RURAL CRIME IN AUSTRALIA: CONTEMPORARY CONCERNS, RECENT RESEARCH AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS[1]

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ABSTRACT   This paper considers rural crime in Australia, a topic that until recently has lain dormant among criminologists. It summarises the substantive nature of rural crime by placing contemporary findings into historical perspective. It argues that problems associated with contemporary crime in rural areas have evolved from long-standing historical experience. Since its formation, Australia has had: a). a propensity for autocratic dominant state control; b). a concern with the miscarriage of justice; c). a concern with violence and, more subtly; an interpretation of rural areas as mundane. The paper describes the evolution of research on rural crime in Australia in conjunction with these concerns, which have dominated research and policy formation. It then presents recent research and social policies that indicate a growing and conscious awareness of the complexity of crime in rural areas. Finally, it addresses future directions for research and social policy addressing crime in rural Australia.

1. INTRODUCTION

Australia is arguably the most rural and most urban of all countries. This diametrically opposed logic stems from the converse facts that while eighty-five per cent of Australians live in cities, most of Australia is sparsely settled. This conceptual ambiguity may be the basis for the relative absence of analyses of crime in rural Australia.

There are many sound reasons why more attention should be paid to rural crime in the nation. The economic and cultural contributions from these areas are essential to the well being of the nation. Demographically, approximately 2.7 million people, 15% of the population resides in locales with fewer than 1000 residents (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998a). In 1996, agriculture provided

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nearly five per cent of Australian employment and thirty-five per cent of exports (Lloyd and Malcom, 1997). Other rural based primary industries, such as mining and tourism, contribute disproportionately to the Gross Domestic Product and exports, figures that are multiplied as they pass through the economy. Nevertheless, the relative loss of employment opportunities has been much greater and with more devastating impacts on rural areas than in the cities. The characteristics of rural populations, their living conditions, and their problems, differ significantly from their urban cousins. Analytically, rural communities in Australia are an unstudied crime laboratory, offering new opportunities to investigate theoretical and methodological issues that can scarcely be studied in any other industrial nation.

Scholars have gradually begun to address characteristics, causes, and solutions for such crime. Although earlier research occasionally included some dimension of rurality, no conscious identification connecting rural and urban crime occurred until the last decade. The paucity of research on rural social cohesion and crime is particularly striking (Jobes, 1999). Recent reviews of literature on rural crime in the United States (Weisheit, Falcone and Well, 1999) and Australia (Hogg and Kerrington, 1998) have been published. During the past three years, The Australian Institute of Criminology has jointly organised conferences on rural crime at Charles Sturt University and the University of New England. This paper provides a brief summary of the small but burgeoning literature and programs directed toward rural crime in Australia, including findings from the most recent of these conferences.

2. PAST AND CURRENT CONCERNS WITH RURAL CRIME IN AUSTRALIA

Rural crime, law enforcement and social justice have simultaneously illustrious and tarnished traditions in Australia (Sturma, 1983). The goldfields provided the setting of crime endemic in a frontier (Thurgood, 1988). They established the mystique of the bushranger. They also provided the stage for the mutual antagonisms between police and miners to be played out (Chase and Krantz, 1995). Conflicts in Victoria did much to further professionalisation of policing in the nation (Disher, 1981, Summers, 1994). Several issues that were evident during the founding era, violence, cultural discrimination and social disorganisation, remain evident today. Others, such as drug offences, suicide and fragmented families, are more symptomatic of contemporary society. The most violent confrontations against Indigenous people by the colonising populations occurred in rural agrarian areas. Yet, Aboriginal trackers became heroes in the bush (Bohemia and McGregor, 1995). The most violent Australian massacre in modern times occurred not in a city but in a rural Tasmanian tourist site. While not symptomatic of rural crime, the tragedy at Port Arthur led to a strict revision of the nation's gun laws and to an awareness that serious crime occurs in rural areas.

This brief history of concerns about crime in Australia exemplifies persistent issues relevant to rural crime. The first is a propensity for autocratic dominant state control that is particularly manifested in police forces. Although strict

centralised control is justifiable in the sense of a universally fair justice model (Cunneen and White, 1995), it runs the risk of being insensitive and unaccommodating to rural communities. The second issue, a concern with the miscarriage of justice, follows from the first issue. Early events following colonisation exemplified two tangents of rural injustice. Law enforcement was often harshly administered against lower social and economic groups, both white and people of colour. Rigid and brutal control, whether formally or informally sanctioned, constituted an invasion against Indigenous people, and set the stage for contemporary conflicts. The third issue is a concern with violence. Control of firearms, has been central to this concern and has disproportionately impacted rural residents (Sarre, 1994). The fourth and most subtle issue is an interpretation of the bush as mundane. Except for the relatively few and volatile hotspots of crime in rural Australia, concerns have occupied a null set that has created a virtual vacuum of knowledge about rural crime.

