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No.1 Violence, Crime and Australian Society

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This report is the first in the series *Violence Today* produced by the National Committee on Violence and published by the Australian Institute of Criminology.

On 16 October 1988 the Minister for Justice, Senator Michael Tate, announced the establishment of a National Committee on Violence. The Committee is a joint Commonwealth-State initiative and is required to make its final report to the Prime Minister and the Premiers by 31 December 1989. Its brief is wide-ranging and the twelve-member Committee will inquire into and report on violent crime and violence generally in Australian society, recommend preventive strategies, and suggest ways in which victims can be effectively assisted and offenders appropriately treated.

During its term the Committee intends to publish a number of reports in the *Violence Today* series which it hopes will generate interest in the topic and raise issues for debate. The series will include reports on: domestic violence; child abuse; violence in the work place and on the sporting field; victims; and offenders.

Appropriately, this first report looks at our knowledge about and perceptions of violence in Australia, past and present, and considers some of the strategies which might be used to minimise and prevent violence in society.

As part of its investigative process the Committee is seeking submissions from interested organisations and individuals. These should be sent to PO Box 28, Woden, ACT 2606. Submissions close on 30 June 1989.

FEAR, VIOLENCE AND 'LAW AND ORDER'

'Beware of Dangerous Australia, Japanese Tourists Warned' (*Sydney Morning Herald* 14 June 1988)

'The Violent Society. Public Fears Deepen as the Law Seems to Lose its Grip' (*The Bulletin* 25 August-1 September 1987)

'Nooses Sent to Police Stations' (*The West Australian* 12 May 1988)

'Rape and Drugs — Madness Stalks the Manicured Streets of the Capital' (*The Sun Herald* 10 April 1988)

These are just a few of the media headlines in recent months which mention the state of violence in Australian society today. They suggest that Australia is succumbing to a torrent of violent crime beyond the control of the traditional system of law enforcement. The impact of this type of publicity upon public fear about crime has yet to be fully measured, but there seems little doubt that publicity has helped to push law and order issues to the top of the list of contemporary community and political concerns.

Evidence of the high levels of public anxiety about violent crime can be found in the ubiquitous opinion polls which influence so much of the decision-making in the political area. In April 1986 the Gallup Poll found that violent crime was the 'number one issue of concern

for Australians'. This finding was the first occasion since 1977 that unemployment had not been the principal concern of those polled. Gallup reported that men and women were equally worried about violent crimes. Residents of Tasmania were found to be the most concerned about violent crime, and those of the Australian Capital Territory least concerned. More recent polls confirm these general trends. However, the levels of fear expressed in different parts of the country are likely to have been influenced by recent local crime events, for example, the publicity associated with several brutal crimes in Canberra has almost certainly had an impact upon public perceptions about the state of violence in the nation's capital.

The views of the community about the state of violent crime are influenced to a substantial degree by the attention given in the media to particular criminal events. Thus in reporting its 1986 poll results Gallup noted that the poll was conducted after the murder of Anita Cobby in New South Wales on 3 February 1986, but before the bombing of the Victoria Police Headquarters in Russell Street, Melbourne on 27 March 1986, when a policewoman was killed and a number of other persons injured.

Since these two events there have been further well publicised acts of criminal violence in Australia to fuel public alarm. Of these acts probably none have been more traumatic and troubling than the two mass shootings which occurred in Melbourne in 1987. In the first of these in Hoddle Street, Clifton Hill on 9 August, seven people were

killed and nineteen injured (*The Australian* 11 August 1987). Just four months later on Tuesday, 8 December a similar incident occurred in Queen Street in the heart of the city of Melbourne, resulting in eight deaths and injuries to five people. The gunman responsible for this violence, 22 year old Frank Vitkovic, subsequently leapt to his own death from the eleventh floor of an office building where the shootings took place (*The Bulletin* 22-29 December 1987).

