed courts are quite fair at the lower levels, but should be tougher on habitual criminals.

One service provider believed the whole system needed an overhaul. He suggested that night courts should be instigated, as they are in the United States, to clear up the back log of crimes. He also believed there should be

some type of triage system to enable serious crimes, like murder, to be dealt with immediately rather than being left in the system for years.

A further statement sought participant's views on the appropriate allocation of resources to crime prevention by asking whether participants agreed that:

*There is too much emphasis on treating/
rehabilitating, rather than punishing offenders.*

Opinions were fairly evenly divided on this question with 43% agreeing, 3% strongly agreeing, while 31% disagreed and 12% strongly disagreed. Eleven per cent were undecided. Table 8.5 displays the responses to this statement by community.

Table 8.5:
Residents' responses to rehabilitation versus punishment.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	0	33%	7%	20%	40%
Greenhills (n=30)	13%	31%	13%	44%	0
Hillnest (n=24)	0	47%	10%	32%	11%
Reedy Creek (n=24)	0	60%	13%	27%	0

Several respondents believed that rehabilitation is a worthwhile goal. Others thought there should be more emphasis on rehabilitation. One added that many juvenile offenders lack guidance in the home and need help to make their way in life.

Two respondents believed that there is little opportunity to introduce rehabilitation programs to those in the criminal justice system. They pointed out that it is difficult to rehabilitate people within the jail environment. Another added that jail is supposed to be punitive, not rehabilitative. Therefore, there is no turn around in offenders' behaviour. He believed camps for juvenile offenders, where they are treated with respect, were a better alternative to jail. Another service provider agreed that farms for rehabilitation or the 'boot camps' that have been trialed in Queensland, were a good idea.

Others believed there should be an equal blend of rehabilitation and punishment. One person said: 'a little punishment is a good thing: too much is like hitting children'. Some respondents believed offenders and their background should be taken into account before deciding the appropriate action. Others added that it would depend on the crime. If the crime was serious, it should be punished.

Most of those who agreed with this statement believed that punishment should be tougher, that courts were far too lenient, and offenders have lost their fear of being punished. Others thought that rehabilitation programs were ineffective. One did not believe sex offenders could be rehabilitated.

One service provider maintained that many things inhibit the success of rehabilitation programs. Juveniles on community based orders often refuse to work. Another resident thought such programs were a waste of resources and questioned, 'how far can you help people?—often it's throwing good money after bad'. One respondent, who used to be youth worker in the city, believed that the social/criminal justice programs were not working. She had come to the conclusion that no matter how much support and encouragement were provided, some juveniles were destined to be in trouble with the law. Therefore, the solution must be more punishment.

8.2.4 Family responsibility

Residents perceptions of the role of the family in juvenile offending was ascertained by asking whether they believed that:

Families should take much more responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

There was an overwhelming support for this statement with 43% agreeing and 48% strongly agreeing. Only two people disagreed with this statement and four could not say. Table 8.6 presents the responses to this statement across the four communities.

Table 8.6:
Residents' responses to family responsibility.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	40%	47%	13%	0	0
Greenhills (n=30)	44%	44%	6%	0	6%
Hillnest (n=24)	56%	32%	5%	5%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	47%	53%	0	0	0

This result may be an artifact of the structure of this item. It is likely that few people would disagree with such a statement. However, the statement was designed to encourage participants to discuss their views on the role of the family in society and the degree they believed the family was responsible for juvenile delinquency.

The majority of comments followed a similar theme that parents should be *allowed* to take responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

Respondents believed that government policies of ensuring that children are aware of their rights has eroded the ability of parents to control their behaviour. Child Protection Laws prevent parents from disciplining their children. Several respondents believed children need a smack occasionally but such disciplining is now called child abuse. One father added:

> *Parents want to have control over their children until they are old enough. As soon as parents try to discipline their children, the kids say, 'You can't touch me'.*

Some respondents objected that society had the power to tell parents what they could and could not do. Many were outraged at the apparent policy of the Department of Family and Community Service of providing support for children who desire to leave home. Such policy goes against the family. Several participants stated that government should not interfere with families and called for a more reasonable approach to keep families together.

Others stated that teachers should also stay out of parental roles. However, the teachers we interviewed also believed laws prevented them from giving a child a hug when needed or disciplining them when necessary. One observed that even the police were powerless to discipline juveniles.

One teacher believed that parents need to be more responsible for their children. Those children who do not have discipline in the home are easily identifiable within the school. Some participants added that working parents are often too busy to be with their children. These respondents believed there should be a return to traditional family values. One man stated that he fell into trouble at the age of fifteen when his mother went to work and he did not have anyone to keep him in line.

Only a few respondents noted that some families experience difficulty and need the support of government and community services. Many identified single parents as the reason more juveniles were getting into trouble. One woman believed that abusive step fathers seem to be a big part of the problem though she could see no answer to this dilemma.

8.2.5 Social Responsibility

The extent residents believed that society had a responsibility in preventing crime was investigated by asking whether they thought:

> *More should be done to address the social problems that lead to crime.*

Fifty-eight per cent of participants agreed with this statement, 18% strongly agreed, while 15% disagreed, 3% strongly disagreed and 6% were undecided. Table 8.7 presents the responses of residents from each of the four communities.

Table 8.7:
Residents' responses to the need for more social support.

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	27%	40%	7%	20%	7%
Greenhills (n=30)	13%	67%	0	13%	7%
Hillnest (n=24)	24%	53%	12%	12%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	7%	73%	7%	13%	0

Those who agreed with this statement thought there should be more support and programs targeted to families. One stated that there are too many dysfunctional families in society and current services do not always meet their needs. One believed there should be more education for parents. Another thought that there was a need for more counselling for couples before they marry or commit to each other.

Others thought unemployment was a major problem that should be addressed. One added that the boredom associated with unemployment was a large part of the problem. He added:

> *There is a need for more schemes to assist people and*
> *provide them with some skills, such as the work for*
> *the dole program.*

One person thought that more support and resources for addressing social problems would be appropriate, as long as resources are not provided at the expense of law enforcement. Another stated that if more money for social problems meant more money for programs that take children away from their families, he would definitely not agree.

One man stated that the first step would be for the government to stop purging the bush of services. Another believed cut backs in services creates a vicious cycle in social problems in rural communities. Others agreed that more resources should be allocated to communities since they cannot solve their problems unaided. 'Taxes should even out the inequities in society', one person stated. Another thought that charity organisations, such as the Salvation Army, should receive more support from the government to enable them to reach more people in need. Another believed the government should not carry the entire responsibility for social problems; there was a need for community support as well.

