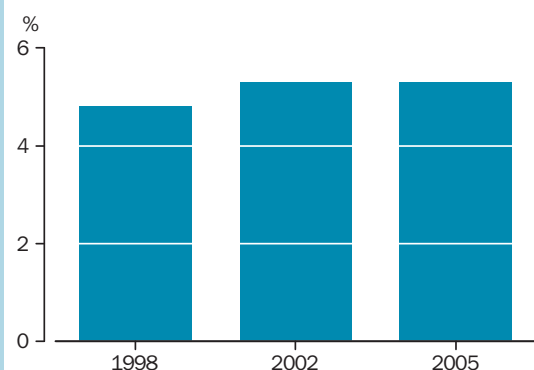


# Crime: key points

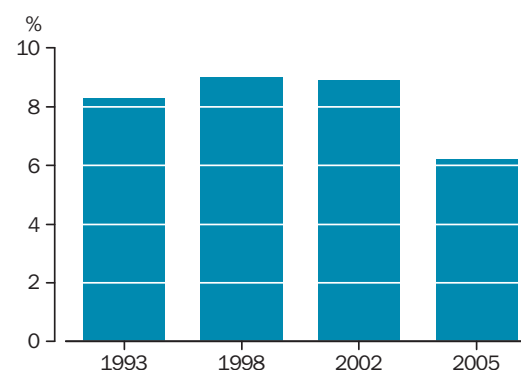
**Victims of personal crimes(a)**



(a) Assault and robbery among people aged 15 and over. Sexual assault among people aged 18 and over.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005 cat. no. 4509.0.*

**Victims of household crimes(a)**



(a) Actual or attempted break-ins; and motor vehicle theft.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005 cat. no. 4509.0.*

Though small, the victimisation prevalence rates for personal crimes showed an increase between 1998 and 2005 from 4.8% to 5.3%, the same level as in 2002. Most of these people were assaulted.

Between 1993 and 2005, the proportion of households that were the victim of a household crime (an actual or attempted break-in or motor vehicle theft) fell from 8.3% to 6.2%, after remaining at about 9% in 1998 and 2002.

## The relationship of crime to progress

Crime takes many forms and can have a major impact on the wellbeing of victims, their families and friends, and the wider community. Those most directly affected may suffer financially, physically, psychologically and emotionally, while the fear of crime can affect people, restrict their lives in many ways, reduce levels of trust and impact on social cohesion. There are other costs as well, including the provision of law enforcement services by the police, courts and associated legal services, and corrective services.

## About the headline indicator and its limitations: Household crimes, Personal crimes

Although it would be desirable to have a single indicator of the cost of crime to society, one does not exist (for further discussion see following page). Instead the headline indicators are two measures of common criminal offences: 'household crimes' and 'personal crimes'. The former refers to actual or attempted break-ins and motor vehicle theft. The latter refers to an assault, sexual assault or robbery. Personal crimes are not restricted to crimes committed in the victim's home, and so include crimes at people's place of work or study and so on.

The victimisation rates for personal crimes are for assault and robbery among people aged 15 or over, and sexual assault among people aged 18 and over.

The victimisation rates for household crimes are for actual or attempted break-ins and motor vehicle theft across all households.

## Crime: Other indicators

Homicide rates, imprisonment rates.

## Some differences within Australia

Crime rates tend to be higher on average in metropolitan centres than in non-metropolitan areas, but can vary considerably within those areas. Very high rates are observed in some small rural localities with high levels of disadvantage.

## Links to other dimensions

In the absence of clear evidence one can only speculate as to whether changes in crime rates have been associated with other indicators of progress presented in this publication. Some areas of progress that are worth considering for associations with crime are: *Work, Economic hardship*, and *Family, community and social cohesion*.

# Crime

## Progress and the headline indicators

Crime takes many forms and can have a major impact on the wellbeing of victims, their families and friends, and the wider community. Those most directly affected may suffer financially, physically, psychologically and emotionally, while the fear of crime can affect people, restrict their lives in many ways, reduce levels of trust and impact on social cohesion. There are other costs as well, including the provision of law enforcement services by the police, courts and associated legal services, and corrective services. Although government agencies take on the major responsibility for law enforcement, many businesses and householders also bear costs in protecting against or paying for the consequences of crime. Such costs include those associated with taking out insurance policies, and the provision of surveillance and security equipment or services.