Few Australians will probably forget the sense of personal shock and horror which these mass shootings provoked. Perhaps more than any other notorious crimes of violence in recent history these two events made Australians aware that the random and senseless carnage more commonly associated with television pictures beamed from abroad could occur in the midst of one of Australia's own supposedly tranquil cities. With this awareness has also come a realisation that remedial measures are urgently required to deal with a range of violent behaviours in society.

Much controversy currently surrounds the form these measures should take. For governments whose political survival may well rest on their response to violence and associated crime, the options may seem few. Persistent community demands for tougher penalties for offenders, coupled with increased resources and powers for law enforcement agencies, have proven difficult policies for most to resist even though these are at best short-term and costly palliatives for complex problems, for example, see Morison (1987). Attempts by certain governments to deal with these problems in a more effective manner, as in the case of gun control, have tended to spark strong and successful opposition from powerful lobby groups whose influence can sway election results. The impact of the gun lobby seems to have been felt in the New South Wales State Election especially in rural seats (*Sydney Morning Herald* 4 April 1988).

Despite these somewhat gloomy developments there are a number of measures which have been suggested or implemented which offer promise for governments, and society at large. In reviewing some of these measures a background analysis of the nature and scope of the violent behaviours against which they are directed is necessary.

A LEGACY OF VIOLENCE

The origins of the nation involve a deep legacy of violence both among those transported to Australia as a punishment for crimes committed on another continent, and those who joined them in the settlement of this country.

Scarcely a century ago Australia was a much more violent and dangerous society than it is today: rates of homicide were as much as ten times higher than those experienced in contemporary society, and bushrangers terrorised rural communities (Grabosky 1977).

Even during the first few decades of the present century violence was commonplace in Australia. In 1916, for instance, drunken soldiers caused havoc at Sydney's Central Railway Station. During this incident one rioter was shot dead by police, six were wounded, and four policemen were injured (Grabosky 1977, p. 108).

The Depression years also witnessed substantial violence associated with labour unrest and protest. In New South Wales, late in 1929, police opened fire on a group of striking miners at Rothbury, wounding seven and killing one. This particular event was one of historical significance, representing the 'most severe repression of labour protest in twentieth century New South Wales' (Grabosky 1977, p. 108).

CONTEMPORARY TRENDS IN VIOLENT CRIME

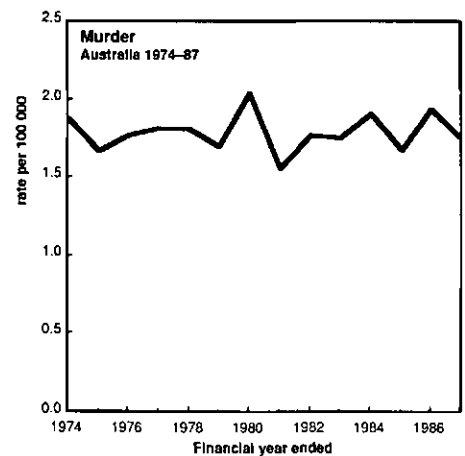
To recite facts like these is probably to give greater comfort to students of history than contemporary observers of the state of violent crime: the rates of all forms of violent crime have fallen significantly during the past 100 years but the short-term trends, in general, have been less encouraging (Grabosky 1977, p. 121).

Homicide

In the public mind the most serious form of crime is homicide. The term homicide incorporates a number of legal categories of offence including murder, infanticide, and manslaughter (Mukherjee 1981).

As homicide involves the death of a human being there is better data

FIGURE 1



Source: Mukherjee, S. K. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

about its incidence than other forms of violence. There are well-established procedures for investigating deaths occurring in the community as well as stringent obligations to report their occurrence. It is therefore assumed that almost all homicides, whether justified or not, are in fact brought to the attention of the authorities.

The incidence of homicide in Australia has been remarkably stable over the past two decades. National rates for the crime of murder are shown in Figure 1 for the period 1974-87. It will be seen from Table 1 that there are substantial variations in the rate of murder per 100,000 population around the country. The Northern Territory, in particular, in 1986-87 had a murder rate that was five times greater than that of any other jurisdiction.