Those who strongly disagreed with this statement did not think that more effort or resources directed to these areas would make any difference to alleviating social problems. Several Encounter Bay respondents maintained there were enough programs in place. One resident thought that in Encounter Bay, more money for social programs was wasted because of the

transient nature of those with demands on welfare services. One woman questioned:

> *...how far does society have to go? People will always be in trouble.*

One added that more programs was not the answer because they do not reach those with real needs. Furthermore, many people do not want help.

Some respondents were not sure that money being poured into welfare schemes was the answer. They claimed there was a need to look at underlying reasons for these problems in society. One was concerned about more money being provided for those who abuse the welfare system. Another agreed, stating that:

> *...organisations such as St Vincent de Paul make it too easy for those who choose not to work. People ask for petrol vouchers when they should pay like everyone else.*

A second question sought residents' perceptions of the state's role in crime prevention was ascertained by asking whether:

> **Governments and communities should provide more support for families with children in trouble with the law.**

The majority of respondents (52%) agreed with this statement. Seventeen per cent strongly agreed. Twenty per cent disagreed, while 11% could not decide. Participants' responses were divided on where the responsibility lay for children in trouble with the law.   Table 8.8 displays participant's responses across the four communities.

Table 8.8: Residents' responses to more support for families with children in trouble.					
Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	40%	27%	14%	20%	0
Greenhills (n=30)	13%	56%	13%	19%	0
Hillnest (n=24)	11%	53%	16%	21%	0
Reedy Creek (n=24)	7%	73%	0	20%	0

One participant had a son who had been arrested on a drug possession charge. She found the whole experience to be very traumatic and would have liked some advice and assistance at that time.

Those who agreed with this statement acknowledged that some families experience tough times and need support from the community. For example, families with children with Attention Deficit Disorder and similar problems, clearly need support. Others stressed there is not enough support in rural areas for families in trouble. Others were aware that many parents lack parenting skills and need more education programs. One woman added that support should be of a moral and social nature rather than financial. Another disagreed saying that: 'counselling was a waste of time. Assistance needs to be constructive'.

Many respondents believed that support services were already in place in the community and that there was no need for additional investment. One service provider maintained that too many services can overlap, which is a waste of resources. Another asked, 'the government could spend millions on such causes, but to what end?' Others believed that: 'the government can only do so much. Do-gooders in the community do not help'. The solution is to build a good traditional community with values which allow parents, teachers, and the police to enforce the rules. One added that some families need to be pointed in right direction, 'there is a lot of support available and people just need to know where it is'. Another noted that country areas have lost a lot of government services.

One person thought that what might be considered to be 'support for families with children in trouble' would depend on what direction that support takes. Several respondents raised the topic of children leaving home and being provided with an allowance. One believed that some families should have their children taken away and supported the actions of the Department of Community Services. Others observed that some children are just rebellious and leave perfectly good homes. Some stated that the government should give parents back their rights. One added:

> *Parents should be able to give a child a smack to keep them in line. Children need to develop a healthy respect for punishment.*

One woman stated that:

> *While some families are not handling problems as they should, the government has done terrible disservice to society by creating programs that perpetuate problems.*

Many of those who disagreed with this statement believed that it is up to parents to take responsibility for their children's behaviour. Some called for a return to traditional family values.

Others noted the difficulty of finding appropriate solutions to social problems. One believed services should include community consultation in the development of appropriate programs for a community. She added:

> *...service providers need to see children within the home environment before deciding on what help and how much is required.*

Another thought that parents need to be willing to request and to accept help. One noted that it is difficult in a small community to admit you are in trouble. Some service providers also noted the concerns about confidentiality in rural areas. One claimed that in small communities, where everyone knows everybody else's business, people hesitate to actively seek help.

8.2.6 Community responsibility

Public perception of the need to control incivility was tested by asking residents whether they agreed or disagreed that:

> **More money should be given to cleaning up trouble spots: repairing broken windows, cleaning up rubbish and graffiti, than to programs to rehabilitate offenders.**

The majority of respondents (42%) agreed with this statement, 7% strongly agreed, while 24% disagreed with 9% strongly disagreeing. Nineteen per cent could not decide on this issue. Of these, two believed that the two aspects of the statement were mutually exclusive. Both prevention and cure were necessary to deal with the problem of vandalism. The responses of residents in the four communities are presented in Table 8.9.

Table 8.9:
Residents' responses to cleaning up incivility (percentages).

Community	Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Encounter Bay (n=23)	8%	31%	15%	23%	23%
Greenhills (n=30)	7%	47%	20%	27%	0
Hillnest (n=24)	11%	39%	17%	22%	11%
Reedy Creek (n=24)	0	54%	23%	23%	0

Most respondents agreed that prevention is better than cure. Some thought that vandalism was a community responsibility rather than a government responsibility.

One man stated that vandalism affects the look of a town. He added: 'restoration can be a worthwhile community project'. Another believed the residents of a community should repair such damage and claimed:

> *All types of families could come together to deal with the problem.*

One Greenhills resident believed that preventative programs were needed. He maintained: 'skills training programs, where graffiti vandals are trained to become graphic artists, can turn a negative to a positive'. Greenhills people were proud of the laneway in the central business district which had been transformed into an art gallery for local art-work, negating the abuse by graffiti vandals.

The majority of comments regarding this statement focused upon the need to have the offenders repair the damage they caused. Some respondents believed the parents of the offender should be responsible for the costs of the damage.

Other respondents thought public money spent upon repairing damage caused by vandals was wasted because the vandals so often re-offend. One added: 'covering up the damage does not get to the real problem. Offenders should be punished'. Another thought there was a need to have people monitor an area rather than paying money to repair the damage.

8.3 DISCUSSION

This chapter has provided an overview of rural resident's views on diverse aspects of criminal and social justice. The views people hold on such matters are important as they affect people's perceptions of the efficiency of the criminal justice system. These views also impact upon their feelings of safety and security within their community. These opinions also guide people's perceptions of government policies on welfare support for various groups in society.

To summarise respondents' opinions, it appears that most rural people believe that police should have more powers to enforce the law, but that there should be standards in place to ensure there is no abuse of that power. Drug abuse is a major problem in society and more policing of heavy drug use and drug dealing is needed. The courts need to impose tougher penalties for drug offenders. The inequities and inconsistencies in the judgements of the courts should be addressed. Communities should address problems of incivility to prevent ongoing offending. Additional resources should be targeted toward preventing crime. More programs to prevent the social problems that precipitate crime and to rehabilitate juvenile offenders are needed. However, the bottom line is that families must take more responsibility for the behaviour of their children.