Measuring the full cost of crime might provide a single number approach to measuring progress in this area. But there is no well established way of doing this nor are there comprehensive data. Although information about expenditures on crime-related services provides some idea of the financial costs of crime to the community, the full impacts on victims, or the subsequent costs to the wider community, might never be fully known.<sup>1</sup> This is partly because the full extent of crime cannot be measured through available information systems. Indeed, it is well known that many crimes are never brought to the attention of the police. Estimating the costs of crime, even for those crimes that are known, is also fraught with difficulties: each offence has different consequences for those affected and these can be difficult to value.

Another way, albeit limited, of looking at progress in this area is to consider crime victimisation rates. These indicators, collected in the Crime and Safety survey, are incidents of crime regardless of whether they had been reported to the police. The survey focused on those categories of more serious crime that affect the largest number of people. There are two groups of offences – 'household crimes' and 'personal crimes'. The former refers to the theft of a motor vehicle and actual or attempted break-ins. The latter refers to assaults, sexual assaults and robbery. Crimes such as non-violent theft, fraud and property damage are not included.

The proportion of households experiencing a household crime between 1993 and 2005 decreased. In 1993, just over 8% of households were the victim of a at least one household crime. In 2005, just over 6% of households experienced a crime. Break-ins were the most commonly reported household crime in 2005 (3.3% of households), while 2.6% of households reported an attempted break-in and 1.0% reported a motor vehicle theft.

Households experienced almost three-quarters of a million household crimes in 2005. About 209,000 households experienced just one break-in, but a further 36,000 households experienced two break-ins that year, while over 15,000 experienced

three or more such crimes. Almost 75,000 households had a motor vehicle stolen in 2005.

Though small, the changes in the prevalence rates for personal crimes between 1998 and 2005 showed an increase. In 1998, 4.8% of Australians reported being the victim of at least one personal crime. In 2005 the figure stood at 5.3%, the same level as in 2002. Assault was the most commonly reported personal crime, with 4.8% of people reporting at least one assault in 2005. Some 0.4% of people reported at least one robbery, and 0.3% reported sexual assault.

Almost 2.8 million personal crimes were experienced by individuals in 2005. About 370,000 people reported being the victim of a single assault in 2005. Another 146,000 people were the victim of two assaults, while 252,000 people were the victim of three or more assaults. Some 40,000 people were the victim of one robbery, 11,000 were the victim of two and approximately 8,000 were the victim of three or more.

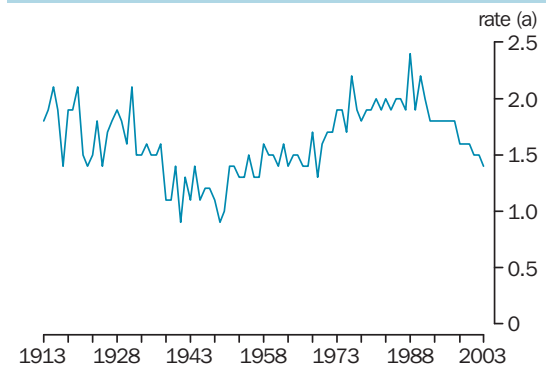
## Homicide rates

The homicide rate (here based on cause of death statistics rather than police statistics) offers a longer term view of the prevalence of crime in Australia.<sup>2</sup> While representing only a small fraction of overall crime, homicide (referring in this context to murder and manslaughter) is one offence category for which generally consistent statistics have been available for many years, and it is also a crime that does not often go unreported.

Homicide rates for the period 1913 to 2003 have fluctuated, often substantially from one year to the next, but overall within a relatively small range, i.e. between extreme lows and highs of 0.9 and 2.4 homicides per 100,000 people per annum.

Despite the annual fluctuations and some decades of relative stability, there were some longer periods over which the rates tended to rise and fall. Broadly described, these include a decline in the rates after the 1920s, down to lows recorded during the 1940s – around the time of World War II. After that, there was a long-term upward trend

## Homicide rate



(a) Age-standardised rate per 100,000 people.  
Source: AIHW GRIM books 2003.