No national study has been made of homicide but the South Australian Office of Crime Statistics (Grabosky 1981), and, more recently, the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (Wallace 1986), have made detailed examinations of homicide offences occurring in those states. As approximately 40 per cent of all Australian homicides are committed in New South Wales there is justification for making some cautious generalisations, based on this study's findings, about homicide across the nation. Some of the more important findings to emerge from this New South Wales study include (Bonney 1987, pp. 2-4):

- Homicide was overwhelmingly a crime committed by and against people who knew one another. More than 40 per cent of victims were killed by members of their

TABLE 1 Violent crimes reported to police and rate per 100,000 population Australia 1986-87

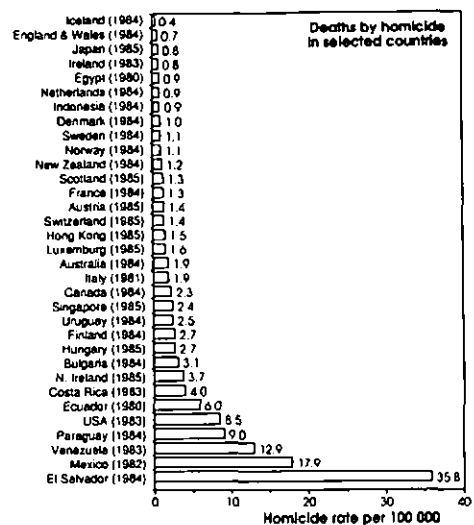
Region	Murder Rate	Robbery Rate	Other violent crime Rate
New South Wales	1.77	70.45	379.11
Victoria	1.63	50.23	393.81
Queensland	2.02	24.73	367.90
Western Australia	0.91	31.46	516.10
South Australia	0.94	52.44	734.80
Tasmania	1.12	8.74	
Northern Territory	11.66	37.56	1014.11
Australian Capital Territory	1.16	20.08	323.28
Australia	1.76	49.75	418.93*

*Excludes Tasmania

Source: Mukherjee, S. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Police Commissioners' Australian Crime Statistics Sub-Committee, *Reports*, March 1987 and September 1987.

FIGURE 2



Source: World Health Organization 1986, *World Health Statistics Annual 1986*, World Health Organization, Geneva.

families, approximately 20 per cent by friends or acquaintances and approximately 20 per cent by others known to the victim. Less than 20 per cent of the victims were killed by complete strangers.

- Almost one-third of homicides were related to some form of marital conflict.
- The most frequently used weapon was a gun (about 35 per cent). The rate of gun homicides was 60 per cent higher in rural areas than in urban areas.
- The rate of family killings was significantly higher in rural areas and guns were much more likely to be used in these killings.
- In the majority of cases suspects and victims in homicides were males. Approximately 85 per cent of suspects and over 60 per cent of victims were males.
- Women were approximately twice as likely to be the victims of homicide as they were to be suspects.
- Mental illness among homicide offenders was found to be no higher than in the population in general. Few offenders had any prior criminal record involving any form of serious violent offence.

This New South Wales study found that the rates of homicide in the state had not increased dramatically over the last sixty years. It was noted, in contrast, that in the period between 1960 and 1980 the homicide rate in the United States almost doubled (Wallace 1986, pp. 15-21). Figure 2 contains some more detailed international comparative data in regard to homicide which indicate that Australia has a homicide rate well below that of many other nations including Canada, the United States and West Germany.

However, Australia's rate is higher than that of New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The rate of homicide in the Northern Territory, on the other hand, places it among the highest in the western world.

Given the significant level of public concern about homicide, the data presented thus far may in one sense be viewed as encouraging. Offences of homicide do not seem to be increasing in Australia and are not closely related to acts of random terror committed by strangers, nor to violence in the streets of our cities. Further, contrary to popular belief, the statistics also suggest that the proportion of homicides committed by Australia's youth is not increasing (New South Wales Department of Family and Community Services 1988).