More recent concerns reflect underlying and persistent social injustices that are symptomatic of factors associated with rural crime. Rural Australia suffers from high levels of serious social problems that merit investigation in conjunction with crime. Suicide among young rural men is among the highest in the world (Dudley, Waters, Kelk and Howard, 1992). Rural unemployment and underemployment are similarly high. Weatherburn and Lind (1998) have documented the effects of economic and social stresses on regional crime. This paper examines how the presence and complexity of social problems and crime in rural Australia have evolved and currently are being addressed by social scientists.

3. THE EVOLUTION OF RESEARCH ON RURAL CRIME IN AUSTRALIA

The meaning of rural and how important rural is for explaining behaviour has been contentious for decades (Dewey, 1960). One of the earliest and most resilient meanings stems from Tönnies' (1957) notion of *Gemeinschaft*, which contrasted rural community with urban society, *Gesellschaft.* Traditionally, rural communities have small populations subsisting on local production and services. Their residents know each other well, communicate face-to-face, and share common norms. They share and value a common identity distinct from other people and places. Few true *Gemeinschaft* exist in an industrialised world with electronic media and rapid transportation. Nevertheless, the more *Gemeinschaft* qualities that modern places have, the closer they are to being cohesive communities. These attributes are especially present and persistent in rural places. Crucially, for contemporary Australia, stable, cohesive communities typically prevent or reduce social problems and crime. Rapidly changing and fragmented communities may increase them.

The first projects focusing on crime in rural Australia were case studies of small towns published only a decade ago. *Crime in a Rural Community,* by O'Connor and Gray (1989 is a seminal analysis of the small town of Walcha, NSW that precursed much subsequent research in Australia. O'Connor and Gray's predominant finding was that Walcha had relatively little official crime,

as might be expected of a small, stable, homogeneous, agricultural community. However, in reviewing comparative statistics from Mukherjee *et al* (1987), they found rural areas, overall, had relatively high assault rates. The case study methodologies of these early projects, while fitting for introductory analyses, did not permit comparative or quantitative analyses of rural social structures on crime. At about the same time, Dempsey (1990) was investigating the relationship between community structure and social problems in a small Victorian town. Through extensive interviews and observations, he identified two groups whom "respectable" people in *Smalltown* socially and symbolically excluded from community life. "No-hopers" and "Blockies" were perceived to account for most alcohol and drug abuse, and domestic violence, problems that remain common to rural areas. Dempsey uses this discussion to analyse how local prejudices work against disadvantaged residents.

Two important contributions come from these early works. First, they initiated research that others could build upon, challenge and approach from other perspectives. Second, they implied that not only did rural areas have social structures that distinguished them from cities, they also had diverse social structures that needed to be explored in order to understand variations in rural crime. These works acknowledged findings by Mukherjee *et al,* that more violence occurred in states with higher proportions of rural residents, especially the Northern Territory, while cautioning that violence accounted for less than four per cent of reported crimes. Coorey (1990) and Cowlishaw (1988) had already discussed crime in racially divided rural communities, indicating that local crime partially reflected local prejudice and discrimination in the justice system. Braithwaite (1989) was also instrumental for later research on rural crime. *Crime, Shame and Reintegration* drew extensively from a community model that initially evolved from interpretations of rural areas. It has become a nearly universal reference for subsequent investigations of crime, social justice and rehabilitation in rural areas. Together with the works of O'Connor and Gray, and Dempsey, it articulated many pressing issues related to rural social problems.

The next stage of research involved further specification of types and patterns of rural crime. The specification followed three tangents. The first tangent examined substantive issues, particularly Aboriginality, domestic violence and firearms, in more detail. These studies most frequently relied upon descriptive statistics or case studies. Cunneen (1992) identified the high levels of Aboriginal crime in New South Wales and associated them with policing and the criminal justice system (Luke and Cunneen, 1993). Gale (1990) and her co-authors drew similar conclusions, focusing more specifically on levels of differences between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal youth in South Australia. Broadhurst, Ferrante and Susilo (1991) similarly demonstrated highly disproportionate arrests of Aboriginal youth in Western Australia. Rural family violence also emerged as a serious issue. The NSW Government (1985) had published reports describing the higher incidence of rural domestic assault by the mid 1980s. Poiner (1990) explained rural domestic violence within power relationships that perpetuated traditional male domination. The call for police that were responsive to issues

identified by research soon followed. Butler (1993) called for the development of special services that were sensitive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal youth.

The other tangent involved increasingly sophisticated analyses of secondary data sets, though they also often addressed substantive issues. As will become evident, existing data suggest that rural crime is comparatively serious. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 1984) had begun reporting rural crime statistics in the mid-1980s. However, no particular substantive or theoretical interest in rural crime had become evident. Official systematic analyses of rural crimes still are not provided by the ABS (1998b). Devery (1991) empirically demonstrated the variation in conviction rates, as distinct from reported crimes, through statistical comparisons of NSW LGAs. He delineated rural areas in NSW that had particularly high conviction rates. He then clarified complex and disproportionate effects of social and economic disadvantage. Poverty, unemployment, instability, low qualifications and other variables were associated with arrest rates. Aboriginal people were especially vulnerable to the disadvantages of those variables.

