Speech by Adam Graycar, Director, Australian Institute of Criminology:

"Demography of violence"

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The Demography of Violence

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The National Committee on Violence concluded that:

- Australia is a less violent place than it was during the period from its establishment as a penal colony until Federation. However, it is more violent than it was before the Second World War.

- The rate of homicide in Australia is relatively low by international standards, and has shown no significant change over the past twenty years.

- The rates of various types of non-fatal violence, that is assault, sexual assault, and robbery, have increased sharply since the early 1970s.

- The rate of non-fatal assault appears high by the standards of western industrial societies.

- Rates of violent crime are not evenly distributed across Australia. For example, they tend to be higher in large cities than in country areas. They are also uneven across jurisdictions: the level of violence in the Northern Territory is substantially higher than elsewhere, while the rate of violent offending appears to be actually declining in Tasmania.

- Violent offenders in Australia are overwhelmingly male, primarily between the ages of 18 and 30, and predominantly from blue-collar backgrounds.

- Despite perceptions to the contrary, violent offending by juveniles is relatively uncommon. Gang violence is not a major problem in most jurisdictions.

- Most homicides and assaults are committed by persons known to the victim. Random attacks by strangers, although deeply disturbing when they do occur, are relatively rare.

- Infants up to one year old are the age group at greatest risk of homicide. The overwhelming majority of child victims are killed by their parents or other relatives.

- Victims of violence most commonly tend to fall into two broad categories: men who become engaged in altercations with other men; and women and children who suffer at the hands of men with whom they have been living.

- Men, especially those who are young, single and unemployed, are at far greater risk of becoming victims of all forms of violence than are women, except for the categories of sexual assault and domestic violence.

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An analysis of Australian homicides over the past seven years reveals an amazing consistency of patterns. On average there have been 318 incidents
per year, and seven of ten of these cases are the result of an episode between people who are known to each other: friends, acquaintances, intimate partners or other family members.

The popular perception of homicide is that of an act committed by a cold, calculating killer or stranger, as we so often see in the movies. But homicide is usually the unintended outcome of an quarrel between lovers or friends which escalates out of control, or a purposive attempt to end a relationship - once and for all. Offenders are most likely people who are unable to control emotions of anger, frustration or jealousy.

35% of homicides involve family members, 38% involve friends and acquaintances, and 16% involve strangers. It is this stranger category that worries most people, though the streets are much safer than the home. Residential locations account for over 60% of homicides, and 20% take place in open areas - such as on the streets, in parks, in the bush etc.

The typical offender is likely to be male - 90% of offenders are men, and more likely to be in their teens and twenties, never married and not working. The remaining 10% of offenders who are women, have an even spread of ages, and are more likely to be in a relationship, or have been in one.

The typical victim is harder to portray. 60% of victims are male, and 40% are female. The typical male victim is likely to be aged between 18 and 35, never married, not working, and killed by a male friend or acquaintance, from the same racial or ethnic group. The typical female victim is likely to be between 18 and 26, married or in a relationship, not working, and killed by an intimate partner.

Very different patterns prevail when men kill men, compared to when men kill women. About one in three homicide incidents involve a man killing a woman. When men kill men it is often, as Professor Ken Polk a criminologist from the University of Melbourne has put it, some form of honour contest - an escalation of trivia. A push, a shove, a “what are you staring at mate” and then an event that nobody wanted to happen. Over a quarter kill strangers. About half kill friends and acquaintances. The younger the killer the more likely he is to kill a stranger or somebody not close to him, such as a casual drinking partner.

When men kill women it is often a feature of the control over the behaviour of a sexual partner. “If I can’t have her, nobody else will”. In 61% of cases of when men kill women it is an intimate partner who is the victim, and in another 27% of cases it is another family member or a friend. In 10% of cases when men kill women they kill a stranger, and in all of Australia this accounts for about 10 cases per year. Dreadful and terrifying as this is, the risk of a woman being killed by a stranger is very very low.