What is surprising and rather disturbing is that these facts are neither widely known nor understood within Australian society. A similar state of affairs was found to exist in Canadian society. In the early 1980s University of Toronto researchers found that most Canadians believed that the incidence of violent crime was as high as — or above — that of the United States (Doob & Roberts 1982). In reality rates of violent crime in Canada are approximately one-fifth those experienced by the United States. The researchers suggested that much of the public's misconception about the Canadian rate of violent crime could be attributed to the massive flow of information into Canada about violence which occurred in the United States (Doob & Roberts 1982).

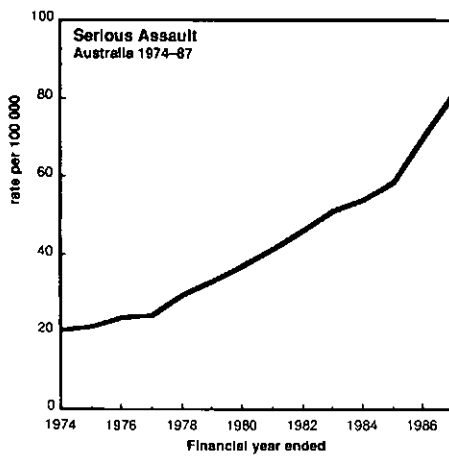
A similar situation, lessened to a degree by distance and the lower availability of such media reports, may influence public beliefs about the state of violent crime in Australia. Much of the daily news about crime

originates from and relates to events in the United States and so the concerns felt by many Australians may be mistakenly based on 'foreign data'. Similarly, Australians' perceptions of violence may also be related to their viewing of American television programs. More research is clearly required before this hypothesis can be substantiated, or, possibly, rejected. In Australia, as mentioned earlier, Tasmanians are the most concerned about violent crime but experience the lowest rates in the country. On the basis of Canadian research their concern may be founded on reports of violent crime occurring in mainland Australia.

Other Forms of Violent Crime: Serious Assault, Sexual Assault and Robbery

The trends in other forms of violent crime display less reassuring developments. Due to problems associated with the official reporting, definition and recording of violent crimes like serious assault and sexual assault, both national and inter-jurisdictional reviews of trends in such offences must be made with extreme caution (US Department of Justice 1988). Subject to this caveat, national trends within the categories of violent offences included in the uniform crime reporting program under the heading of Serious Assault, Rape and Robbery are shown in Figures 3, 4 and 5. It will be seen that in each offence category there has been a significant upward trend during the period under review.

FIGURE 3



Source: Mukherjee, S. K. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Although international data are not included in these figures, Australian rates of non-fatal violent crime tend to display similar characteristics to those of homicide (Mukherjee & Walker 1987, pp. 20-4). Thus rates of robbery remain significantly lower in Australia than those of the United States and Canada, as do the rates of serious assault. On the other hand, countries like New Zealand and the United Kingdom have a lower incidence of these crimes than Australia.

It is not known what impact changes in victim reporting behaviour and allied factors may have had upon the official statistics. Since the early 1970s, for example, the women's movement has devoted substantial attention to sexual assault. Each Australian jurisdiction has now effected some reforms in both the legal definition of such assaults and the way in which victims are dealt with by the criminal justice system (Scutt 1986). As a result victims may be more willing to report crimes and the police may be less inclined to view such reports as fabrications.

Both of these developments, if they have occurred, may well account for much of the rise in the reported incidence of sexual assault in the community without necessarily reflecting any real increase in the overall incidence of this form of crime.