**International comparison of homicide**

Crime statistics suitable for international comparison are not widely available. However, as the definition of homicide is similar in most countries, comparisons of homicide rates help to reveal some of the differences in levels of crime among countries. Such data compiled from police records by researchers for the Home Office of the United Kingdom, are presented below.

For the period 1999 to 2001, the average homicide rate for the 17 member states of the European Union was 1.6 per 100,000 persons (the rates ranged from a low of 1.0 in Norway to a high of 2.7 in Northern Ireland). Australia's rate (1.9) was slightly higher than the European Union average and similar to Canada (1.8). Higher homicide rates were recorded in some other parts of the world. For instance the rates in the USA and South Africa were 5.6 and 55.9 respectively.

**Homicide rates(a) – 1999 to 2001**

Selected countries	Homicide rate
<b>European Union member States</b>	
Norway	1.0
England and Wales(b)	1.6
France	1.7
Northern Ireland(b)	2.7
Italy(c)	1.5
<i>European Union – average for 17 member states</i>	1.6
<b>Other countries</b>	
<b>Australia</b>	<b>1.9</b>
Canada(c)	1.8
Japan(d)	1.1
New Zealand	2.5
South Africa	55.9
USA	5.6

(a) Homicides per 100,000 people, three year average. (b) Data relate to financial years beginning 1 April of each year. (c) Includes murder, manslaughter and infanticide. (d) Includes attempts.

Source: Barclay G & Tavares C. 2003, *International Comparisons of Criminal Justice Statistics, 2001*. Home Office, United Kingdom.

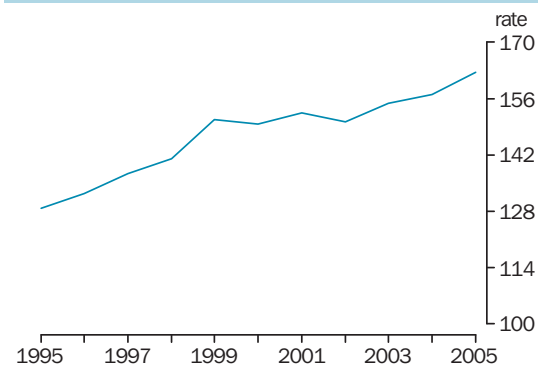
which reached a peak of 2.4 homicides per 100,000 people in 1988.

After falling back to 1.8 homicides per 100,000 people in 1992 the annual rates through the 1990s have fallen slightly further. In 2003, there were 278 homicides recorded in the cause of death statistics: 1.4 homicides per 100,000 people. Similar data compiled from police records since 1993 indicate little change through the 1990s.<sup>3</sup>

**Indigenous and non-Indigenous imprisonment rates**

Although courts may impose various penalties for people convicted of criminal offences (fines, community service orders and the like) imprisonment is the most severe social response to

**Imprisonment rate per 100,000 adults<sup>4</sup>**



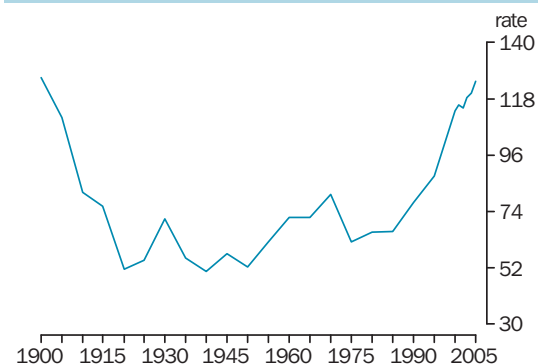
Source: *Prisoners in Australia, 2005*, cat. no. 4517.0.

crime in Australia. Changes in the imprisonment rate (the number of people in prison relative to a measure of the total population) do not necessarily measure changes in the level of crime or success in catching and convicting criminals, although they may be related. They can reflect changes in community attitudes (played out through the court system) as to how tough the community's response to crime should be, as well as changes in prison capacity.