When women kill males, they almost invariably kill an intimate partner or their male child.
Aboriginal people have enormously higher rates of offending and victimisation. Their rates for both are about seven times those of non-Indigenous people. Alcohol is present in 80% of Aboriginal offenders and about 70% of victims. Among non-Aboriginal victims and offenders alcohol is present much much less, but still there in around a quarter of cases. While Indigenous people have a very high homicide rates, their use of firearms in homicide is very rare (guns are used in around 5% of Aboriginal cases).

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**Definition**

Violence in its most basic form is behaviour that is intended to cause, and actually causes, injury. Extreme forms of violence like homicide occur about once a day in Australia, while 360 cases of assault are reported to police each day, as are 60 cases of robbery, and 40 cases of sexual assault. Of course, not all acts of violence are reported to police, and we have no way of knowing the actual incidence of violence in our regular relationships and everyday activities. Using a number of indicators it appears that Australia is a more violent place in the second half of this century than it was before the Second World War, but less violent than the period from 1788 to Federation.

**Why Demography of Violence?**

A great deal can be learnt about violent behaviour by looking for patterns and not treating each incident as ‘isolated and unpredictable’ which has been the traditional way of looking at crime in our society. By studying the demography of violence – both for offenders and victims - we find that it is not as unpredictable and isolated as may have been supposed. Demographic factors give us a picture based on sex, age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status and marital status of this population and we find that for whatever reason there is a significant uniformity in the results of the analysis of this data. This information can help us to find out what is happening and to formulate theories as to why it occurs. It provides guidelines as to where our efforts to reduce violence within society should be focused.

The demographics of violence are fairly consistent worldwide and there is little difference in these factors between England and Australia. Today I shall talk about these factors with an Australian emphasis. One area in which Australia is strikingly different from England is the Indigenous population of Australia which is greatly over-represented in prisons and which has a homicide rate which in some regions is as much as ten times the rate for the general population of Australia.

It is important to emphasise that demographic factors do not determine criminal or violent behaviour. The fact that certain traits, characteristics or other factors may be associated with violence does not imply causation. They may be entirely coincidental, or alternatively, symptoms of underlying causes. They
may be amplified or muted through interaction with other factors. They may vary in their relative influence on a given individual as he or she proceeds through the life cycle. The relation of demography to culture and lifestyle is a close one. The lifestyle a person chooses, including the people with whom one associates, is often linked with socioeconomic status and is significant as a risk or protective factor for involvement with violent behaviour. People who work out of the home and use public transport, who go out at night frequently and drink heavily are at greater risk.

**General Risk Factors**

There are a host of factors which affect the risk of someone committing a violent act, beginning from the moment a person is born, right up to the immediate circumstances which lead a person to commit a violent act. There are various times throughout a person’s life when they are at increased risk of becoming both a victim and a perpetrator of violence. The first year of an infant’s life is one time during their life cycle that they are at relatively high risk of being a victim of homicide. Having survived that period, the risk does not become as great again until young adulthood is reached. Through their school years children may be perpetrators of bullying and other acts of violence but it is not until they reach the age of fifteen or sixteen that violent acts which they commit once again form part of the criminal justice records.

We can identify risk factors which are associated with violence such as individual factors (including genetic, biological, psychological and personality factors), and family factors as well as wider social factors (including peer, socio economic and school factors).

There are physiological factors and personality traits which are good predictors of violence. Aggressive children tend to grow up to become aggressive adults. A lack of empathy or regard for the feelings of others, and impulsivity - the inability to deter gratification - are two personality traits often associated with violent behaviour.

From an individual point of view there is evidence of an association between violence and physical abnormalities such as neurological dysfunction (sub-optimal brain function, abnormal patterns of electrical activity and chemical imbalances). The relationship with violence may be an indirect one; in that brain dysfunction may adversely affect a person’s intelligence, learning ability, impulse control, one’s perception of the world, or ability to cope with frustrating events. Research shows that hyperactivity, impulsiveness, poor behavioural control, attention problems, low intelligence and low school attainment all predict violent offending. However the presence of these physical abnormalities does not make it inevitable that violence will occur. Rather, it is the interaction with a number of other influences which ultimately determines whether a person will become violent.
The family is the main breeding ground for violence. Families can greatly reduce the risk of an individual becoming violent, or significantly add to that risk. Parents reduce the risk of violence when they are able to provide consistent discipline based on clear standards in the context of strong attachments between parents and children, and a high degree of support, nurturing and encouragement. Conversely, families add to the risk when there is poor parental supervision, parental aggression, including harsh, punitive discipline, and parental conflict. Parents who use physical punishment to discipline their children may only be giving their children a lesson in aggression, rather than disapproval of certain conduct.