The first examinations of the effects of policies also occurred during the early nineties. In her case study of Walgett, NSW, Burns (1992) concluded that although there was a reduction of drinking on the street, following the legislation of "alcohol-free zones", there was no reduction in the rates of recorded assaults, offensive behaviours, or malicious damage. As the Port Arthur Massacre stimulated heated political debate and rigid gun control policies, the higher representation of firearms in rural places became evident. Although not specificying rural distinctions, Polk and Ransom (1991) had already identified two conditions common to rural areas, including gun ownership, as predisposing factors for homicide.

4. RECENT RESEARCH INVESTIGATING RURAL CRIME

Scholars are now consciously investigating the dynamics of rural crime in Australia. This section presents recent research into the measurement and causation of rural crime. The Conference on Crime in Rural Communities at the University of New England in February 1999 provided numerous examples of current research related to rural crime in Australia. Quantitative analyses have been facilitated by the development of sophisticated data collection and analysis capabilities, such as the Computerised Operational Policing System (COPS) system of the New South Wales Police Service (NSWPS) and integrated data sets, such as BOCSAR. Graycar (1999) has compared a variety of crimes in NSW Statistical Divisions to demonstrate how varied regional crime is. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate how extremely different Sydney, the urban centre, is from other regions. Because of the size of its population and sheer numbers of crimes, crime rates in Sydney heavily influenced the rates for NSW. Sydney had the highest rate of Armed Robbery, more than double that of the next highest region. On the other hand Sydney had the lowest rate of sexual assault, less than one-third of the rural Far West.
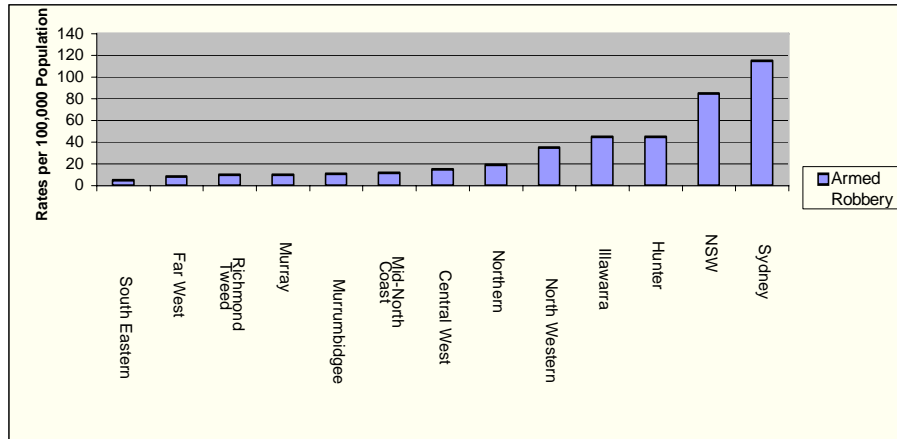
Figure 1. Armed Robbery, NSW Statistical Divisions: 1998
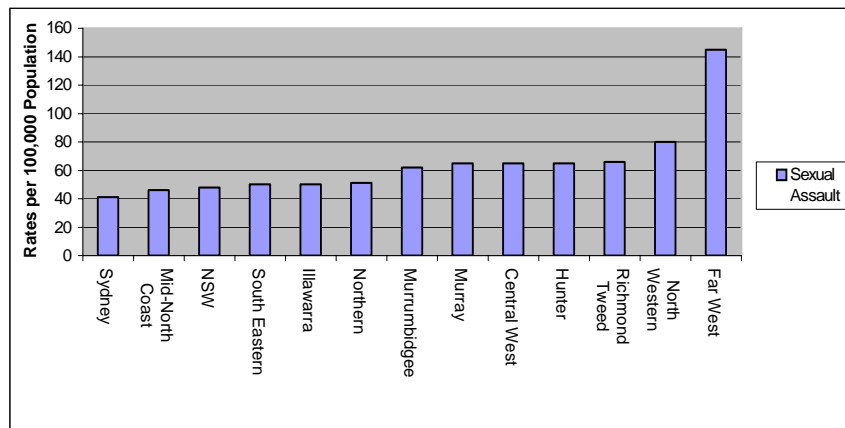**Source:** Graycar (1999)

Figure 2. Sexual Assault, NSW Statistical Divisions: 1998
Source: Graycar (1999)

