

AUSTRALIA

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Description of sample

2,006 respondents from throughout Australia were selected according to known regional and demographic characteristics. Australia is a very highly urbanised nation, and over sixty per cent of the sample was obtained from its five largest cities, which range in size from around 1½ million to over 4 million persons. As Australia is a socially homogeneous nation, however, while the city-country split is indicative of differences in opportunities for crime, it appears to be virtually unrelated to social class.

Data collection technique

Data collection was conducted, in English, by the well known Roy Morgan Research Company using the same CATI technique as had been employed for the 1989 survey. Interviewers, some of whom were familiar with the previous survey, were given specific training on the contents of the questionnaire, and were warned about the sensitive nature of the topics. The survey took place in the last week of January 1992, with supplementary calls being made three weeks later to bring the sample up to 2,006 interviews. It is probably important to note that the end of January in Australia is mid summer, and is, according to police statistics, also the peak period for recorded statistics on a range of crimes including burglary, personal thefts and assaults. Most other countries' surveys will have taken place during the northern hemisphere winter.

Only two problems were encountered. These were a very poor overall response rate in the two major cities, Sydney and Melbourne, and some respondent suspicion particularly in Perth. The Perth problem was related to an incident in that city shortly before the survey took place, where the media had reported that a person, purporting to be conducting a survey on crime, had made indecent suggestions to females. The telephone number provided for respondents to check the authenticity of the survey was much used.

Response rate and recontacting

The initial sample of 3,508 produced 1,789 interviews (51%) including up to 12 call backs and call back of "Weak Refusals". A further 471 sample was required to complete the final 2,006 interviews. The distribution of respondents was 55% female and 45% male (Census data 51% female and 49% male for persons aged 16 and over). Table 1 gives a breakdown of call results.

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Victimisation rates

Tables 2 and 3 present the prevalence victimisation rates for the five and one-year period under survey, respectively. The results from the 1992 survey appear to be similar in most respects to those of the 1989 survey. The increased five-year rates for car theft, car damage and robbery all accord with official statistics on trends in crimes reported to the police, and all appear to be statistically significant. Police statistics, however, also show increases in other offences, such as assaults and burglaries, which do not show up in the two surveys. The significant fall in survey figures from 13.5% to 8.9% for sexual incidents runs counter to trends in official statistics for serious sexual assaults.

The most significantly different response in the one-year rates of victimisation is the much lower 1992 figure for sexual incidents (3.5% compared to 7.3% in 1989). This figure is much more in line with other countries' results from 1989. The fall suggested by the survey results does not, however, agree with figures for crimes reported to the police over the same period, which increased significantly. The sensitisation of the Australian population to the issue of sexual harassment during the 1980s, and the increased sensitivity with which it is now treated by Australian police services, may account for these changes. The inclusion of the new question "Was it a crime?" may also have influenced the results downwards.

Other offences - car theft and personal theft - were significantly higher in 1992 than 1989 in the one-year victimisation rates, in accordance with official police figures.

The comparatively high consumer fraud victimisation rate gives much food for thought for future surveys.

Reporting to the police

Again, the results were very similar to those of 1989. The offence types with low reporting rates - for example, car vandalism and sexual incidents - also tend to have a high ratio of one-year victimisation rate to five-year victimisation rate, which may suggest that many such incidents are minor, not worth reporting, and easily forgotten (see Table 4).

Reasons for not reporting to the police

The point made about minor incidents is reinforced by the figures on reasons for not reporting (Table 5). In virtually every offence type, at least one-third of unreported incidents were "not serious enough". Only car theft escapes this pattern, with only a sixth being "not serious enough", which is not surprising considering the nature of the offence. There appears to be a realistic level of awareness that in many cases there is nothing the police can do.

Quite low percentages of victims thought that "the police wouldn't do anything", or didn't report because of "fear/dislike of police", or "didn't dare". The violent offences of robbery, sexual incidents and non-sexual assaults were exceptions here, and these crimes also produced high percentages in the categories of "solved it myself" and "inappropriate for police", suggesting perhaps that the victims were well acquainted with the offender(s).