It is recognised that victims and offenders tend to share the same characteristics: people who are the perpetrators of many types of crime have an increased risk of being the victim of crime as well. The mediating factors are shared disadvantaged socioeconomic status and marginalisation. The poor and often racial minorities are seen to be most at risk of victimisation.

Sources of Data

Today there are two main sources of authoritative data in Australia, police data and victim survey data. While police statistics on non-fatal forms of violence such as assault show dramatic increases over the past 20 years, victim survey data reveal no increase in this offence. However, until fairly recently the collection of comprehensive data on crime was not regarded as part of police work; nor are a large number of violent crimes ever reported. The victim survey data help fill in the gaps in our knowledge, but it remains incomplete. It has been suggested that increases in statistics of reported violent crime reflect an improved proficiency in recording by police of operational data, and growing intolerance by public and by police of aggressive behaviour which a generation ago would not have been defined as criminal. One needs only look to domestic violence for an illustrative example of violent crime which, although historically common, has only recently begun to attract the attention of the criminal justice system. A recent ABS Women’s Safety Survey revealed that only 15% of women who had experienced sexual violence in the last twelve months had reported the incident to police.

Homicide levels can be taken as a good indicator of levels of violence generally. Today I shall use data collected through the Australian Institute of Criminology’s Homicide Monitoring Program to illustrate patterns of violence within Australia. Homicide data is easier to deal with than assault because we don’t have all the data for assault. A graph of homicide which would look like this.

Graph 1: Australia, Trends in Homicide

In comparison with international standards Australia has a relatively low rate of homicide, although higher than in England and Wales, but the rate of non-fatal
assaults in Australia appears high by the standards of western industrial societies.

*Graph 2: International Comparison*

**Gender**

Looking at numbers appearing before the higher courts, there is a vast difference between males and females. Males commit the majority of violence.

From 1989 to 1996 nine out of ten homicide offenders were male.

*Overhead 3: Offenders of Homicide by Gender*

According to the National Committee on Violence over 90% of those charged with serious assault, robbery and sexual assault were men.

With the important exceptions of sexual assault and domestic violence, men are more likely to become the victims of violence. Males are at higher risk of being victims of homicide by a ratio of 3:2 to females. Males make up 75 per cent of victims of serious assault recorded by police.

*Overhead 5: Distribution of Victimisation According to Gender*

*Overhead 6: Relationship Between the Victim and the Officer*

*Overhead 8: Victim Offender Relationship and Gender*

A study based on data from the National Homicide Monitoring Program showed that over the nine years that data have been collected over half the homicides were men killing men.

Women, also, were more likely to kill men but women only accounted for 12 per cent of all homicide offenders.

*Overhead 7: Incidents which occurred in the context of Family Relationships*

When homicides occur they are the result of an interaction between individuals. Most violence occurs among people who are known to each other. The relationship between the victim and the offender is an important factor in identifying risk factors and developing prevention strategies.

Male offenders were responsible for killing approximately 94% of female victims, and the vast majority (61%) of these killings occurred in an intimate relationship. Almost 60% of women were killed by an intimate partner (either male or female).

*Overhead 9: Total Homicide incidents and Homicide Incidents Involving Intimate Partners*
Demography of Violence

Dr Adam Graycar

22 June 1999

When men are killed, they are more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance or a stranger, and in approximately 95% of these homicides, the offender is also a male. In comparison to women, only 11% of men were killed by an intimate partner, with the majority of these offenders being female (84%).

Men appear significantly more likely to be victims of personal robbery. Males were more at risk of being a victim of robbery; both armed and unarmed, than were females. However, in the older age groups (45 and over) women are at a greater risk of unarmed robbery than men – street crimes like bag snatching.