Overall, residents opinions seemed to reflect the common polarisation in debate over law and order issues in Australia, which can be characterised as involving those who require the criminal justice system to be hard on the offence and the offender, versus those who wish to address contributing factors to crime (Shipway and Maloney, 1998).

There were some emerging themes in the respondents comments on these topics. Political correctness was viewed as government interference in representing the views of a minority of idealists, resulting in an imbalance of humanistic orientation over practical law enforcement and justice. There were generalised concerns over the loss of control by traditional institutions of control, such as the family and police, due to what were perceived to be misguided government policies. There also appears to be some resentment against some groups within society, such as the unemployed, Aboriginal people, single mothers, and so forth.

The similarity in opinions across the four very diverse communities was an interesting and unexpected finding. It suggests that rural residents have one set of views of how life should function within their community but other opinions on how society in general should function. Yet, the authors observed that within these common views, there were some contradictions. For example, respondents believed that government policies should not interfere in the roles of parents and children in a family. At the same time, respondents also expected the government to provide more support for families with children in trouble. Government welfare departments are often criticised for being overly zealous in their intervention and at the same time, are criticised for their inactivity if a child is seriously hurt. It appears that policy makers face a dilemma in providing solutions to social problems, including crime, where there is no defined boundary in public perceptions of what is acceptable and not acceptable in individual behaviour or the required intervention.

One observation made by the investigators was how much the media seemed to influence the participants in the study. Many respondents seemed to express themselves in remarkably similar terms, phrases and examples. The issues covered in these value statements are frequent news items and have been subject to considerable discussion by radio identities, newspaper journalists, television current affairs programs and documentaries. There is much commonality amongst the media in Australia. There is little variety in the news items presented across the country. Australians are also subject to a small number of nationwide broadcasts by radio identities, such as John Laws, who have been outspoken on several criminal justice and other social issues. It would be of interest to understand whether the views of such media identities merely reflect the opinions of the general public or whether one personality can influence public opinion to such a broad extent. Catch phrases commonly used by John Laws were quoted within the conversations of many of the participants in this study. While the sample represented a range of education levels, the majority of participants were relatively well educated. Most were

intelligent, articulate, and thoughtful in their responses and therefore the commonality in viewpoints was surprising.

One other explanation is that the communities studied have two layers of social organisation and culture that have developed over time. The first layer is their early history, which created the distinctiveness or diversity that exists between the communities, based on why a town developed in a particular location, the traditional economic base, and the culture and social organisation that evolved. Many of the people we interviewed were long time residents who are aware of, and more likely to represent their communities in terms of this uniqueness. They saw both the past and the present. The second layer is the communities' most recent history, and how economics, transiency of the population, transportation, and the mass media, have created similarities or homogeneity among the four communities. Hence, an opinion survey about criminal justice issues results in near identical perceptions among residents across diverse communities.

Chapter 9

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

9.1	Introduction
9.2	Summary
9.3	Discussion
9.4	Further Research
9.5	Conclusion
9.6	Recommendations

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This research was initiated to examine crime within the context of the economic and social characteristics of Australian rural communities. This study is the second of a two part comprehensive analysis of crime in rural Australia. In part one, quantitative analyses of census data and crime rates across 122 rural Local Government Areas (LGAs) in New South Wales, identified six diverse types of rural communities which were found to have distinct crime characteristics. The analyses revealed factors that implied greater community cohesion and integration were associated with less crime. Conversely, communities with lower cohesion and integration had more crime. The findings highlighted the enormous diversity of the relationship between social and geographic factors and crime. Rural crime appears to be a complex phenomenon that merits complex analyses and explanations. It was therefore crucial to conduct qualitative studies of rural communities to incorporate the local knowledge of residents based upon lived experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of crime and social factors within a community.

In part two, case studies, drawing on three sources of data were conducted in four towns. First, mailed questionnaires were administered to a random sample of residents in each community. Second, key informants were interviewed in each town to identify similarities or differences between the attitudes of residents concerning crime and other social problems. Thirdly, case studies investigated the incidence and types of crime experienced in each region and the factors that intervened between the success or failure of the residents to cope with crime.

9.2 SUMMARY

In chapter one of this report, the objectives of the present study were described. A summary of the methodology used in this qualitative study was presented in chapter two. In chapter three, the results of the self report mail survey of the four rural communities was presented. Respondents identified the strengths of their community as well as those factors they perceived were a problem in their towns. Lifestyle and environment in rural areas were valued by respondents. Unemployment was the most serious problem facing all four communities.

Chapters four through seven reported on the findings of the case studies of the four communities. The findings highlighted the heterogeneity amongst rural communities in Australia. Each community presented a unique profile of community strengths and problems, including patterns of crime. Each had a distinct lifestyle which had developed through the integration of the personalities of the residents and the economic and geographic environment of each community. The following section provides an overall comparison of the findings across the four communities.

9.2.1 Community strengths

Table 9.1 presents a comparison of participants' views of the strengths of their communities.

Table 9.1:
Comparison of perceived community strengths.

Encounter Bay (n=23)	Greenhills (n=30)	Hillnest (n=24)	Reedy Creek (n=24)
Lifestyle	Lifestyle	Environment	Environment
Environment	Environment	Lifestyle	Lifestyle
Diversity of the people	Friendliness	Friendliness	Community spirit
	Good schools	Trustworthiness	Friendliness
	Good sports facilities	Good schools	Trustworthiness
		Good health services	Low crime
			Good schools
			Sports facilities
			Strong leadership

Residents of all four communities reported that they enjoyed the lifestyle and environment of their rural locations. Perhaps this is not surprising since they choose to live there. Reedy Creek and Hillnest, selected because they more closely approximate the traditional type of community, revealed that personal qualities, such as community spirit, family values, friendliness, and trust, were valued by residents. The larger more diverse, more migratory and fragmented towns, Encounter Bay and Greenhills, experienced higher rates of crime and identified more objective aspects of their communities as the major strengths.

9.2.2 Community spirit

In Table 9.2, the sense of community and the perceived acceptance of newcomers to the district is compared across the four communities.

Table 9.2: Comparison of perceived community spirit.			
Encounter Bay (n=23)	Greenhills (n=30)	Hillnest (n=24)	Reedy Creek (n=24)
Community spirit:			
Perceived unity — many diverse groups	Divided community yet united in resolving problems	United, conservative, supportive: maintains tight social controls	United, strong community spirit, friendly, supportive.
Newcomers acceptance:			
Easy 31% OK 38% Difficult 31%	Easy 44% OK 13% Difficult 38%	Easy 21% OK 47% Difficult 32%	Easy 87% OK 6% Difficult 6%

The generosity and humanism of many rural residents and their commitment to the community was evident in all four communities. However, size is important when it comes to achieving a sociological ideal of 'community'. Encounter Bay is a large melting pot of diverse people and lifestyles. Consequently, achieving homogeneous agreement upon how to live and what rules to live by was comparatively more difficult. In contrast, Reedy Creek, the smallest community in the study, exemplified more unity of values and goal orientation, support and trust.