Overall, the rate of imprisonment has increased over the decade 1995–2005 so that by 2005, 163 adults in every 100,000 were serving a prison sentence – up from 129 per 100,000 in 1995.

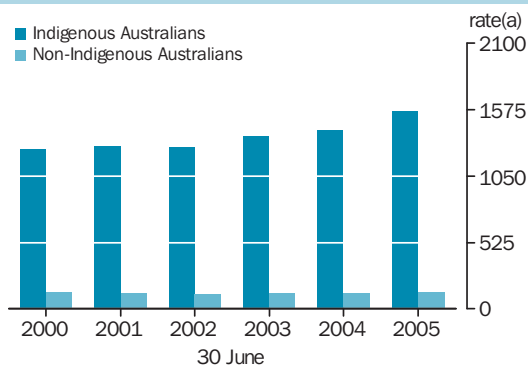
Historical data compiled by the Australian Institute of Criminology show that this trend has been part of a longer term trend over the last 20 or so years. There had also been an increasing trend during the 1950s and 1960s. Measured as a proportion of the total population rather than the adult population (those aged 18 years or over), it also shows that imprisonment rates in 2005 stood at levels higher than in most other years of the 20th century. Following the upward trend seen over recent decades, the rates have now returned to the levels observed at the beginning of the 20th century: in

**Imprisonment rate per 100,000 people(a)**



(a) Rate per 100,000 people of all ages. Source: Graycar A. 2001, *Crime in twentieth century Australia*, in *Year Book, Australia, 2001*, cat. no. 1301.0; *Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2000*, cat. no. 3101.0; and *Prisoners in Australia, 2005*, cat. no. 4517.0.

### Indigenous and non-Indigenous imprisonment rates, per 100,000 adults<sup>4</sup>



(a) Age standardised rate per 100,000 adults.

Source: *Prisoners in Australia, 2005*, cat. no. 4517.0.

2005 there were 125 prisoners per 100,000 people (of all ages) compared to 126 in 1900.

The imprisonment of Indigenous Australians has been a major issue of social concern in Australia, with imprisonment rates much higher than those of the non-Indigenous population. There have also been related concerns about the high proportion of Indigenous Australians in prisons dying of unnatural causes, especially by suicide.<sup>5</sup>

In 2005, the age-standardised imprisonment rate for adults of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin was over 12 times the rate for non-Indigenous people (1,561 prisoners per 100,000 adults compared with 129 prisoners per 100,000 adults). The Indigenous imprisonment rate increased over the 5-year period, and in 2005 it was higher than in 2000 when the rate was 1,265 prisoners per 100,000 adults. In June 2005, there were close to 5,700 Indigenous prisoners in Australia; they represented 22% of the 25,353 people in prison at that time.

### Some differences within Australia

Crime rates tend to be higher on average in metropolitan centres than in non-metropolitan areas, but can vary considerably within those areas.<sup>6</sup> Very high rates are observed in some small rural areas with high levels of disadvantage.<sup>7</sup> There are likely to be many reasons for the differences. Places with high crime rates tend to have interrelated problems of disadvantage (such as low income, high unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, family relationship problems, and high levels of drug use). Differences between areas may also relate to the opportunities to commit crime in those areas and the extent to which people and properties are protected. Comparisons among the states and territories are of interest because the criminal justice system, including police, courts, and correctional services, is primarily administered by state and territory Governments. Comparing the different outcomes across the jurisdictions may be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of various crime prevention and reduction strategies.<sup>8</sup>

Crime victimisation rates (from the ABS Crime and Safety Survey) and murder and kidnapping/abduction rates (as recorded by police) varied considerably among Australia's states and territories and to some extent from year to year. Murder and kidnapping/abduction are crimes which are experienced much less frequently than other crimes such as assaults, break-ins and motor vehicle threats. In 2004, murder rates were below 2.0 per 100,000 adults 18 years and over in all states, with the exception of the Northern Territory with a rate of 4.5. For kidnapping/abduction the rates varied from 1.3 to 3.0 across all states except New South Wales, which experienced a rate of 6.9.<sup>3</sup>

In 2005, total household crime victimisation rates were lowest in Tasmania and Victoria, as were total personal crime victimisation rates. No single state