Crime seriousness

There is an interesting relationship between crime seriousness, as measured by this question (see Table 6), and the percentages not reported to the police. For the offences of car theft, burglary, thefts from cars and thefts of bicycles, the percentage "not reported" was less than the percentage "not serious". Some of these offences are therefore reported to the police despite the fact that they are not serious incidents - presumably they are reported only because of insurance policy implications. For offences of car vandalism and personal theft the percentage not reported was greater than the percentage "not serious", but not greater than the total of "not serious" plus "fairly serious", suggesting that some of these offences are not reported in spite of being "fairly serious" - these are also offences with high percentages that are not reported because the police "could do nothing". Finally, the three categories involving violence - robbery, sexual incidents and assaults - all have percentages "not reported" exceeding the total of "not serious" and "fairly serious", indicating that some incidents described as "very serious" are not reported to the police. As mentioned previously, the relationship between victim and offender may be an important factor here inhibiting the reporting of even serious events.

Victim support

As Table 7 demonstrates, most support for the role of specialised victims agencies came, not surprisingly, from victims of sexual incidents, but also from victims of robbery in spite of the fact that the police were usually called to such incidents. Victims of violence in general found support from the family, friends and neighbours - possibly the result of the intensity of care required for such victims, which the police are unable to provide.

Satisfaction with the police

Table 8 indicates the level of satisfaction with the police, as expressed by the respondents, for each crime category. Only the victims of reported sexual incidents were generally dissatisfied with the police response, with three-quarters of the victims of these offences being dissatisfied. Their reasons for dissatisfaction ranged across the spectrum, but were most likely to be that the police didn't do enough or that they treated them with lack of courtesy. Victims of other violent crimes were also inclined to be dissatisfied, but they were not the majority of victims. Victims of property crimes were overwhelmingly satisfied.

Overall, 69.4% of the respondents thought the local police did a good job controlling crime, and only 16.0% thought they did a poor job. Again, victims of violent offences were least likely to approve of the police (excluding the "theft of motorcycle" category, where small numbers make those results meaningless).

Fear of crime

About a third of the respondents felt at least "a bit unsafe" when walking the streets after dark. Victimisation in terms of robbery or sexual incidents increased that proportion, but interestingly non-sexual assaults/threats did not. Avoiding

places, and (in the case of victims of sexual incidents) even avoiding going out at all, followed similar trends. Over half of all the respondents thought it likely that they would be burgled during the coming year, with those who had experienced the theft of a bicycle being much less pessimistic, possibly having parents with young families at home all day to deter burglars (see Table 9).

Crime prevention measures

Table 10 lists the crime prevention measures taken by the respondents. With a high proportion of two-income households, Australians have in recent years taken a keen interest in effective door locking mechanisms, such as double deadlocks. Almost two-thirds of the survey respondents had special door locks. Neighbours and watchdogs are also frequently relied upon to deter burglars. Other special crime prevention measures were much less used. Only one in six households possesses firearms as a form of crime prevention - this figure appears somewhat lower than that produced in the 1989 survey (20.7%) and may have been affected by a range of tougher gun licencing laws passed recently in several parts of Australia.

Attitudes towards punishment

As in the 1989 survey, around one-third of the respondents thought the offender should go to prison, with a median sentence length of 6-12 months. The most favoured treatment for the offender was some form of community service, suggesting that the respondents are less interested in retribution than they are in rehabilitative restitution. Fines and suspended sentences were thought inappropriate by most respondents for this type of offender (see Table 11).