Recent research on rural crime involves further specification of issues that earlier had been identified as crucial. Jobes, Crosby, Weinand and Donnermeyer (1999) developed cluster analyses of census and crime data to identify six types of social structures that place rural communities in NSW at different risks for crimes. Figure 3 graphically displays the mean standardised score profiles for each of the six clusters. Larger and, especially, middle-sized inland (Cluster 5) towns had the highest levels of most types of crime. Levels of different offences; assault, motor vehicle theft, break and enter and drug offences, varied greatly across types of communities. For example, drug offences were relatively low in
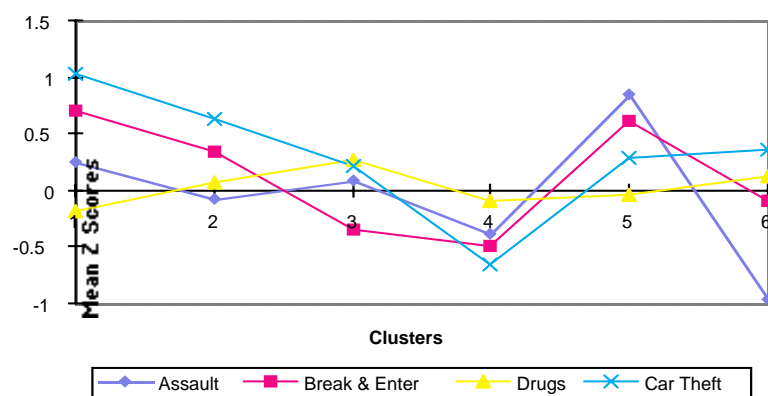
Cluster 1: Large Urban Centres   Cluster 4: Small Agricultural Towns
Cluster 2: Coastal Communities   Cluster 5: Medium Inland Communities
Cluster 3: Small Stable Communities   Cluster 6: Satellite Communities

Figure 3. Mean Standardised Profile Score for Four Types of Crime in Six Kinds of Communities in New South Wales: 1996.

Source: Jobes, Donnermeyer, Crosby & Weinand, 1999.

centres and coastal towns (Clusters 1 and 2). Overall, small stable towns (Cluster 3) and small agricultural towns (Cluster 4) had low crime rates. Local Government Areas in high-crime clusters generally had higher migration, family instability and unemployment. Assault, sometimes stereotypically discussed as a rural offence, was identifiably high in cluster 5 and low in Clusters 4 and 6. Cluster 5 had a high proportion of Aboriginals who were affected by these measures of social disorganisation. The findings demonstrate that rural communities and rural crime are multi-faceted and complexly interrelated. They also substantiate that stability and cohesion of rural social structures are important precursors of social problems and crime.

The Crime Research Centre at the University of Western Australia was among the first to identify regional variations (Harding, Morgan, Ferrante, Loh, and Fernandex, 1997). While rural Western Australia on average had lower crime rates than Perth, the largely rural Mid West had higher levels of burglary than Perth. At the other extreme, the South West had rates that were less than one-third of Perth. Some regions (Great Southern, South West, and Wheatbelt) had consistently low crime rates. Others (Goldfields-Esperance, Kimberley and Mid West) had consistently high crime. Their findings also indicated that the largest towns, eg Geraldton and Kalgoorlie, in rural regions with high crime, accounted for most of the crime in the region. The rates for property crimes and burglary in outlying rural areas typically were relatively low. Table 1 summarises the rates of burglary-dwellings crimes and motor vehicle theft crimes. Note, these two crime rates do not add to total crime: violent crimes, drug-related crimes and owner property crimes are omitted from this table.

Table 1. Total Crime, Burglary (Dwellings) and Motor Vehicle Theft Rates: 1996.

| Region | Total Crime | | Burglary (Dwellings)* | | Motor Vehicle Theft | |
	(n)	(rate)	per 1000 Population	per 1000 Dwellings	per 1000 Population	per 1000 Motor.Vehicles
Perth	*209594*	*169.8*	*25.7*	*63.6*	*9.5*	*17.2*
Gascoyne	2169	146.8	14.8	37.5	3.7	16.8
Goldfields-Esperance	9194	160.0	18.3	52.3	10.0	26.6
Great Southern	4112	85.6	10.4	24.2	2.0	4.2
Kimberley	5247	158.9	19.8	65.1	6.9	40.4
Mid West	8227	160.9	26.1	66.5	5.2	13.1
Peel	7299	118.3	16.2	33.9	5.9	12.1
Pilbara	6355	141.9	17.1	47.4	6.0	19.3
South West	9850	90.9	8.0	18.8	2.7	5.8
Wheatbelt	7325	105.7	10.8	23.9	3.6	4.3
Rural Regions	*59778*	*121.6*	*14.5*	*35.8*	*4.7*	*11.1*

* Summaries of Burglary-Dwellings Crimes and Motor Vehicle Theft Crimes do not add to Total Crimes. Violent Crimes, Drug Related Crimes and Other Property Crimes are omitted from this table.