There appear to be some generalised social norms regarding the acceptance of newcomers to a rural community. There is an expectation that newcomers wanting to become a part of a local community need to be prepared to meet country people half way. Newcomers should be prepared to join social groups and be actively involved in community activities. In short, acceptance depends upon the personality of the individual, what they expect from the community, and their willingness to make a commitment to it.

9.2.3 Community problems

Table 9.3 presents a comparison of participants' views of the problems confronting their communities.

Unemployment was a universal concern across all communities. Economic decline, with the loss of local businesses from rural areas, was an additional concern. Unemployment, and the associated boredom, drug and alcohol abuse, poverty, family breakdown and poor parenting were perceived to have serious ramifications for the younger generation.

Drug abuse was of particular concern to the majority of people interviewed, and was considered to be a primary cause of much of the break and enter and theft that occurred in their communities.

Table 9.3:
Comparison of perceived community problems.

Encounter Bay (n=23)	Greenhills (n=30)	Hillnest (n=24)	Reedy Creek (n=24)
Impact of tourism	Unemployment	Unemployment	Poor health services
Unemployment	Economic decline	Economic decline	Unemployment
Drug & alcohol abuse	Drug & alcohol abuse	Increasing crime	Economic decline
Family breakdown	Crime	People leaving the district	People leaving the district
High welfare needs	Poverty	Loss of services	Lack of public transport
Lack of public transport	Family breakdown		Loss of services
	Loss of services		

These results are similar to those found in the United States where rural people identified alcohol abuse, an increase in crime, an increased use of illegal drugs, loss of family farms, and lack of jobs to be the five greatest threats to rural America (Hobbs, 1992). However, the findings of the present study reveal that economic issues were perceived as fundamental concerns and that crime and other social problems derive directly from economic conditions. It is of interest to note that the quantitative analysis in Part One of this study, found no relationship between economic measures and crime. Economic issues are commonly used as the ubiquitous cause and solution to local problems.

The rationalisation of government services from these communities, common in most parts of rural Australia, was a frequent complaint of residents. The loss of government services has been detrimental for smaller, inland communities leading to a loss of families and employment opportunities from the district, and difficulties in accessing much needed services. Respondents believed that the reinstatement of government services in rural areas would go a long way to providing more employment in these regions as well as more support for those in need. They believe there is a particular need to maintain basic services, such as health, education, and police to sustain small communities. While rural people accept that their choice to live in isolated regions means that not all services and facilities will be available, they do believe that basic fundamental services in their community are justified and warranted.

Lack of mental health support, particularly in small inland communities, was a concern where there was a high incidence of rural youth suicide. The universal concern about drug and alcohol abuse confirms the need for available expertise and support in rural Australia. Residents identified a need for more education and support for rural doctors, ambulance and other health professionals for dealing with psychiatric emergencies.

A lack of public transport was also a problem common to all four communities. The lack of transport severely limited the mobility of youth who needed transport for accessing employment or education opportunities. Young people in Encounter Bay were endangering themselves by hitch hiking. In small inland communities, a lack of public transport compounded the problem of drink driving.

The impact of tourism was a problem for the Encounter Bay community. Large numbers of people strain the town's infrastructure and create problems for the community, including increasing crime. There was a clear need for more government support for tourist communities such as Encounter Bay, which do not have sufficient resources to sustain large influxes of people. Local tax initiatives, such as a bed tax, would be one mechanism for generating local revenue to meet the costs of essential public services.

9.2.4 Crime

The views of residents on crime in their community are compared in Table 9.4.

Table 9.4:
Comparison of the sense of perceived crime in the community.

Encounter Bay (n=23)		Greenhills (n=30)		Hillnest (n=24)		Reedy Creek (n=24)	
Seriousness of crime:							
Serious	25%	Very serious	33%	Serious	21%	Somewhat serious	13%
Somewhat serious	56%	Serious	33%	Somewhat serious	32%	Not serious	87%
Not serious	19%	Somewhat serious	17%	Not serious	47%		
		Not serious	17%				
Increase or decrease in crime:							
Increased	56%	Increased	77%	Increased	72%	Increased	36%
Unchanged	44%	Unchanged	23%	Unchanged	22%	Unchanged	45%
				Decreased	5%	Decreased	18%
Compared to other rural communities?							
More serious	14%	More serious	60%	The same	11%	More serious	20%
The same	14%	The same	33%	Less serious	74%	The same	60%
Less serious	36%	Less serious	17%	Don't Know	16%	Less serious	20%
Don't Know	36%						
Major crime problems:							
Drugs	68%	Drugs	78%	Drugs	64%	Break & enter	42%
Break & enter	53%	Break & enter	82%	Break & enter	62%	Drunkenness	30%
Petty theft	53%	Petty theft	81%	Drink driving	54%	Drink driving	30%
Motor vehicle theft	36%	Bag snatching	90%	Petty theft	40%	Stock theft	17%
Drunkenness	47%	Car theft	75%	Stock theft	46%		
Prowlers	50%	Domestic violence	83%	Assault	39%		
		Drunkenness	82%				
Sources of information about crime:							
Friends & neighbours	50%	Newspapers	100%	Friends & neighbours	100%	Friends & neighbours	80%
Newspapers	57%	Co-workers	80%	Newspapers	75%	Local businesses	44%
Local businesses	43%			Television	50%	Newspapers	44%
Radio	33%			Radio	43%	Co-workers	25%

In relation to problems such as unemployment, economic decline, and drug abuse, crime was not the main focus of concern for the residents of any of these communities. Nevertheless, serious crime, when it occurs, has a great impact upon small communities. Such incidences confront the otherwise complacent safe world view of rural residents.

Drugs crimes were a particular concern of residents within all four communities. Increased drug use among young people, the increasing availability of hard drugs, and the perceived inability to detain drug dealers were commonly reported concerns. Break and enter offences and petty theft appear to be wide spread and on the increase. These crimes were perceived to be related to drug abuse and the need for users to find money for drugs.