Victims of sexual assault and domestic violence are overwhelmingly female. I will talk more about this type of violence when talking about marital status as a demographic factor.

Age

Just as the gender of victim and offender shapes the context within which a killing occurs so does the age. The typical violent offender tends to be in his twenties. Violent offending by juveniles in Australia is relatively uncommon. Juvenile offenders tend to commit property crimes.

*Overhead 11: Offenders of Homicide by Gender and Age Group*

Males exhibited higher victimisation rates than females for all age categories. ‘There are multiple peaks in the distribution of victimisation according to age. These peaks are reached at different ages for males and females, and this is said to reflect their differential levels of exposure to violence during their life cycles.’

*Overhead 4 again: Victims of Homicide by Gender and Age Group*

Females are at greatest risk of homicide victimisation during the ages of 21-23. Males risk of victimisation peaks between the ages of 24-26.

After these ages, victimisation risks decline, but then peak again between the ages of 33 and 35 for males with another slight rise for females between 30 and 32.

It is interesting to note that after 35 years of age, victimisation rates for males seem to decrease more rapidly than for females. This is probably the result of an increased number of intimate partner homicides for persons within this age group (James and Carcach).

Data from our Homicide Monitoring Program reveals that the offender’s age varied according to the relational distance between the victim and offender – using mean figures, as the offender’s age decreases, so does the level of
familiarity between the victim and offender. In other words, the younger the offender, the more likely the victim is to be a strangers. When a woman is killed by a stranger, in almost 60% of cases, the victim is older than the offender.

These results stress the importance of viewing homicide in the context of a social relationship. The continuum between intimate homicides and stranger homicides embraces social relationships of differential intensities. Younger people who most likely have never been married are more often the victims of homicides involving a low degree of sentimental attachment to the offender, while those who are, or who been in a marriage-type relationship tend to be the victims of homicides associated with the day-to-day dynamics of intimate and other family relationships. This could explain the fact that older female victims are killed by persons in the same age-group. The majority of incidents involving people over the age of 50 years are of an intimate or family nature. These results are consistent with the notion that the social distance between the victim and the offender reduces with increasing age (James and Carcach).

Both males and females were most at risk of being a victim of assault while aged between 15 and 24. (Overhead 12: Assault by Age and Sex, 1997)

Males aged between 15 and 24 were at least twice as likely to become a victim of robbery than persons in any other age category. (Overhead 13: Robbery by Age and Sex, 1997)

In the younger age groups (44 and under) males were more at risk of becoming victims of unarmed robbery than females.

However, as mentioned before, females in the older age groups (45 and over) were more at risk than males.

Children

Young people on the streets are very vulnerable to violence. Young women who run away from home, often to escape violence, are particularly vulnerable to violence on the streets, and also unlikely to report violence to authorities.

About 15% of offenders arrested for violent crimes are juveniles. Overhead 14: Table: Violent Crimes – Juvenile Arrest Details by Gender

Children are victims more than offenders. Official statistics indicate that approximately 6 out of every 1000 children have been victims of some form of child abuse.

For the nine-year period 1989-1998, almost one fifth of child homicides could be described as child abuse homicides and were invariably committed by family members.
As can be seen from *(Overhead 4 repeat)* the first year of life is a time of very great risk of homicide.

*Overhead 15: Sexual Assault by Age and Sex, 1997*

Sexual exploitation of children occurs predominantly within the family. Girls under 18 are the victims of sexual assault much more than older women. Males are at the greatest risk between the ages of 10 and 14.