Pennings and Clark (1999) of the NSWPS described the distribution of major crimes in statistical divisions of rural NSW with considerable detail. Their work (see Figures 4, 5 and 6) graphically illustrated that rural crimes increased significantly between 1995 and 1997. Their data also indicated enormous variations in crime within rural areas and identified areas according to their propensity for crime. For example, while motor vehicle thefts are much less common in rural areas, both drug offences and assaults are much more common in the North Western and Far West statistical divisions. Consideration of rural areas is now an integral aspect of crime data analysis and program development through Analysis of Crime (ACE). NSWPS has developed rural programs including "Crime Stoppers Towns", rural information packages, special protections for the fisheries, livestock and small mining industries, and organised opportunity activities for youth through the Van Heythuysen Trust.

Research on rural crime has grown sensitive to methodological issues. In his analysis of homicide in Eastern Australia, Carcach (1999) addressed statistical problems associated with interpreting crimes within spatial boundaries. Crime rates in low population areas vary more than in more densely populated regions. Small increases in crime rates over time may erroneously imply high increases in crime to a small population. Regional heterogeneity must be considered when statistically comparing rural crime rates. New technology, like Geographic Information Systems (GIS), can assist in developing crime control and prevention programs by identifying ecological and locational aspects of crime.

Qualitative research also has evolved. Carrington and Lee (1997) made a video of a law and order summit in Dubbo in 1996. Jobes (1997) interviewed police officers in small towns in NSW about strains between being a good community citizen and a fair officer. Effective officers utilised techniques based upon personal knowledge about the social ecology of their communities.

Williams (1999) has noted that the popular press speculates that illicit drug use is "out of control" in rural Australia. Media rely primarily on anecdotal evidence from rural treatment services and allied health professionals that indicate illicit drug use in rural areas has increased in the 1990s. Similar assertions about the level of crime in rural areas and its association with the "increase" in illicit drug use, have also recently attracted popular appeal. Evidence from the National Drug Strategy Household Survey series (1985-1998), indicates that rural rates of illicit drug use increased over the period of the collection, but that they do not approach contemporary city levels. Lags of between 2 and 8 rate years, depending on substance, had occurred. Rural areas had lower durability of drug use and lower rates of increase (See Figure 7). Williams suggested these factors imply that, rather than converging, rural and city rates will become more divergent for the foreseeable future.

Williams' analyses distinguish the patterns use of all types of drugs. Table 2 summarises differences in the recent and lifetime marijuana and heroin use patterns in rural and non-rural regions. Rural use is less, has been less, and has increased less than urban use.

Figure 4. Assault, NSW Statistical Divisions: 1995-97.

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1998), New South
Wales Recorded Crime Statistics 1997, Sydney.

Figure 5. Motor Vehicle Theft Offences, NSW Statistical Divisions: 1995-97.

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1998), New South Wales
Recorded Crime Statistics 1997, Sydney.

Figure 6. Drug Offences, NSW Statistical Divisions: 1995-97.

Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1998), New South Wales Recorded Crime Statistics 1997, Sydney.
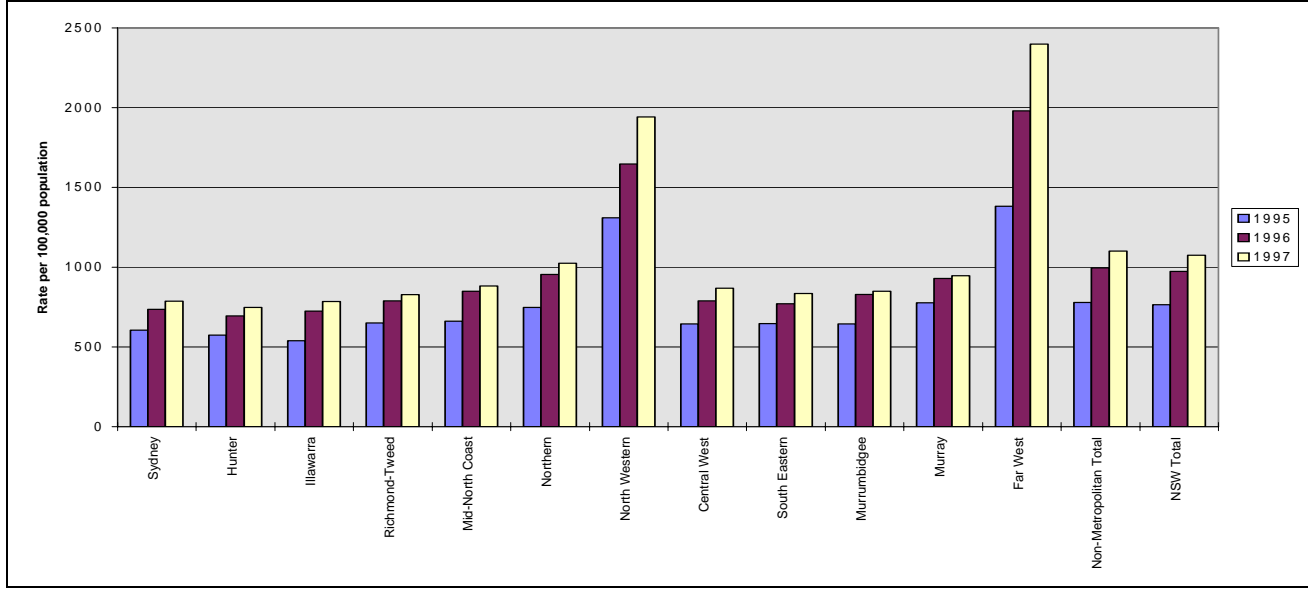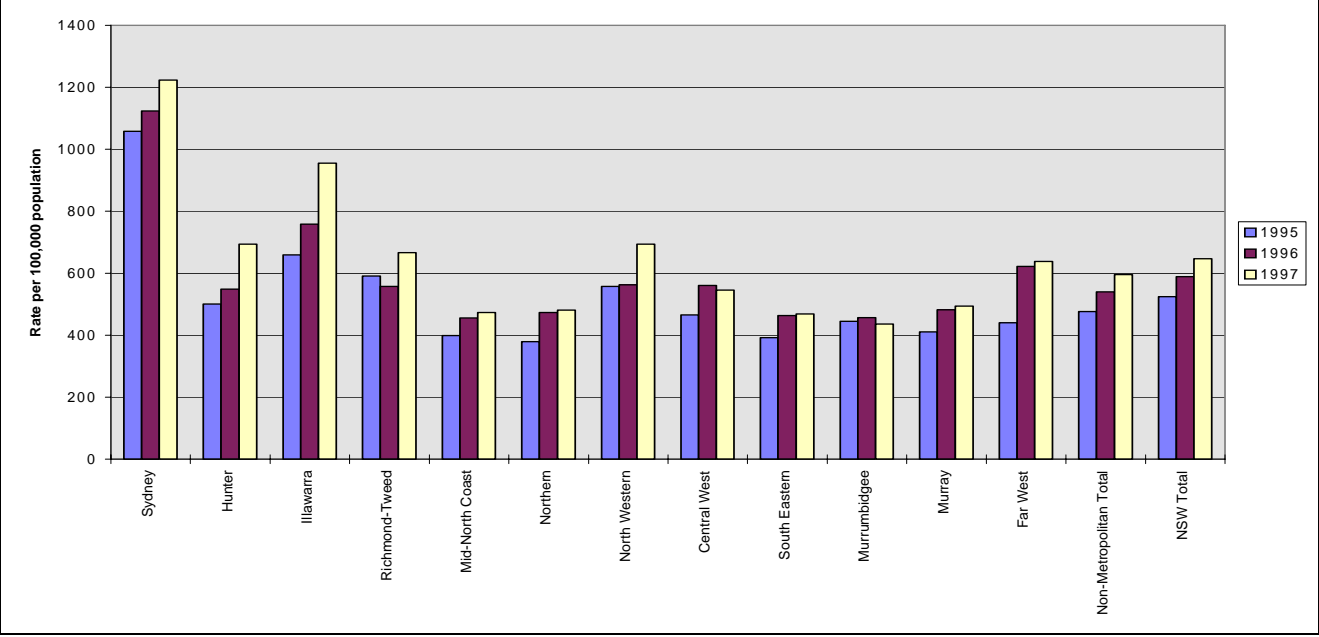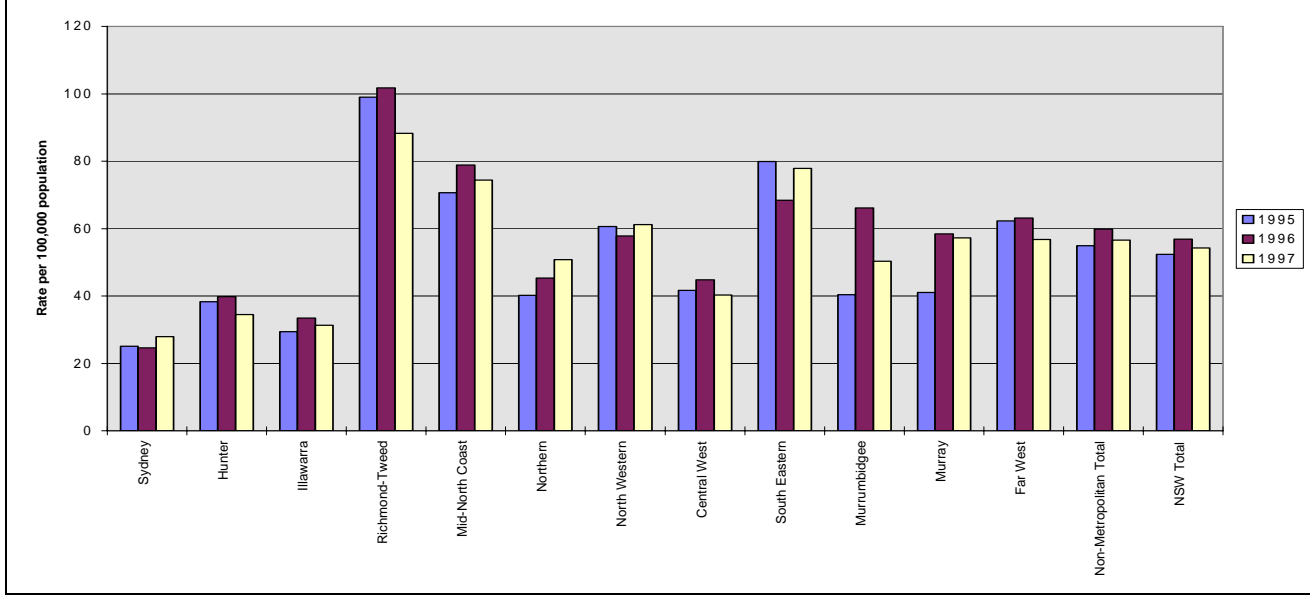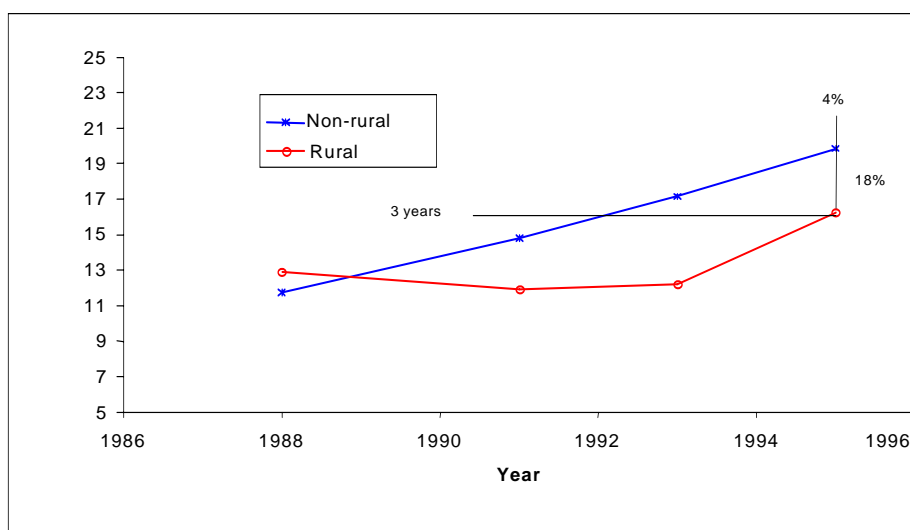
Figure 7. Age Standardised Rates (%), Any Illicit Drug: Recent Use, by Region: 1988-1995, Australia.