Under-reporting of crimes was a common complaint among police. In Encounter Bay, some under-reporting by tourists occurred because either the offender or victim was moving on. Tourists on a tight schedule, required to return to their own country, often do not bother to report crimes. In Greenhills, fear of reprisal prevented some residents from reporting crimes to police. In Reedy Creek, the small size of the community was a deterrent to people reporting sensitive issues, such as sexual assault or child abuse. Another problem was the nonchalance of residents in reporting crimes on properties, such as stock theft. Stock theft and other property crime on farms emerged as a phenomenon that requires more investigation.

9.2.5 Blame

Residents' perceptions of who or what was to blame for crime in their community are compared in Table 9.5.

Table 9.5: Comparison of perceived causes of crime.			
Encounter Bay (n=23)	Greenhills (n=30)	Hillnest (n=24)	Reedy Creek (n=24)
Who is to blame			
Transient population	Lower socio economic groups: Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal- particularly unemployed youth	Outsiders who come to town	Professional criminals passing through town. Some of the transient population.
What is to blame			
Unemployment Poverty Lack of diligence by tourists	Unemployment Drug & alcohol abuse Parental irresponsibility Poverty Inequities in society	Unemployment Drug & alcohol abuse	Unemployment Boredom Drug & alcohol abuse

In all four communities, residents could identify some groups who they believed were associated with crime; the transient populations in Encounter Bay and Reedy Creek, the lower socio-economic Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals in Greenhills, and the outsiders who come to town in Hillnest. Unemployment and the associated poverty, drug and alcohol abuse were universally identified as the social causes of crime.

As noted in the introduction to this report, the W.I. Thomas' Theorem maintains that such perceptions, whether true or not, produce real consequences. This theory is the foundation of the Labelling Perspective (Becker, 1963). If residents believe that increased crime and drug and alcohol

abuse threaten their community, they will respond to these threats, if only by further dividing their communities into the 'good people' and 'those people'. If residents blame individuals who engage in the behaviour, they may devalue these individuals in the community and look to specialised programs to restore them to acceptable behaviour. Such social divisions diminish the sense of community and impede the achievement of common goals. On the other hand, if residents consider the causes to lie outside the community, they likely will do nothing (Hobbs 1994).

We observed elements of these phenomena in the sample communities. In Reedy Creek, crime was seen to be not of the community. The main perpetrators were perceived to be professional criminals who occasionally committed break and enters in the town because it was located on a major highway. Thus, residents perceived crime to be beyond their control, and they appeared not to dwell upon this threat. In the other three communities, there were elements of a 'them' and 'us' perception of crime, with some participants pointing the finger of blame at identifiable groups within the community. For example, in Greenhills, some people believed Aboriginal people were disproportionately responsible for crime in the community. Interviews with service providers revealed that this was greatly exaggerated. The redeeming feature of all these communities, Greenhills in particular, is that there were many concerned participants, service providers and community leaders who viewed crime as a whole of community problem and were implementing community initiatives that were holistic in nature.

In the quantitative analyses of crime in rural communities in Part 1 of this study, crime was found to be associated with communities with high proportions of Aboriginal people. Two communities were selected for case study because they had large Aboriginal populations. One, Greenhills, had high crime, while the other, Hillnest, had low crime.

The Hillnest community maintains control over crime through strong social controls and social cohesion which the Aboriginal community accepts and adopts. This unity of opinion and lifestyle, and a common belief in the successful relationship between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities, established the ideal of 'community' for Hillnest and provided the power to impose social controls. Being a small community in which everyone knows everyone else, deviant behaviour was quickly identified and was not tolerated. Newcomers to Hillnest had a difficult time being accepted into the community if they did not conform to the established standards. This included incoming Aboriginal families. If they did not conform, they were soon put under pressure to do so, or leave. Chantrill (1999) similarly found that in a northern Queensland Aboriginal community, deviant community members were required to answer to the Elders. The humiliation resulted in the desired behaviour change. This practice exemplifies Braithwaite's (1989) concept of reintegrative shaming where:

> *...the deterrence is not the severity of the sanction but its social embeddeness: shame is more deterring when it is administered by persons who continue to be of importance to us.*
> Braithwaite (1989)

The successful integration of Aboriginal people in Hillnest is due largely to the fact that the Aboriginal people have been established for over a hundred years in the region and are strongly attached to the place. Interviews with the Aboriginal residents revealed that they desire to conform to what are commonly perceived to be white mainstream societal values. The Walhallow people were extremely proud of the fact that six of their children were completing their final year of high school. They were happy that there were several mixed raced couples in the town. They strongly objected to being victims of crime, and were aware of the general perceptions Australians have about crime and Aboriginal people. Therefore, they exercised pressure for trouble makers to conform. Both quality of life and good reputation within the wider community were desired.

In contrast, Greenhills experienced more difficulty in controlling crime because there was no unity of opinions regarding social order. In Greenhills, in addition to the non-Aboriginal community, there are segmented Aboriginal populations, some who have traditional attachment to the area and others who have come to the region from other parts of Australia. Aboriginal culture stresses the importance of looking after the land where you were born. It governs many of the rules of Aboriginal life. Thus, when families are displaced and confront others with different values and different claims to the area, there can be tension. There was a lack of cohesion between groups in the Greenhills community and no consensus regarding acceptable social behaviour. Some aspects of law abiding behaviour can be considered to be deviant behaviour among some sub-groups within the community. When some groups perceive that they are marginalised and excluded from the wider community, the alignment with peer groups can become all important. Peer group pressure can be a major factor in deviant behaviour amongst juveniles. At the same time, expectations of behaviour of Aboriginal youth amongst the wider community, can become a self fulfilling prophesy (Becker, 1963). However, within these Aboriginal communities, we found some extremely concerned Elders wanting change and better relations with the white community and seeking solutions for their people. Likewise, in the non-Aboriginal community, there were residents who were genuinely interested in uniting to overcome many of the problems.

9.2.6 Safety and security

Table 9.6 presents a comparison of resident's responses regarding their safety and security.

Table 9.6: Comparison of safety precautions taken.			
Encounter Bay (n=23)	Greenhills (n=30)	Hillnest (n=24)	Reedy Creek (n=24)
Most felt safe	Most felt safe in the day: not after dark. Would drive rather than walk	Most felt safe	All felt very safe
75% always locked their homes	71% always locked their homes	88% always locked their homes	Most never locked their homes
63% always had someone watch their homes while they were away	86% had someone watch their homes while they were away	All had someone watch their homes while they were away	64% had someone watch their homes while they were away
63% had security doors/windows	71% had security doors/windows	75% had security doors/windows	36% had security doors/windows
50% had security alarms	28% had security alarms	25% had security alarms	None had security alarms
One had been a victim of crime	80% had been a victim of crime	One had been a victim of crime	50% had been a victim of crime

There was a common consensus that the responsibility for personal and property safety and security was largely the responsibility of the individual. Reedy Creek was the only community where people felt safe enough to not concern themselves with locking their homes, or even their vehicles. However, most people in all four communities were diligent about securing their properties if they were away for any length of time and ensured their neighbours or friends watched over their homes or properties.