**Paedophilia**

The 1990s has seen the emergence both in Australia and other parts of the world of a very emotional public debate on paedophilia *(see James 1996)*. Issues surrounding paedophilia are, however, extremely complex. The term itself can be emotive and misleading. Paedophilia is not usually committed by strangers who randomly molest children with whom they have had no previous contact, as myth would have us believe. Conversely, their victims are more likely to be boys or girls with whom they have forged a social acquaintance. Paedophiles are, in the main, sex offenders who can be neighbours and relatives, social workers, child care workers and teachers, church leaders, politicians, judges and doctors. They may be well educated or not; rich or poor; married or unmarried; employed or unemployed. Paedophile offenders are not easily recognised – they look and, in public, behave the same way as everyone else; they are found in every suburb organisation and walk of life; some are married and have sex with their partners and/or other adults as well as children; other paedophiles gain satisfaction only from sexual contacts with children. Research does, however, indicate that the vast majority of offenders are male, a significant number of whom are adolescent. And, indeed, paedophilia is a life-long compulsive condition which often initially emerges in adolescence *(James 1997)*.

The exact extent of paedophilia is not known. Paedophilia is part of an intricate web of deviant behaviour which is specifically directed towards the sexual abuse of children. The sexual abuse of children, in turn, is one element of child abuse which also includes physical and emotional abuse. All forms of child abuse can result in later social problems such as youth homelessness, childhood prostitution, juvenile offending, mental health problems, drug and alcohol abuse and the inability to form relationships. Its antecedents include the attitudes of our society to children, to sex and to violence, as well as the effects of childhood experiences. Both incidence and prevalence studies of child sexual abuse, and child abuse generally have their problems. Incidence statistics are based on official records and are therefore likely to include only extreme cases. Prevalence studies, on the other hand, are often based on self-report data which relies on the retrospective identification of the behaviour by the individual who has been victimised. This combined with definitional problems can lead to a bias in the research. However, there has been enough research to conclude that paedophilia is a substantial problem which can often
have serious consequences resulting in costly implications for society generally (James 1997).

**Elderly**

4.6 per cent of older people are victims of physical, sexual or financial abuse, perpetrated mostly by family members and those who are in a duty of care relationship with the victim.

When the elderly require support and assistance from families or professional service providers because of frailty and dependence their vulnerability to victimisation is increased. The stressful nature of the caring role, complex family dynamics and a loose and largely unregulated system of support provide an environment in which abusive situations can arise. These factors also mean that abuse is not always an uncomplicated or one-directional interaction of “carers” who abuse dependent people. In some situations, especially where there is a history of family violence or child abuse or where dementia and other psychological disorders are present, the dependent elderly can also be “abusive” towards their carer.

Increasingly, the relationship between domestic violence and elder abuse is understood to be important; domestic violence accounts for a significant percentage of cases identified as “elder abuse”. In many of these cases, the abuse is the continuance of long-term domestic violence into old age. However, the relationship is not straightforward. In some cases, the situation is reversed – the long-term perpetrator becomes dependent upon their victim and the domestic violence victim now becomes the abuser under changed power relations. An abusive carer may also be the victim of domestic violence or the adult survivor of child abuse who is now in a position of power over their past abuser. (Kinnear and Graycar).

A National Elder Abuse Incidence Study in America* has found that in 1996 approximately 450,000 elderly people in domestic settings were abused and/or neglected during 1996 – out of a total population of approximately 44 million aged 60 and over.

- Female elders are abused at a higher rate than males, after accounting for their larger proportion in the ageing population.
- The oldest elders (80 and over) are abused and neglected at two to three times their proportion of the elderly population.

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• In almost 90% of the elder abuse and neglect incidents with a known perpetrator, the perpetrator is a family member, and two-thirds of the perpetrators are adult children or spouses.

Seven types of abuse are covered: physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, financial or material exploitation, abandonment, neglect and self-neglect.

Of a total of 449,924 elderly people abused/neglected, 70,942 (16%) were reported officially but the remaining 84% were not. From these figures one can conclude that over five times as many new incidents of abuse and neglect were unreported than those reported.

The largest category of perpetrators (47.3%) were adult children of the victims. Spouses represented the second largest group (19.3%); other relatives (8.8%); and grandchildren (8.6%)

Socioeconomic status

Both victims and offenders appear to come disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is particularly true of more serious offences, the background of offenders are ‘noticeably tilted toward the lower reaches of the working class. The reasons for this imbalance are numerous, but one of the most important is the distinctive qualities of their cultural capital. Children of working class origin inherit substantially different cultural capital from middle-class children. It limits their access to the resources needed to entertain and to strive for options readily accessible to the more advantaged. Their rates of unemployment are among the highest, and those who do have regular employment often are consigned to some of the dirtiest and least remunerative work’ (Shover 1996: 29).