Table 2. Summary Measures, Marijuana, Heroin, by Region: Australia.

Substance and Region		Lifetime Use, 1995	Recent Use, 1995	Durability Ratio(a), 1995	Annual Increase 1988-1995
			(%)		
Cannabis	- Non-rural	35.65	16.20	0.45	7.33
	- Rural	31.78	12.17	0.38	-1.52
Heroin	- Non-rural	1.71	0.46	0.27	1.67
	- Rural	1.32	0.21	0.16	1.53

(a) Ratio of recent: lifetime.

Source: National Drug Strategy Household Survey 1988-1995.

Table 3. Developing a Local Crime Prevention Plan.

1.	Identify the range of crime issues of concern to the local community.
2.	Identify priority crime issues.
3.	Develop Crime Profile Reports for each of the priority issues.
4.	Identify a number of critical components of a Crime Profile report, which combine to cause the occurrence of a particular crime in the community.
5.	Identify specific strategies that can impact on the critical components of a crime profile report.

Source: Shipway & Homel (1999).

5. RECENT POLICIES AND PROGRAMS FOR RESPONDING TO RURAL SOCIAL PROBLEMS AND CRIME

Australian policy makers are addressing issues of rural crime. Graycar (1999) has suggested that community strategies against crime incorporate three perspectives to help plan for safer communities. He advocated simultaneously using a societal perspective to ensure a common moral underpinning of law, a knowledge perspective to empirically discover what is known (and not known) about crime and crime prevention, and an organisational/institutional perspective to focus on structures that deal with crime prevention. Graycar recommended developing community strategies against crime that would reduce local vulnerability to crime, support and empower victims, and divert potential offenders into constructive activities. Strategies involving local partnerships and safety links should be developed with sensitivity to the local social and physical environments, and to the special cultural and demographic characteristics of local populations. The ideal is to instil social order through shared values and equitable opportunities, rather to rely on law enforcement.

Research and theoretical knowledge are being applied through a variety of government programs and localised projects. Two initiatives are currently sponsored by the Commonwealth government. The National Anti-Crime Strategy (NACS), is a shared initiative of State and Territory governments. The goal of the NACS is to optimise cooperation among government agencies in order to develop effective crime prevention procedures and programs. The National Crime Prevention (NCP) is a government initiative for preventing crime through programs, policies and projects. This is a multifaceted approach that seeks to involve all government sectors, universities and private enterprise. Domestic violence, which is comparatively common in rural areas, is given high priority in both the NCP and the NACS systems.