### Victimisation rates for selected offences(a) – 2005

	NSW	Vic.	Qld	SA	WA	Tas.	NT	ACT	Aust.
	rate	rate	rate	rate	rate	rate	rate	rate	rate
Personal crime(b)									
Assault	4.8	4.1	5.7	4.7	5.2	4.4	5.9	5.5	4.8
Robbery	0.4	0.2	0.4	*0.3	0.5	**0.1	**0.5	*0.3	0.4
<b>Total personal crime(c)</b>	<b>5.4</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>4.7</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>5.3</b>
Household crime									
Break-in/attempted break-in	5.9	3.9	5.4	5.5	7.2	3.8	12.8	6.6	5.4
Motor vehicle theft	1.1	0.7	0.8	1.3	0.9	*0.9	np	np	1.0
<b>Total household crime(c)</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>13.0</b>	<b>7.6</b>	<b>6.2</b>

(a) Victims refer to individual people for personal crimes, or households for property crimes per 1,000 people/households. (b) Excludes murder and kidnapping/abduction. (c) The total is not a sum of each of the components as people/households can experience more than one crime.

\* estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

\*\* estimate has a relative standard error greater than 50% and is considered too unreliable for general use.

np not available for publication but included in totals where applicable, unless otherwise indicated.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005* cat. no. 4509.0.

had the highest (or lowest) rate for all offence categories shown, however the Northern Territory had the highest crime rates for assault and break-ins.

There are likely to be many factors accounting for the differences. States differ in their demographic and socioeconomic profiles: some population groups are more likely to be either perpetrators and/or victims of crime and some of these groups are more highly represented in certain states. For example, states and territories with younger populations tend to have higher crime rates than states with older population profiles, as a high proportion of offences are committed by young people (particularly young men).<sup>9</sup> Differences in the representation of population groups with other characteristics more likely to be correlated with crime (such as those with low levels of educational attainment, high unemployment rates and low income) may be a factor. Differences in the level of drug and alcohol use in each community may also be important, as may other factors, such as the level of policing activity.

**Victims of personal crimes**

The chance of being the victim of a robbery or an assault decreases with age. In 2005, 9.9% of 15–19 year olds were the victim of an assault compared to 0.8% of those aged 65 or over. Similarly 1.2% of 15–19 year olds were the victim of a robbery compared to approximately 0.1% of those aged 65 or over.

Data from the General Social Survey in 2002 shows that the unemployed, lone parents and people living alone were also more likely to be victims of personal (and household) crimes than their married, and employed or not in the labour force, counterparts.

In 2005, almost one-third of assaults happened in the victim’s home, with a further 26% in their place of work or study. A weapon was used in 12% of assaults, and in over three-quarters of assaults the victim was not physically hurt. About 78% of assaults were carried out by men, and the victims knew their assailants 59% of the time.

**Recent trends**

Changes in crime rates in recent years within each of the states and territories show some quite different trends, which also differ according to the nature of the offences involved. Such differences are illustrated by focusing on the two major offence categories presented as the headline indicators (household and personal crimes).

**Household crimes**

National rates of household crimes decreased between 1993 and 2005, and this trend was observed in all states and territories except the Northern Territory, where there was no significant difference in the rate.

**Personal crimes**

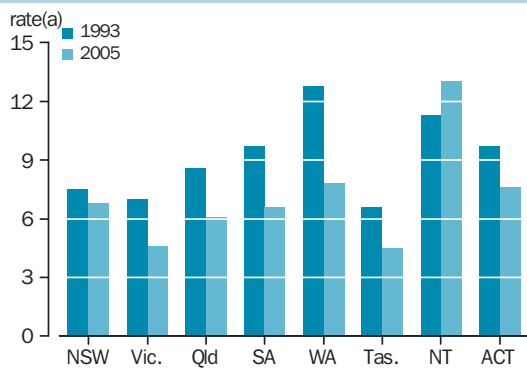
Comparative data relating to the prevalence of personal crimes cover a shorter time period than for household crimes, and while the rate at the national level has increased between 1998 and 2005, this trend was not uniform. Among the states and territories, the victimisation rates for personal crimes rose in New South Wales from 4.6% of people experiencing a crime in 1998 to 5.4% of people in 2005, and in Queensland (5.1% to 6.1%). The rate fell in the Australian Capital Territory, from 7.7% of people in 1998 to 5.8% in 2005, and also in Tasmania from 5.7% to 4.7%. Rates remained broadly unchanged in the other states.