Almost 85% of victims and a little over 90% of offenders belong to what can be described as an under-class in Australian society. This suggests a strong inverse relationship between socio-economic status and the risk of becoming the victim or perpetrator of homicide. Several studies, however, have demonstrated that the issue is not simply poverty but that factors such as economic and social stress disrupting the parenting process, a lack of neighbourhood cohesion, or the culture that exists among people in this section of society may be of greater importance.

Data from the Institute’s Homicide Monitoring Program revealed that from 1 July 1989-30 June 1996, out of 1957 offenders where employment status was known, almost 8 out of 10 were unemployed at the time of the homicide incident. (Here the term ‘unemployed’ includes those not employed and not in the labour force.)
Risks are greater for people in rented accommodation than in homes that are owner-occupied. This suggests areas with greater residential mobility which are usually lower socioeconomic status areas are at greater risk (National Committee on Violence 1990: p. 35).

**Marital Status**

Marital status becomes very relevant when analysed in conjunction with the circumstances surrounding the incident and the relationship between the victim and the offender.

*Overhead 10: Victims aged 15 years and over according to marital status*

For instance, an altercation was the contributing factor for more than half of all homicides where the victims were aged 15 years and over and had never been married. (This probably has more to do with the age group (18-26 years old) than the fact that they were not married, although marriage for men is a form of social control that assists in preventing them from engaging in risky behaviour that attends homicide victimisation – frequenting the bar scene, heaving drinking, staying out late, fighting, etc.)

Single men were 2.5 times as likely to die of homicide as married men. Similarly, divorced, separated, and widowed men had a risk that was nearly 2.4 times that of married men. In terms of household size, men living alone were nearly 1.9 times as likely to die of homicide, compared to men living in households with two or more individuals. In acquaintance violence for both men and women: being unmarried, having children under 12, and living in an area where the rate of incivilities was high heightens the risk.

In three-quarters of incidents where the victim was in a marriage-type relationship or separated/divorced the homicide was the result of domestic altercations.

On the other hand, it has been found that for women, marriage is more of a homicide risk factor than being single.

One half of all homicide victims who were married, in a de facto relationship, separated or divorced were killed by an intimate partner.

*Domestic Violence:* There is an enormous amount which can be said about domestic violence but I am not going to touch on this today.

**Ethnicity**

Socioeconomic disadvantage and disorganised communities contribute substantially to a city’s or ‘neighbourhood’s crime problem. Recent research has revealed that race/ethnicity/country of origin has less to do with crime than
the environment and the disorganised communities of alleged criminals. Lack of knowledge of the local language is considered to be a major disadvantage that migrant groups face. Migrants generally have lower levels of education and a very low rate of participation in higher education, which limits their life chances. Migrants generally live around the poorer and disadvantaged city neighbourhoods. Their unemployment rate is significantly higher than that of the native-born. There is also evidence of some bias against minority groups in their contacts with the criminal justice system. (Mukherjee 1999)

*Overhead 16: Homicide Offenders by racial appearance.*

It should be noted that records do not show accurately the ethnicity of the offender, but rather point to racial appearance – frequently based on assessment by the police. The vast over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is apparent in this chart.

_The following data must be viewed with caution because of the small numbers involved._

In Australia there has been a decrease in the risk of becoming a homicide victim for Caucasian and Indigenous people over the last two years of data collection by the National Homicide Monitoring Program. However, the risk for Asian people has increased. In 1989/90 and 1995/96 Asian people represented 5% of all homicide victims but in 1996/97-1997/98 this has increased to 9%. People of Asian ethnicity comprise approximately 4.8% of the general population. Furthermore, it must be noted that despite the slight decrease in the percentage of Indigenous people that were homicide victims (13% down to 12%), they are still consistently over-represented as homicide victims, considering that they only account for 2% of the total Australian population.