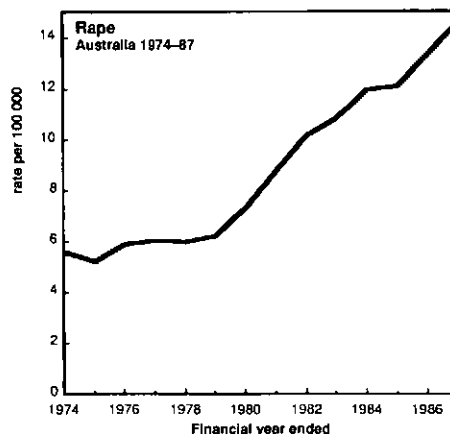
A similar situation may possibly have occurred in the area of domestic violence. As part of an extensive program to make members of the community more aware of this most pervasive and troubling form of violence, much has been done in the 1980s to mandate reporting of child

abuse, and to persuade health professionals and law enforcement officials to deal with family violence as a criminal rather than a largely private matter (ed. Hatty 1986; ed. Snashall 1987).

With two exceptions, no substantial research has been conducted on the occurrence of serious assaults within Australia. The aforementioned South Australian study (Grabosky 1981) reveals that during the three years 1978-80 the number of assaults occasioning grievous bodily harm remained fairly constant; however, those causing actual bodily harm rose from 331 in 1978 to 411 in 1980. Like the New South Wales study which will be mentioned next, males were overwhelmingly the victims of serious assault (almost 80 per cent) and almost 60 per cent of victims were clustered in the 15-30 year old age group. In 1988 the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research released a study of Police Reports of Serious Assault in New South Wales (Robb 1988). Based on an examination of police incident reports relating to this category of offence researchers found that these assaults had increased by more than 20 per cent per annum on average since the early 1980s; almost two-thirds of all attacks did not involve weapons and there was a decline in the use of weapons from 1982 onwards; more than two-thirds of all the incidents occurred between males and the most common age group of both victims and suspects was 20-29 years (Robb 1988).

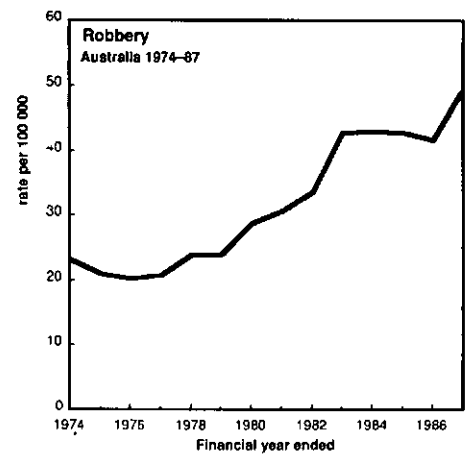
The New South Wales research suggests that the increase in serious assault cannot be explained by changes in reporting by certain

FIGURE 4



Source: Mukherjee, S. K. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

FIGURE 5



Source: Mukherjee, S. K. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

categories of assault victim, nor by factors like a rise in domestic assault incidents, gang disputes or street muggings. The last two offences accounted for very few of the serious assault reports (Robb 1988, pp. 23-4). The researchers concluded that so far as New South Wales was concerned the increases in reported incidents of serious assault 'do not appear to be due simply to increased reporting to police, but imply (at least in part) an actual increase in alleged offending. This point requires research, however, in order to be conclusively established' (Robb 1988, p. 36).

Nationwide research is needed to establish whether or not the findings from New South Wales have a wider relevance to the country at large. It is necessary to conduct regular crime victimisation surveys which now form a valuable data source about crime in most developed nations including the United States, United Kingdom and many European countries. These surveys allow an informed assessment to be made of the impact of changes in victim reporting behaviour upon official crime statistics, and of the nature and extent of the so-called 'dark figure' of crime — the crime which is committed in the community but not reported to the authorities (Gottfredson 1986, pp. 251-87). They also allow policy makers to assess the effectiveness of different types of criminal justice programs, including those designed to assist crime victims. Australian policy makers at present are almost completely dependent upon frequently questionable official crime statistics as a basis for decision-making (Mukherjee 1986).

THE COSTS OF VIOLENCE

Overall, this analysis portrays Australia as a relatively safe country and certainly one which does not deserve the type of international reputation for violence implied in the warning given to Japanese tourists by the headline cited at the beginning of this paper.