In general, there appeared to be no great degree of fear of crime in these rural communities. Encounter Bay has relatively high crime, yet few were concerned about safety or security. In contrast, Greenhills also has high crime, but residents were more aware of crime and were more active in taking steps to ensure their personal safety and security. Most residents reported feeling safe in the daytime but parts of Greenhills were believed to be sufficiently dangerous that many residents avoid them, particularly at night. Only one elderly lady, who had been a victim of harassment, displayed any notable fear of crime.

Hillnest residents were very concerned about the increasing incidence of crime in their community. Residents were more diligent about securing their premises than residents in other communities. Nevertheless, crime was still not perceived as serious. In Hillnest, caution, prudence, and responsibility were imprinted throughout the community not because of fear of crime, but because of a commitment to traditional values. Reedy Creek residents were the least concerned about crime. Yet this community was selected for study because it experienced high rates of crime in 1996. Seven of those we interviewed had been victims of crime. Fortunately, crime rates had decreased since 1996. Reedy Creek residents tended to accept crime as part of life and were nonchalant about safety and security.

However, it was notable that two farm women in Reedy Creek reported feeling nervous when they were alone on their isolated properties at night.

Generally, there was little evidence of concern for other family members in any of the communities. Concern for the safety of children reflected normal parental concern.

Neighbourhood Watch was generally perceived as an excellent idea in principle, but irrelevant in most of these rural communities. 'Neighbourhood watch happens naturally', was a frequent comment. While there were some Neighbourhood Watch groups operating in some parts of these communities, we received several reports of groups folding through lack of interest. A common complaint was that these groups failed because they become monopolised by certain community members with agendas other than the safety of the community.

9.2.7 Police

Table 9.7 presents a comparison of residents' perceptions of policing in their community.

Table 9.7: Comparison of the sense of perceived policing.							
Encounter Bay (n=23)		Greenhills (n=30)		Hillnest (n=24)		Reedy Creek (n=24)	
Police presence:							
Driving	100%	Driving	75%	Driving	94%	Driving	80%
Walking	43%	Walking	25%	Walking	17%	Walking	None
In shopping		In shopping		In shopping		In shopping	
centres	39%	centres	44%	centres	15%	centres	6%
Staffing levels							
Sufficient	64%	Sufficient	12%	Sufficient	59%	Sufficient	20%
Too few	36%	Too few	71%	Too few	41%	Too few	67%
Are police doing a good job?							
Yes	31%	Yes	53%	Yes	56%	Yes	60%
Sometimes	23%	Sometimes	17%	Sometimes	25%	Sometimes	13%
No	46%	No	17%	No	6%		
Crime under control in the community?							
Yes	38%	Yes	29%	Yes	67%	Yes	47%
No	54%	No	53%	No	20%	Don't Know	47%
Respect for police?							
Yes	47%	Yes	53%	Yes	53%	Yes	67%
No	47%	No	35%	No	29%	No	13%

Attitudes toward police and policing were remarkably similar across the communities. Most respondents would like to see a greater police presence on the streets. In all communities, police were regularly observed patrolling in vehicles. However, most residents rarely sighted officers patrolling on foot. While most residents believed current staffing levels were adequate in

Encounter Bay and Hillnest, there was a general consensus that more police were needed in the communities of Greenhills and Reedy Creek.

Within Hillnest and Reedy Creek, there was frustration with the inability of residents to make direct contact with their local police station. All calls to police were directed through regional centres. Apart from the delays in service provision, there was a feeling of uneasiness about delays in the event of a serious emergency.

Regret was expressed about the current trend for officers to have limited tours of duty within rural communities. It appears to be important to rural residents for local officers to be integrated into the community, to enable people to get to know them, and break down any communication barriers that may exist. Of course, this creates difficulties for officers who must walk a tightrope between being a good citizen as well as a good law enforcer (Jobes, 1999). Furthermore, the more the community expects conformity to social order, the more impossible the job (Jobes, 1999). The present study found that the smaller the community, the harder it was for officers to separate themselves from the job. In Reedy Creek, officers' desire to take leave from their duties conflicted with the fact that they wanted to be a part of the community. To effectively police the community, and share the confidence of the local people, they needed to make themselves available when required. Weisheit, Falcone and Wells (1999) concluded that rural police must be particularly accountable and connected with their community in order to accomplish service as well as law enforcement.

Generally there was a belief among respondents that the police were doing the best job possible. However, there was also was a common perception that police were under resourced, and were inhibited by too much paper work and legal restrictions that in turn, reduced their effectiveness. One business owner maintained that it was important for police to provide some feedback to victims who report a crime, to ensure that they have a sense that justice has been done.

Most respondents appreciated that the job of the police was a difficult one. Some were concerned about the stress officers are under. One commonly used phrase that, 'police are more reactive and less proactive', suggested that some of these respondent's perceptions of police could be less of their own observations and more of those reflected in the national media. There appears to be overall respect for police in rural Australia. However, several respondents noted that respect depends upon the individual officer.

9.2.8 Community Solutions

Each community had strategies and programs developed to meet the particular social welfare needs of their community and counteract the problems of crime. Participants in the study also offered some worthwhile suggestions for combating crime. Some of these suggestions and initiatives would be applicable to other communities and are summarised below.

9.2.8.1 Encounter Bay

- The 'Uncle Project' was a service that was clearly in great demand by single parent families in the Encounter Bay region. This project, and other 'Big Brother' type programs, offer one solution to the problems faced by single parents families who have children in trouble with the law. More funding for this type of program is needed.

- The Mullwise program revealed the success of programs and resource material that was developed for youth by youth. There is a need to begin drug support programs for children aged as young as nine.

- One youth worker suggested that programs especially need to be developed for children aged 13 to 14 as this is the age group which tends to truancy and early school leaving.

- One resident recommended that policy makers when planning social policies or programs, should utilise the expertise of local volunteer organisations as they are better able to understand the problems within their community and evaluate the relevance of a particular strategy for their community.

9.2.8.2 Greenhills

- The initiative of creating a space for local artists to dissuade graffiti vandals was not unique to Greenhills. However, the success of this initiative in the central business district supports this idea as a worthwhile initiative in many other rural communities.

- The Greenhills Assistance Patrol is one initiative of which Greenhills residents were particularly proud. This initiative provided a solution to the problems of young children and others at risk being on the streets late at night and would be applicable in other rural communities with similar needs.