**Aboriginality**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a much higher rate of substantiated child abuse with 18 cases per 1000 children – three times higher than the rate for the general population. But they very rarely kill their kids.

Although Indigenous people number just under 2% of the total Australian population, they account for nearly 17% of homicide offenders. Indigenous offenders are on average almost nine times more likely than the rest of the Australian population to be homicide offenders.

It is interesting to note that while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in remote areas (where firearms are presumably readily available), in only about 5% of Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander homicides are firearms used. Knives or bodily force are most commonly used. Most Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander homicides are intra-racial. The majority of incidents involving an Indigenous offender are related to intra-familial disputes, both intimate and
non-intimate, and to disputes between friends and acquaintances (James and Carcach).

Indigenous people constitute a much greater proportion of homicide victims than might have been expected from their numbers – over eight times the Australian national homicide rate.

Findings indicate that when Indigenous men and Caucasian men are killed, it is most likely to be by a friend or acquaintance. However, Indigenous men are twice as likely to be killed by an intimate partner as Caucasian men.

Indigenous women are vastly over-represented as victims of homicide. Overall Indigenous women account for approximately 15% of female victims, in contrast to comprising approximately 2% of the total female Australian population. Three-quarters of the Indigenous female victims were killed by an Indigenous intimate partner and only 1.5% by a stranger, whereas 17.2% of Caucasian women were killed by a stranger. This difference may be explained by the structure of Indigenous communities, where more often than not Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander people live amongst immediate family and relatives in a close knit community (Mouzos, forthcoming).

**Alcohol Use**

When controls are made for both racial appearance of the offender and whether he/she was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident, it can be seen that a little over three-quarters of Indigenous offenders were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the homicide. In the Northern Territory although just under 9 in 10 Indigenous offenders were affected by alcohol at the time of the incident, almost 6 in 10 of the non-Aboriginal offenders were also recorded as being affected by alcohol. (James and Carcach 1997)

Alcohol use is also a factor in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander homicide victims. In the Northern Territory three-quarters of all Indigenous homicide victims were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. This is almost the mirror image of the level of alcohol involvement in homicide victimisation for the rest of the Australian population (Mouzos, forthcoming).

While the level of alcohol consumption is a contributing factor in homicide incidents involving the Indigenous population, it should not be regarded as a primary cause. It is as much a symptom of underlying historical and structural aspects which have resulted in the social dislocation of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The fact that almost without exception, both Aboriginal victims and offenders of homicide are not working has ensured that they remain part of an underclass in Australian society. (James and Carcach 1997)
A great deal of non-fatal violence also occurs in Indigenous communities, but to an even greater extent than in the non-Indigenous population violence is under-reported.

Nationally, 45% of Indigenous people felt that family violence was a common problem in their area. Family violence is perceived to be more of a problem in the urban areas of country towns than in rural areas or in the capital cities.

**Arrest Data**

Although not necessarily an indication of violent behaviour the arrest and imprisonment rate of Indigenous people is so much higher than for the non-Indigenous population that it should be commented on because of its link to demographic factors.

The arrest of Indigenous people is associated with a variety of factors, including age and employment status, and many of these factors have simultaneous effects. Males who had been taken from their families as children also had a significantly elevated level of arrest compared with those not taken away, with a 44% probability of arrest, compared with 24% for the young employed Indigenous person who was regarded as a 'standard reference person' in a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey. (ABS: 1998)

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey found that 20% of Indigenous Australians reported that they had been arrested by the police at least once during the five years immediately prior to interview in the first half of 1994. Almost half (47%) of young Indigenous men aged 18-24 years had been arrested, with two-thirds of these having experienced multiple arrests. One explanation for the elevated rate other than high levels of criminal behaviour, is that many of the arrests are for ‘disorderly conduct/drinking in public’. (ABS: 1998:37)

The over-representation of Indigenous people in prison (an imprisonment rate currently 19 times that of non-Indigenous people) has been explained to a large extent by the differences in their educational and employment status. More recent research has supported this finding but added the variable of having been removed from family in childhood. The issue here is socioeconomic disadvantage; its causes and impacts.