**Factors influencing change**

Law breaking occurs within all societies, and all have systems of policing and justice to help minimise its spread and to maintain social order. Many factors influence a person's risk of criminal behaviour, and many also affect differences in crime rates among areas and changes in crime rates over time.

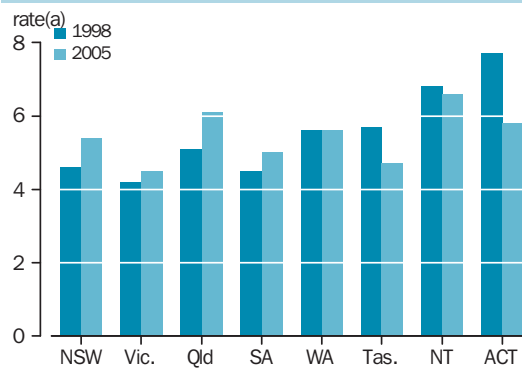
Differences in crime rates between areas have also been associated with poverty, unemployment and income inequality. Over time, changing levels of drug dependence may have been a factor in changes in crime rates.<sup>10</sup> The prevalence of crime may also depend on available opportunities and the size of the potential rewards, perhaps weighed

**Household crime victimisation rates**



(a) Rate per 100,000 households. Source: Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005 cat. no. 4509.0.

**Personal crime victimisation rates**



(a) Rate per 100,000 people. Source: Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005 cat. no. 4509.0.



## Crimes recorded by police

Most of the statistics in this commentary are based on people's responses to ABS surveys, although some data come from police figures. Crimes recorded by police are offences that became known to police and are recorded by them. These offences may have been reported by a victim, witness or other person, or may have been detected by police.

Care should be taken in interpreting police statistics as many crimes are not reported to the police (see next paragraph). Changes in recorded crime may be a reflection of changes such as:

- ◆ community attitudes to reporting crime
- ◆ policing resources and strategies
- ◆ crime recording systems

rather than changes in the incidence of criminal behaviour.

## Crime reporting rates

National crime and safety surveys conducted by the ABS estimate the extent to which incidents of crime were reported to the police. Whether the most recent incident in the last 12 months has been reported is widely used as a guide to the overall preparedness of victims to report crime. As such it is sometimes used to provide an indication of whether there are particular issues with respect to reporting incidents in individual states and territories, or in relation to particular types of offences.

### Crime reporting rates(a) – 2005

	Break-in	Assault(b)
	%	%
NSW	75.0	31.3
Vic.	77.4	31.8
Qld	65.7	32.4
SA	72.9	37.4
WA	79.7	25.9
Tas.	75.0	27.7
NT(c)	*67.4	*35.7
ACT	74.9	26.6
<b>Aust.</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>31.4</b>

(a) The proportion of victims in each offence category who told police about the most recent incident. (b) Persons aged 15 years and over. (c) Refers to mainly urban areas only.  
\* estimate has a relative standard error of between 25% and 50% and should be used with caution.

Source: *Crime and Safety, Australia, 2005, cat. no. 4509.0.*

The national reporting rate in 2005 for break-ins was 74%, with Western Australia having the highest rate (80%) and Queensland the lowest rate (66%). Victims were much less likely to report assault to the police – the national reporting rate was 31%, ranging from 37% in South Australia to 26% in Western Australia.

One of the known factors for the difference in reporting patterns for different offence types is the requirement to report property crimes for insurance purposes, whereas for assault victims a common reason for not telling police was that the incident was either seen as too trivial or that it was a personal matter.

against the risk of detection, apprehension and punishment.

Family factors, such as conflict with parents and family disruption, parental neglect, deviant parental behaviours and attitudes, are also considered to be strong predictors of juvenile involvement in crime.<sup>9</sup>

Common responses to increasing levels of crime include increasing prevention and detection activities, and increasing penalties, such as terms of imprisonment. Significant investigation into the longer term impact of these responses is necessary in order to properly assess the influence of these factors on changing levels of crime.