Local residents as well as tourists are affected by this form of misleading information. Based on inaccurate assumptions about the risks of becoming victims of a violent crime and perhaps as a result of associating property crime, graffiti and vandalism with violent crime, many citizens undoubtedly modify their normal patterns of behaviour, for example, avoiding inner city areas and public transport, particularly at night (Braithwaite et al. 1982, pp. 220-8).

As noted earlier, the fear of becoming a victim of violent crime is quite widespread among the general population. For instance, the Gallup poll conducted nationally in July 1987 found that one-third of the respondents thought it was somewhat likely that they might become a victim of violent crime, while about 10 per cent thought it was very likely. In fact, Australians are at little risk of becoming the victims of violent crime. Furthermore, as Figure 6 shows, the majority of crime committed in the community is directed against property rather than against the

person. Violent crime in Australia over recent years has remained quite stable at about 5 per cent of the total of all offences.

Although these statements are intended to reassure a frightened public about the actual incidence of violent crime, it is not in any way intended to denigrate or diminish the gravity of the problem presented by violence. The death and injury which results from violence in Australian society cause immeasurable suffering and loss to thousands of citizens. Some measure of the dimension of these losses can be obtained from recent research in the United States which shows that suicide, homicide and domestic violence involve enormous costs in terms of the loss of potentially productive life, as well as hospital and health care expenditure (Rosenberg et al. 1986).

Similar research has not been conducted in Australia, but even with the acknowledged lower levels of violence, the social and health costs to the Australian community and the personal costs experienced by victims of crime are totally unacceptable.

RESPONDING TO A COMPLEX PROBLEM

Apart from further research into the incidence and seriousness of violent crime in Australia, other appropriate responses are necessary. The relatively simple and immediate solutions provided by a criminal justice-oriented response are unlikely to have any long-term impacts and may well run the risk of exacerbating the situation.

For example, contemporary proposals to increase the severity of penalties for violent crime, coupled with a tightening of parole and remission provisions, if fully implemented, will almost certainly result in more serious problems for already crowded prisons. Although imprisonment has the obvious direct effect of protecting society by removing offenders who have committed violent crimes, this benefit is counter-balanced by the adverse effects of overcrowding. Overcrowding is one of the principal factors precipitating violence within prisons which has already been evident in a number of Australian jurisdictions. It is significant to note that the United States, which has led the western world in its move

towards using capital punishment and long prison sentences as a primary weapon against violent crime, continues to experience extremely high levels of violence within its society.

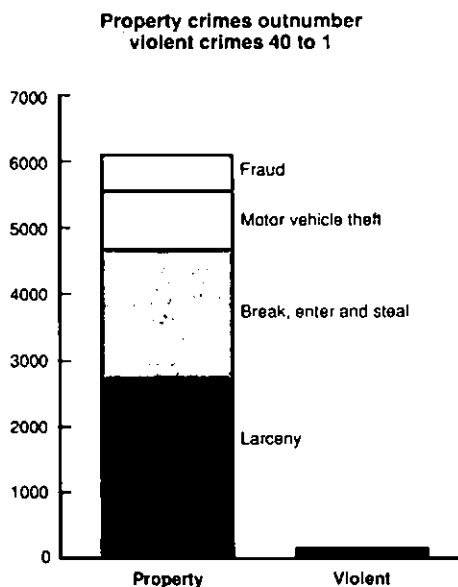
While much disagreement continues among researchers about the causes and prevention of violence, virtually all agree that the situation is complex. Most researchers would offer no quick solutions and would suggest that successful solutions will require a variety of sustained interventions (see, Rosenberg et al. 1986).

Current discussion amongst researchers about the causes of violence tends to be arranged into three broad categories — biological, psychological, and sociological with different schools of thought in each. The plethora of theories about violence and its causes means that the identification and implementation of appropriate prevention strategies represents a formidable task, which cannot be performed in an atmosphere of crisis, and with an expectation of immediate results. Rather, it is a task which requires widespread consultation and dialogue with the members of the many disciplinary groups who have an expertise and interest in violence related issues.