Incorporating factual knowledge into policy is essential for addressing rural

social problems. As an illustration of "target-hardening", Graycar noted that rates of automobile theft in 1998 had declined from 1990 because new cars were designed to be harder to steal. He also referred to recent statistical analyses indicating that households that had been victims (286/1000) of burglary, or motor vehicle theft, were approximately three times more likely than non-victim households (83/1000) to be victimised again. Identifying victims is a clear first step for developing strategies to protect them.

Shipway and Homel (1999) provide an example of a new rural crime prevention planning technique that incorporates both community participation and data analysis. Table 3 describes this technique, as developed by the Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Department of the Attorney General. First, the crime issues are identified and prioritised through consultation with the community. Next, Crime Profile Reports that summarise local crime characteristics in comparison with crime characteristics in other localities are compiled. Crime Profile Reports describe locations, victims, perpetrators, circumstances, times, incentives and opportunities, and consequences of the crimes. Once the critical components of the report are identified, strategies for addressing the crimes are developed.

Innovative programs for preventing and reducing crime and violence are being developed in response to the clearer identification of rural crime issues through research and planning. Chantrill (1999) summarised an effective community-based justice program in Kowanyama, a remote Aboriginal community in northern Queensland. Developed in response to directives from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Kowanyama Aboriginal Justice Group is a model for making local native people more autonomous and involved. The group has worked through a Community Development Officer to find alternative sentencing arrangements, visits by elders to correctional institutions, the use of out station correctional facilities, and more effective involvement with the judiciary and Aboriginal magistrates' courts. The community is helping youth by reestablishing respect for local customs and elders, as well as developing better relations with government agencies, especially the police and other justice institutions. The reductions in crime are astounding. Within twelve months after inception, police records indicated that break and enters had decreased 82%, stealing had decreased 91%, assault had decreased 68%, and domestic violence had decreased 83%. Similar reductions were noted for offences committed by youth.

The social reintegration that Chantrill discussed is a response to social problems that have plagued many rural and Aboriginal communities. Alcohol, drug abuse, family disintegration and cultural disorganisation have become typical in communities that once were organised. The Uncle Project, initiated by Michael Light (1999), is a program based on a voluntary network of men to help boys aged 4-15 in families where no father is present. Centred in Byron Bay, the project attends to their emotional development through extensive mentoring by carefully screened and highly committed volunteers. Fatherless sons account for disproportionate levels of delinquency in addition to being at significantly greater risk for drug use and dysfunctional relationships. The effectiveness of the

Uncle Project in reversing the propensity for problems will take several years to assess, though initial personal evaluations by the boys, their mothers and the men who volunteer their services have been very favourable. The greatest limitation of the program has been that the requests by single mothers for "Uncles" to help their sons has been much greater than the availability of acceptable volunteers.

Some authors are convinced that a totally integrated approach is essential for addressing crime in the community. Bohill and Davis (1999), have begun to develop such a model for Moree in north-west New South Wales. They contend that," to understand crime, an area--whether rural or urban--needs to be understood from a contextual perspective that holistically accounts for it's political, social, legal, historical, psychological, cultural, geographical, Indigenous and spiritual specificity. Once these dynamics are conceptualised and inter-linked, crime, and the way it impacts upon community, can be more easily understood." They believe this approach serves as the most effective way of reducing crime and of healing schisms in many Australian communities, especially those with high proportions of Aboriginal people. Their model implies that social justice legislation and policy formation will be most effective if they adopt a community-centred approach.

6. FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND RESEARCH ON CRIME IN RURAL AUSTRALIA

Knowledge related to rural social problems and crime in Australia will continue to evolve. Reporting of annual crime rates has become routinised. Australian criminology has played a seminal role in identifying crucial factors associated with crime for the public and private sectors. Although rural crime has only recently been identified as a matter of key importance, this new recognition of its importance has generated interest in academia, and law and social justice organisations. More importantly, the interest in diverse rural social problems seems to be shared by both public and government. Since government support is now established, both research and program development can be expected to retain the momentum gained in recent years.

Future analyses will continue to probe more broadly and specifically into the origins of rural social problems and crime. Given the quality of data that now are available from police services and other government sources, quantitative analyses will be able to identify the relationships between causal factors and crime much more precisely and extensively than has been feasible until recently. At the same time, limitations of secondary data sources will become increasingly evident. In depth ethnographies, case studies and historical analyses will be necessary in order to explore the deeper causal mechanisms and evolutionary forces that lead to crime and other social problems in rural areas. These qualitative approaches will help to further unravel how particular types of communities have developed their unique types of crime and resistances to crime. Together, qualitative and quantitative research discoveries will help to guide a new generation of social justice programs to help prevent and to facilitate effective responses to rural crime.

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