INTRODUCTION TO PART 1:
OVERVIEW

It is fitting that the first paper of the proceedings is by David Goldie, since it was his television program that initiated the conference and a lot of the interest in it. He describes how his motivation for doing the documentary increased with the research and the discovery of how under-reported and secret the crime of rape is. He also explains why he included rapists—so that their motivation to control, humiliate and degrade would be clear.

Spangaro provides an overview of the research (and its difficulties) that has been conducted to assess the incidence of sexual assault. She suggests that sexual assault may end up affecting nearly half of Australian women. Yet, she points out that there is a great reluctance for people to accept the depths of the crime and that, by generating a concept of 'real' rape (stranger, weapon), we are able to keep the figures down. Another consequence of a narrow definition is the extremely low reporting rates of sexual assault with an even lower imprisonment rate.

Easteal's paper reports on the findings of the Australian Institute of Criminology's national questionnaire concerning beliefs about rape. The results of almost 7,000 surveys are described as very tentative and should be treated only as suggestive. The study found that there continues to be an adherence among some Australians to fallacious myths which see rapists as mentally ill, rape as involving a weapon and being about sex and not about power, and beliefs that attribute at least part of the responsibility for sexual assault upon the victim. Males were generally less enlightened in their attitudes than the female respondents.

Moran's overview is focused upon rape offences that were reported to the Queensland Police Service. She found that a small proportion involved a weapon, that almost two-thirds took place in a residential dwelling, and three-quarters at night time. Slightly more than half of the offences had ended in arrest. More than two-thirds of offenders were known to the victim in some way; and almost one-quarter of rapes were committed by a family member. The latter fact was significantly higher than found in other similar research in South Australia and Victoria.
From Moran's police data, we turn to the sexual assault workers. Byrnes and Kendall report on findings from the Victoria phone-in for survivors which found that a high proportion did not report their rape because they did not believe that the police would believe them or that reporting would do any good. Most who had dealt with either the police or the courts had found the people unsupportive at best and a nightmare at the worst. Byrnes and Kendall report that similar findings in New South Wales contributed to the formation of a group—SCARS (Social Conscience Against Rape and Sexual Assault)—to push for change within the legal system.