TABLES

Table 1: Call result summary

Total sample	3,979
Complete interviews	2,006 (50%)
Appointments for call back	47 (1%)
Number busy/engaged tone	14 (0%)
No answer	153 (4%)
Strong refusal	859 (22%)
Weak refusal	192 (5%)
Respondent terminated mid-interview	31 (1%)
Hearing problem	59 (1%)
Foreign/no English	177 (4%)
No adults in household	6 (0%)
Disconnected number	187 (5%)
Business/facsimile number	107 (3%)
Number incomplete (not enough digits)	29 (1%)

Other reasons for termination of call	112 (3%)
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Table 2: Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)*

	Victimisation rate %
Theft of car	9.7
Theft from car	17.6
Car vandalism	23.2
Theft of motorcycle	0.7
Theft of bicycle	5.7
(Owners)	
Theft of car	10.7
Theft from car	19.5
Car vandalism	25.5
Theft of motorcycle	6.1
Theft of bicycle	9.9
Percentage of total respondents:	
Burglary with entry	14.3
Attempted burglary	11.9
Robbery	3.5
Personal theft	15.4
Sexual incidents (females only)	8.9
Assault/threat	11.6

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 3: Prevalence victimisation rates (1 year)*

	Victimisation rate %
Theft of car	3.0
Theft from car	6.2
Car vandalism	9.1
Theft of motorcycle	0.2
Theft of bicycle	1.8
(Owners)	
Theft of car	3.3
Theft from car	6.8
Car vandalism	10.0
Theft of motorcycle	2.0
Theft of bicycle	3.1
Percentage of total respondents:	
Burglary with entry	4.1
Attempted burglary	4.0
Robbery	1.2
Personal theft	6.2
Sexual incidents (females only)	3.5
Assault/threat	4.4
Consumer fraud	8.3

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 4: Reported crimes

	%
Theft of car	93.8
Theft from car	52.8
Car vandalism	26.2
Theft of motorcycle	93.3
Theft of bicycle	74.8
Burglary with entry	88.5
Attempted burglary	49.2
Robbery	51.4
Personal theft	41.4
Sexual incidents (females only)	13.3
Assault/threat	40.8
Consumer fraud	22.3*

* 2.4% to police; 19.9% to other agency.

Table 5: Reasons for not reporting*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/threat %
Percentage not reported	6.2	47.2	73.8	6.7	25.2	11.5	48.6	58.6	86.7	59.2
Not serious enough	16.7	69.1	74.0	100.0	46.2	39.4	32.4	50.8	41.7	37.5
Solved it myself	33.3	3.7	1.2	0.0	19.2	27.3	14.7	5.6	14.3	11.0
Innapropr. for police	25.0	11.7	13.2	0.0	3.8	6.1	14.7	16.2	16.7	19.9
Other authorities	16.7	1.9	1.2	0.0	0.0	3.0	5.9	15.1	7.1	10.3
My family solved it	0.0	0.6	0.9	0.0	0.0	9.1	2.9	0.0	0.0	2.9
No insurance	0.0	1.9	0.3	0.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.6	0.0	0.0
Police could do nothing	8.3	15.4	19.5	0.0	19.2	9.1	20.6	19.6	20.2	14.0
Police won't do anything	0.0	9.3	5.1	0.0	3.8	9.1	5.9	5.0	4.8	7.4
Fear/dislike police	0.0	0.6	0.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.8	0.6	1.2	2.9
Didn't dare	0.0	0.6	0.3	0.0	3.8	6.1	5.9	0.0	7.1	9.6
Other reasons	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Don't know	8.3	1.2	0.6	0.0	7.7	3.0	5.9	1.1	2.4	3.7

* Percentage of incidents not reported - multiple answers possible. Percentages calculated on victims who said they had not reported the last incident of each type of crime to the police.

Table 6: Crime seriousness*

	Theft of car	Theft from car	Car vandalism	Theft of motor-cycle	Theft of bicycle	Burglary with entry	Robbery	Personal theft	Sexual incidents	Assault/ threat
Very serious	55.4	16.7	14.8	60.0	27.0	59.9	55.7	30.7	42.9	47.4
Fairly serious	30.3	33.9	24.5	13.3	37.4	25.1	21.4	30.4	25.5	30.9
Not serious	14.4	49.4	60.6	26.7	35.7	15.0	22.9	38.8	31.6	19.7

* Percentages of all incidents.