There is some encouraging evidence that governments in Australia are beginning to recognise these facts. Following the Queen Street tragedy in Melbourne the all party Social Development Committee of the Victorian Parliament received broad terms of reference to inquire into strategies for dealing with the issue of community violence. The Committee has recently tabled its initial report which contains a recommendation to establish a Community Council Against Violence (Parliament of Victoria Social Development Committee 1988). This proposed Council, backed by a research staff, would have as its broad long-term objective the prevention and reduction of violence. The shorter-term specific goals recommended for the Council include reducing 'the extent of inappropriate portrayals of actual or fictionalised violence; [changing] community attitudes and values; and [improving] the control of offensive weapons' (Parliament of Victoria Social Development Committee 1988, p. 4).

At the national level the Prime Minister heralded in December 1987 the establishment of a National

FIGURE 6



Source: Mukherjee, S. K. (forthcoming), *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, 2nd edn, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

Committee on Violence to assist in understanding and combating violence in Australian society. The announcement followed a special meeting of heads of government convened by the Prime Minister to discuss gun control and related matters. The National Committee on Violence began its work in October 1988 under far-reaching terms of reference.

While neither the proposed Victorian Community Council Against Violence, nor the National Committee on Violence, can be expected to offer instant cures for the problems of violence in our society, they promise to provide a balanced, realistic set of action proposals. These bodies are likely to advise on the need to change deep-seated attitudes and values which tolerate the use of violence in many aspects of our daily lives. It is change which will take a long time to achieve.

VIOLENCE AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The criminal justice system still has a role to play in dealing with the problem of violence in our society but the role should be rather different from that proposed by most of those involved in the contemporary debate about law and order. The most promising long-term solutions lie well beyond the responsibilities of this system, and as suggested above, almost certainly demand a massive program of re-education of the public about attitudes and values associated with the use of violence.

There are already attempts to effect such change in regard to the use of violence in the context of the family. Recent survey research has shown that as many as one-third of Australian males believe that the use of violence towards a spouse or child may be justified in certain circumstances (Office of the Status of Women 1988). Such attitudes help to explain the high levels of violence which occur in Australian homes, most of which goes unreported or unnoticed. Changing this situation requires a concerted, sustained and imaginative education program. The Commonwealth/State Co-ordinating Task Force on Domestic Violence was established in 1987 to consider how such an educational program can best be planned and implemented.

The possible role of the media in propagating pro-violence attitudes and behaviour has been examined by the Joint Select Committee on Video Material, and currently this topic is under investigation by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal. While the causative relationship between exposure to different types of media portrayed violence and actual violent behaviour remains elusive to scientific proof, many informed observers believe that there is sufficient peripheral evidence of such a relationship to justify certain preventive interventions (Parliament of Victoria Social Development Committee 1988). These interventions have included, in the case of television, the formulation of guidelines designed to prevent the screening of violent material during children's viewing hours (Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations 1988). In addition, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General meeting in Darwin on 30 June-1 July 1988 proposed that certain classifications of videos and films be banned from sale or distribution. However, these proposals have also extended to the banning of pornographic materials which contain no violence. To civil libertarians such proposals raise the danger of censorship again becoming a commonplace practice in Australia with consequent infringements on freedom of speech and expression (Parliament of Victoria Social Development Committee 1988).

With certain caveats, these developments offer the possibility of future reductions in the levels of violence committed in Australia, but the support and assistance of the criminal justice system will still be needed if they are to succeed. To conclude, it is proposed to examine what form this assistance and support might take within each of the major agencies involved.

Policing

Apart from traditional law enforcement responsibilities, Australian police forces are giving increasing recognition to their role of preventing violence within the community. 'Community-based policing' or, more appropriately, 'problem orientated policing' involves police working jointly with the community to identify their principal concerns about crime, and to devise methods of addressing these concerns in ways which

prevent or lower the risks of criminal victimisation (Eck & Spelman 1987). The impact of this new approach can be seen in a number of areas including the response made to domestic violence, youth crime and in ways of ensuring the well being of those held in police custody, for example, *see* Grabosky (1988).