- Aboriginal community organisations controlled and developed by local Aboriginal people appear to facilitate successful service provision to Aboriginal people.

- The disadvantaged youth driver program was an excellent concept and one that could easily be adopted in other communities. It was based on the premise that providing driver education and a means for obtaining a licence leads to greater self esteem and more employment opportunities for youth.

- Greenhills was one of the growing number of rural communities in New South Wales which had developed a community crime prevention plan in collaboration with the New South Wales

Attorney General's Department. Through broad community consultations, the range of crime issues of concern to the local community are identified. Local crime issues are then prioritised and a Crime Profile Report (CPR) for each issue is developed. CPRs describe locations, victims, perpetrators, circumstances, times, incentives and opportunities, and consequences of local crimes. Strategies for addressing local crimes are then developed. This approach of prioritising and specifying problems provides the detail and analysis to assist a community to negotiate the delivery of local services more effectively and meaningfully. Furthermore, the process of developing CPRs can initiate dialogue between groups that have been in conflict (Shipway and Homel, 1999). More communities should be encouraged to develop similar strategies.

9.2.8.3 Hillnest

- The Police Citizen's Youth Club was obviously a very successful and necessary service for youth in Hillnest. There is a need for more of these types of youth clubs in rural communities.

- The importance of employment schemes for small rural communities, particularly where there are larger numbers of Aboriginal youth, was clearly demonstrated in Hillnest. The withdrawal of support for such schemes has serious ramifications for youth in areas where employment opportunities are extremely limited. When community schemes are successful, providing employment and hope where it would otherwise not exist, the social rewards are well worth the economic costs to government.

- The observation by one service provider that community service orders devalue volunteer work in the community, is an interesting observation.

9.2.8.4 Reedy Creek

- Youth camps, with role models such as football heroes, were very successful. These camps provided social contact for rural youth as well as an opportunity to expose youth to alternatives to drug or alcohol abuse and help them deal with issues such as suicide.

- There is a need for flexibility in the requirements for youth leaders in rural areas to enable the provision of youth groups and sports activities in communities where there is a limited resource base from which to draw volunteers.

- The suggestion by one farmer, that police and other emergency services be familiar with properties in their local district, noting the

main gates and access roads, house, and other main buildings, would contribute to expediency in an emergency.

9.2.9 Attitudes To Criminal Justice Issues

In chapter eight, the findings of an investigation of rural residents' attitudes concerning selected issues relating to criminal justice were presented. Irrespective of the diversity exhibited between these four communities, residents' opinions on the generalised aspects of criminal justice proved to be remarkably similar. Their opinions reflected the common polarisation in debate over law and order issues as reflected in the national media. This debate can be characterised as involving those who require the criminal justice system to be tougher on the offence and the offender, versus those who wish to address contributing factors to crime (Shipway and Maloney 1998).

It appears that many of the respondent's opinions may have been influenced by the media. There is much commonality amongst the media in Australia with little variety in the news or current affairs programs presented across the country. It would be of interest to better understand the nature and extent of the influence of the media on public opinion of criminal justice issues in rural Australia. Alternatively, the similarities in opinions may simply reflect the homogeneity of contemporary Australian society where economics, transiency of the population, transportation, and the mass media, have created similarities in the values of residents among the four communities.

9.3 DISCUSSION

This report has encapsulated the perceptions of rural residents about the issues confronting their communities. It is important to note that, the problems identified by community residents do not necessarily imply that those problems actually exist, except in the minds of the residents. Moreover, the problems exist in the context of the individual community. The meaning and prevalence of particular types of crime in one community, may be more, or less important to residents in another. For example, drugs were more tolerated in Encounter Bay than in Hillnest. When the problems do have empirical foundation, they do not necessarily have amenable solutions. For example, accurately realising that marital breakdown or the lack of jobs pose problems for the community does not mean that there are feasible solutions for them at this time. In spite of the limitations of knowing what the perceived problems are in these communities, it is important to understand social problems in conjunction with the underlying structures of the community. That knowledge becomes even more important when comparing problems of community characteristics between diverse communities.

People who are living in a truly cohesive social structure talk about what the others do, usually in conjunction with local institutions. They refer to 'our school', 'the students', 'the women at the church'. In actuality, the word 'community' is seldom used. Reference to what characterises community is real and relatively simple. One impression left with the authors is that people who are living in a more migratory, fragmented and often complex community, draw upon a different vocabulary. Service providers and professionals especially, are schooled in generalising concepts that can be depersonalising in operation. The people who use the term 'community' in these contexts are hoping for, working for, and even believing what they are saying is valid. Yet, community in this sense is an artificial construct.

9.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

Some possibilities for further research were identified in this study and are summarised below.

- The incidence and types of crime that occurs on farms emerged as a topic that warrants further investigation. The additional concerns of farm women being alone on isolated properties at night should also be further researched. The reasons for the under-reporting of crime in rural areas is of interest and warrants further research.

- The mental health needs of rural people and the gaps in mental health service provision is an issue of vital importance and one that should be investigated. The problem of alcohol abuse among young rural people persists and justifies continuing research. The social consequences of the recent trend of babies being born only in base hospitals should also be explored.

- The impact of tourism on small rural communities and the relationship to crime prevention would be a useful investigation. The effect of the media on the perceptions of rural people on issues of criminal justice should be further explored. It may be of interest to researchers to further explore the distinction between rural resident's values that they apply to their immediate environment in their local community versus those they apply to society in general.

- This research has convincingly demonstrated the diverse nature of rural communities and the effects of diversity on the types of crime they experience. This study has focused entirely on rural social structure. The implications of the findings may be profound for economic and comparative community structures in urban areas as well. Comparative analyses of similarities and differences between rural and urban structures are clearly called for.

9.5 CONCLUSION

Crime is a phenomenon which is a product of a complex interaction of many factors. Quantitative analyses, the focus of Part One, while invaluable, do not provide a complete explanation for such complexity. As such, it was necessary to conduct qualitative analyses, to draw upon the knowledge and experience of rural people to better explain crime in a rural community.

The findings of the qualitative case studies of this study support and compliment the quantitative analyses of community social structure and crime. Reedy Creek and Hillnest, selected because they more closely approximate the traditional type of community, revealed that personal qualities, such as community spirit, family values, friendliness, and trust, were closely linked to low crime. The larger more diverse, more migratory and fragmented towns, Encounter Bay and Greenhills, experienced more crime and were less inclined to identify personal qualities as community strengths. The one exception was economic issues. The quantitative analysis found no relationship between economic measures and crime. However, the residents we interviewed identified unemployment as the fundamental problem facing their communities. They were also concerned that the loss of government services from rural areas had led to a detrimental loss of families, employment opportunities, and access to much needed services. Crime was perceived to occur as a consequence of these social problems.