Explanations for the increased risk of both homicide victimisation and offending in Aboriginal communities have been sought. Some research has shown that areas with higher rates of violence seem to share the following factors: larger populations, legally available alcohol, reduced links with traditional culture, and a greater number of Aboriginal people displaced from their traditional areas.
Rural/Urban Comparison

What is rural?
In the demographic sense the word ‘rural’ describes population numbers and their density. It also conveys a sense of geographic isolation. A little over 85 per cent of the Australian population live in urban areas (Year Book of Australia, 1995). Urban areas are defined as those with populations of more than 1000 people.

According to the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1997: 31-4) for violent crimes other than robbery, official rates in some predominantly rural areas were as high or higher than urban areas. For example, in the far west of New South Wales the rates of murder, assault and sexual offences were second only to those of the inner Sydney area.

Overhead 17: Percentage of incidents in urban and rural localities

This finding corresponds closely to the general urban/rural population distribution.

Crime rates vary considerably across geographic regions. As in urban areas, high rural crime rates are found in areas with high unemployment, low income levels, higher proportions of Indigenous people, single parents and higher numbers of people living in rental and public housing. While these factors are not explanations for higher crime rates they do highlight the link between the lack of education and employment opportunities and elevated rates of crime and violence. As employment opportunities are continuing to decline in rural areas through economic restructuring, it is likely that these problems will become more concentrated.

- The Far Western region of NSW has an assault rate of 258.5 per 100 000 more than twice the average of 823.5.
- It has a homicide rate of 29 per 100 000 also more than twice the state average of 14.1 and a sex offence rate of 596.9 compared to a state average of 314.0.
- Rural homicide rates in NSW have been consistently slightly higher than urban rates. For example, in 1996 in the Far West, the murder rate was 3.7 per 100 000 compared with an average of 1.7.
- In Wallace’s study of homicide in NSW over a 14 year period from 1968-81 more than half of all rural homicides involved family members compared with 41.2% of total urban homicides.
- Killings involving victims and offenders unknown to each other accounted for only 6.9% of total rural homicides compared to 20.5% of total urban homicides. From this it could be inferred that violence in rural settings is...
likely to involve intimates or others known to each other to a greater extent than in urban areas. Such violence is less likely to be reported to police unless it involves serious injury.

- No doubt a contributing factor to the higher rates of victimisation for assault and homicide, as well as the very high suicide rates in rural Australia, is the easier access to weapons in rural communities. It has been estimated that 41.1% of rural households have guns compared to just 11.7% of households in metropolitan areas (Dann and Wilson 1993: 42).

- Law and order campaigns pressing for tougher government responses are prominent in many rural localities. Much of the resistance to uniform gun laws comes from rural communities.

- Rural service providers find that there are serious problems of domestic, sexual and other community violence in many areas, most of which was unreported.

- Rural law and order lobby groups tend to dismiss domestic and sexual violence as serious problems and prefer to focus on property crime and public disorder.

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Homicide is a dreadful deed - and varies very significantly around the world. Australia’s rate at just under 2 per 100,000 is the same as it was at the start of this century.

The USA has a rate 5 times that of Australia, and countries like Russia, Mexico and Croatia have rates much higher than the USA. Australia’s rate is similar to that of many northern European countries and Canada and New Zealand, but double that of Japan, Norway and Ireland.

Why this is so is a real mystery to criminologists, anthropologists, psychiatrists and psychologists. We all have distressing things happen to us, yet the vast overwhelming majority of us do not try to solve the problem by killing the antagonist. There are obviously some fundamental neurological and sociological unknowns. From a policy point of view, things like expanding the number of police, giving them better technology, setting longer prison sentences, imposing or abolishing the death penalty have had no effect on the homicide rate, which has remained fairly constant in most countries (though is falling in the US). Neither money nor science have helped us solve this activity, which has reached epidemic proportions in America, and which is the cause of so much fear in Australia. It seems however, that there are significant issues in education policy and mental health policy - much more so than in justice policy.
So to make inroads, a policy of homicide prevention would not be the right way to go, but a more general, cross-sectoral set of violence prevention activities are likely to yield some results.

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