In regard to domestic violence, police are now being encouraged to deal with it as a 'real crime' rather than as simply a matter to be resolved between the parties involved. Research shows that such intervention, including arrest, helps prevent repeated violence which sometimes culminates in a fatal assault (Sherman et al. 1986, pp. 145-74).

When dealing with youth crime new preventive strategies adopted by police stress the need for much greater use of cautioning powers in appropriate circumstances, and for the development of a better understanding of the rights, responsibilities and needs of young people. School-based policing programs, like that now widely implemented in the Northern Territory, are regarded by some as a useful and promising example of the use of such strategies (ed. Harvey 1987, pp. 139-48).

The Adjudication Process

For those involved in the process of adjudicating the guilt or innocence of persons charged with offences of violence the principal objective remains that of ensuring that accused persons are dealt with in a just and fair manner. This may well involve determining whether or not that person is suffering from some mental disability which may preclude them being fit to stand trial, or may lead to their acquittal on the ground of insanity. There are ways in which the screening mechanisms required to make decisions of this type might be handled in a more effective manner (Roesch et al. 1980; Roesch et al. 1984).

The quality of all the information made available to the judicial officer responsible for sentencing an offender convicted of a violent offence is also important. A contentious question is the extent to which information should be made available about the impact of the violent crime upon the victim as part of the sentencing decision. The view expressed on this subject in the recent report of the Victorian

Sentencing Committee was that victim impact statements, as they are termed, should not be part of the sentencing data considered by a judicial officer (Victorian Sentencing Committee 1988, vol. 2, pp. 540-6). In South Australia, on the other hand, the government has endorsed the use of victim impact statements. Commentators who support the use of victim impact statements have suggested that without such a statement judicial officers may neglect or misconstrue the effects of a serious crime upon a victim and, as a result, not adequately sentence an offender for that offence. Part of that sentencing process must also involve a consideration of the types of facility available to provide treatment for any convicted violent offender. This issue leads to a consideration of the correctional aspects of the criminal justice system response to violence.

Corrections

There is a substantial deficiency in the range of and information available about treatment programs which can be offered to those convicted of violent offences within Australia. The likelihood of imprisoned violent offenders, particularly adult offenders, receiving any form of treatment is quite slim. Correctional services simply lack the resources to provide such programs, or they are not minded to develop them because of other competing priorities. This is an area where research is required. There is also a need for the further development of community-based correctional programs to deal with those offenders convicted of violent offences who may still be kept safely outside prison walls, either with the assistance of drug therapy or through the application of probation and parole supervision.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that a high level of public concern is being expressed in Australia about the state of violent crime. While acknowledging that much of this concern is justified, and that there is a troubling and deep-seated problem of violence within Australian society, an attempt has been made to provide a balanced appraisal of the nature and scope of the problem as well as pointing to some of the more promising

strategies which might be applied to deal with it.

It has been suggested that certain strategies, and particularly those associated with contemporary law and order political platforms, have little to offer in the way of long-term solutions to the problem of violence. Rather, a number of much more difficult, time consuming and often costly interventions will be needed to begin to make a major impact on the levels of violence being experienced by Australians. There is substantial evidence that much violence results from behaviour learned from a variety of sources including parents, peers and the media. Changing these learning experiences is a formidable, but not impossible task. The task is not one which is for the criminal justice system alone: all members of society must make contributions in order to provide a more safe and peaceful environment.

Note: This is an abridged, updated version of the 1988 South Australian Justice Administration Foundation Oration presented at the South Australian Police Academy, Fort Largs on 13 July 1988.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In preparing this paper I have received enormous assistance from Jennifer Norberry, Satyanshu Mukherjee and Lavinia Hill. To each of these members of the Australian Institute of Criminology staff I express my warm thanks. Responsibility for the final product is of course mine alone.

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