This research has found that crime is increasing in rural areas. However, rural residents displayed a relatively low fear of crime. They were not actively engaged in safe guarding their personal safety or the security of their homes or possessions. In fact, most appear to believe that personal and property security were largely the responsibility of the individual. However, there was concern that there had been a gradual erosion of the police safety net. What was important to rural residents was unemployment and economic decline in their region. In addition, they believed there is a need to maintain basic services, such as police, health and education, in order to sustain rural communities.

Understanding crime in rural Australia requires an understanding of rural life and the contexts in which crime occurs. Some crimes are common to both rural and urban settings, but the way they occur and the way they are responded to, tend to be very different. The characteristics of rural populations, their living conditions, and their problems are distinct from urban centres and vary between rural communities. Ongoing research is vitally important to understand crime and other social problems within the contexts of rural environments in Australia.

9.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have been drawn from the findings of this study.

■ **Recommendation 1**
That employment schemes be maintained and enhanced in rural areas, particularly where there are large numbers of Aboriginal youth to provide employment and hope where it would otherwise not exist.

■ **Recommendation 2**
That a closer examination of the under-reporting of crimes in rural areas be conducted. Issues relating to the fear of reprisal of reporting crimes to the nonchalance of residents in reporting crimes need to be investigated.

■ **Recommendation 3**
That further investigation of crime on farms be conducted including an investigation of the reported insecurities experienced by farm women when they were alone on their isolated properties at night.

■ **Recommendation 4**
That governments examine the needs of tourist communities such as Encounter Bay, which do not have sufficient resources to sustain large influxes of people. Furthermore, local tax initiatives, such as a bed tax, to generate local revenue to meets the costs of tourism should be explored.

■ **Recommendation 5**
That more support for mental health be provided for rural areas. Further more, rural doctors and other health personnel be provided with more education in mental health.

■ **Recommendation 6**
That more support be provided for mentoring programs such as the 'Uncle Project' and other similar programs that provide much needed support for single parent families.

■ **Recommendation 7**
That police and service providers in rural communities familiarise themselves with local roads and the location of rural properties, farm house and main sheds to ensure expediency in times of emergency.

■ **Recommendation 8**
That the Police Service re-examine the policy of calls from small rural communities being directed through regional offices.

■ **Recommendation 9**
That the police service re-examine the policy for restricting the term of service of officers in rural areas. Issues of the reliance on

personally knowing and trusting local officers in rural communities
in order to report crime also need to be investigated.

■ **Recommendation 10**

That police staffing levels be examined to ensure that at least one
officer is available on call most days of the week to maintain cohesion
between community and law enforcement.

■ **Recommendation 11**

That more local councils be encouraged to develop community crime
prevention plans to assist their communities to negotiate the delivery
of local services more effectively and meaningfully.

■ **Recommendation 12**

That drug education programs and resource materials for young
people be developed in consultation with youth and utilising the
skills of youth.

■ **Recommendation 13**

That drug support programs be developed for children aged as young
as nine.

■ **Recommendation 14**

That education or training programs be developed for children aged
13 to 14 to encourage attendance at school because this is the age group
which is most at risk of truancy and early school leaving.

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* The references using the actual community names are available from the authors on request.

APPENDIX 1

Residents perceived major strengths and problems of their community

Table 1:
Residents perceived major strengths of community.

Community Strengths	Byron Bay		Kempsey		Quirindi		Jerilderie		χ^2
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	
Lifestyle.	54	98.2	30	68.2	24	53.3	28	50	38.11 **
Employment opportunities.	14	25.5	0	0	1	2.2	4	7.1	33.428 **
Economic growth.	5	9.1	0	0	3	6/7	4	7.7	27.59**
Traditional family values.	8	14.5	7	15.9	16	36.4	21	37.5	33.31**
Low drug and alcohol abuse.	6	10.9	4	9.3	11	24.4	16	28.1	77.289**
Low crime	13	23.6	4	9.3	18	40.9	31	54.4	48.83**
Good sport facilities.	25	44.6	17	38.6	21	46.7	32	56.1	Not Significant
Good schools.	27	49.1	24	54.5	31	68.9	35	61.4	Not Significant
Good health services.	21	37.5	5	11.4	28	62.2	6	10.5	68.47**
Environment.	52	94.5	34	77.3	36	80	38	67.9	14.656 *
Strong leadership.	15	26.8	7	15.9	13	29.5	25	45.5	30.19**
Strong community spirit	25	45.5	8	19	14	31.8	30	53.6	16.119*
An interesting mix of people	41	73.2	12	27.3	13	28.9	18	31.6	35.949**
Friendliness	22	39.3	12	27.9	23	52.3	32	56.1	19.483**
Trust	12	21.8	8	18.2	22	48.9	32	59.3	31.949**

* Significant at.05 level; ** Significant at .01 level

Table 1 (continued):
Residents perceived major problems of community.

Community Problems	Byron Bay		Kempsey		Quirindi		Jerilderie		x^2
	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	(n)	%	
People leaving the district.	13	23.6	22	50	21	46.7	22	40.7	39.517**
Unemployment	43	79.6	42	93.3	39	86.7	31	54.4	26.864**
Economic decline.	7	14	34	79	30	68.2	30	56.6	51.883**
Family breakdown.	20	37.7	26	57.8	16	36.4	6	10.7	27.566**
Drug and Alcohol abuse.	37	68.5	37	82.2	17	37.8	7	12.5	70.91**
Crime	22	40.7	26	63.4	24	53.3	3	5.7	51.265**
Poor sport facilities	7	12.7	4	9.1	6	13.3	6	10.7	Not Significant
Inadequate schools.	2	3.8	4	9.1	4	9.1	3	5.3	Not Significant
Inadequate health services.	8	14.5	17	38.6	6	13.3	34	60.7	47.442**
Environmental hazards.	15	26.8	3	7.3	5	11.6	3	5.5	21.17**
Poor community leadership.	16	29.1	10	22.7	6	13.6	2	3.6	26.75**
Poor community spirit	11	20.8	8	18.6	3	6.8	2	3.7	24.63**
Division.	17	33.3	14	34.1	5	11.1	3	6	19.24**
No privacy	4	7.3	6	13.6	9	20	8	14.3	Not Significant
A breakdown in trust	11	20	14	32.6	6	13.3	3	5.5	25.375**

* Significant at .05 level; ** Significant at .01 level