## Links to other dimensions of progress

In the absence of clear evidence one can only speculate as to whether changes in crime rates have been associated with other indicators of progress presented in this publication. There are strong links to levels of economic hardship when comparing crime rates among population subgroups, but the association between crime rates and changes in unemployment over time is considered to be weak.<sup>11</sup> It is believed that the effect of changes in levels of economic hardship on crime may be indirect, for example, by disrupting the parenting process and increasing the likelihood of neglect and abuse of children, making them more susceptible to the influence of delinquent peers.<sup>11</sup>

Drug addiction, a major health concern, is also associated with criminal activity (both in terms of dealing with prohibited drugs and sometimes in having to commit other crimes to support what can be expensive drug habits). To the extent that the prevalence of crime affects people's trust of others there may also be a link between crime rates and levels of social cohesion.

See also the commentaries *Work, Economic hardship*, and *Family, community and social cohesion*.

## End notes

- 1 See, for example, Mahew, P. 2003, 'Counting the costs of crime in Australia', in *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 247, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra. Also, for contemporary data on expenditures on policing and community safety and support services, see Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision (SCRCSSP) 2006, *Report on Government Services 2006*, Vol. 1. Ausinfo, Canberra.
- 2 For a recent study on producing homicide rates using different data sources see, Mouzous, J. 2003, 'Australian Homicide Rates: A comparison of three data sources' in *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, No. 261, Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), Canberra.
- 3 The rate of murder and manslaughter offences recorded in national police statistics fluctuated between 1.7 and 2.0 per 100,000 people between 1993 and 2003 with no apparent trend. See Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004, *Recorded Crime*

- *Victims, Australia, 2004*, cat. no. 4510.0, ABS, Canberra.
- 4 In some jurisdictions the adult population comprises those people aged 18 and over, in others it is those people aged 17 and over.
  - 5 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (RCIADIC) 1991, *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, Volume 1* (Commissioner, Elliot Johnson), AGPS, Canberra. Annual figures for Aboriginal deaths in custody are available from: Joudo, J, and Veld, M. 2005, *Deaths in Custody in Australia: 2004 National Deaths in Custody Program (NDICP) Annual Report*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.
  - 6 National statistics relating to differences between 'metropolitan' and 'non-metropolitan' areas have been published in Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Crime and Safety, Australia, 2002 and 2005*, cat. no. 4509.0, ABS, Canberra. Differences within states have also been published in the following state-based publications: see Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Crime and Safety, New South Wales, 2003*, cat. no. 4509.1, ABS, Canberra. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Crime and Safety, South Australia 2000*, cat. no. 4509.4, ABS, Canberra and Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001, *Crime and Safety, Western Australia, 1999*, cat. no. 4509.5, ABS, Canberra.
  - 7 For example, see Losoncz, I., Carcach, C., Blake, M., and Muscat, G. 2000, *Atlas of Crime in Australia, 2000*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra. Differences can also be seen in tables 9.1 and 9.2 in: Australian Bureau of Statistics 1999, *Crime and Safety, Supplementary National and Standard Tables, Australia, 1998*, cat. no. 4509.0.40.001, ABS, Canberra.
  - 8 It should be noted that comparisons of the criminal justice systems of the states and territories, and their impact on crime rates, may be affected by differences in legislation and administrative or organisational arrangements.
  - 9 See Weatherburn, D. 2001, *What Causes Crime?* (Crime and Justice Bulletin B54) at <<http://www.Lawlink.nsw.gov.au/bocsar1.nsf>> last viewed 27 March 2006.
  - 10 While it is difficult to gather an accurate measure of levels of drug dependence due to the reluctance of people to identify as drug users, if we consider drug-induced deaths (see *Family, community & social cohesion* chapter) there was a sharp increase in drug-induced deaths over the past 15 years, which was later followed by a sharp decline.
  - 11 Weatherburn, D., Lind, B., and Ku, S. 2001, 'The Short-Run Effects of Economic Adversity on Property Crime: An Australian Case Study', in *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 34 No. 2, pp. 134–148.