Table 7: Victim support (in percentages)

	Theft of car	Theft from car	Car vandalism	Theft of motor-cycle	Theft of bicycle	Burglary with entry	Robbery	Personal theft	Sexual incidents	Assault/ threat
Support obtained from:										
Family, friends, neighbours	47.8	34.9	31.1	50.0	27.3	51.7	46.2	47.4	63.6	64.4
Police	37.0	10.7	3.8	25.0	20.5	38.3	7.7	15.1	12.1	9.1
Others	1.1	.0	.4	.0	4.5	.7	23.1	3.9	12.1	7.6
Specialised agency useful?										
No	69.6	81.7	81.9	75.0	72.7	67.1	38.5	77.0	51.5	62.1
Yes	26.1	14.8	13.9	25.0	22.7	27.5	53.8	20.4	45.5	31.1
Don't know	4.3	3.6	4.2	.0	4.5	5.4	7.7	2.6	3.0	4.5

Table 8: Satisfaction with police

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motor-cycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/ threat %
Was most recent crime reported to police? (percentages of incidents where police contacted)										
Yes	90.2	53.3	18.9	100.0	77.3	89.3	69.2	41.4	12.1	37.9
No	9.8	46.2	79.0	.0	20.5	10.7	30.8	58.6	84.8	62.1
Were you satisfied with police response? (percentages of incidents where police contacted)										
Yes	80.7	72.2	79.9	50.0	79.4	79.6	66.6	79.5	24.8	62.0
No	14.4	24.4	13.2	50.0	17.6	18.0	33.4	19.1	75.2	38.0
Don't know	4.8	3.4	6.9	.0	3.0	2.2	.0	1.7	.0	.0
Reason for dissatisfaction (percentages of incidents where police response unsatisfactory - multiple answers possible)										
Didn't do enough	33.3	40.9	50.0	100.0	50.0	29.2	33.3	33.3	66.7	52.6
Lack of interest	50.0	50.0	33.3	.0	50.0	29.2	66.7	41.7	33.3	42.1
Lack of success	41.7	31.8	50.0	.0	.0	41.7	66.7	25.0	33.3	15.8
Lack of courtesy	33.3	31.8	33.3	.0	16.7	62.5	33.3	66.7	66.7	42.1
Local police control of crime (percentages of all respondents)										
They do a good job	78.3	66.3	70.6	25.0	72.7	66.4	61.5	70.4	63.6	64.4
Not a good job	6.5	17.8	15.1	75.0	9.1	16.1	15.4	14.5	18.2	22.0
Don't know	15.2	16.0	14.3	.0	18.2	17.4	23.1	15.1	18.2	13.6

Table 9: Fear of crime

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/threat %
Walking alone after dark										
Very safe	21.7	26.0	26.5	50.0	31.8	30.2	15.4	23.0	12.1	28.0
Fairly safe	44.6	38.5	46.2	25.0	45.5	35.6	38.5	37.5	33.3	41.7
A bit unsafe	16.3	20.7	16.4	.0	11.4	14.1	23.1	21.7	21.2	13.6
Very unsafe	17.4	14.8	10.9	25.0	11.4	20.1	23.1	17.8	33.3	16.7
Avoidance of areas/people										
I avoid places/people	21.7	24.3	21.4	25.0	13.6	16.1	46.2	30.9	33.3	24.2
No, I don't worry	63.0	69.8	65.5	75.0	79.5	72.5	53.8	55.9	48.5	63.3
Don't know	3.3	1.8	2.9	.0	2.3	2.0	.0	1.3	.0	1.5
I never go out	12.0	4.1	10.1	.0	4.5	9.4	.0	11.8	18.2	10.6
Chances of burglary this year										
Very likely	17.4	18.3	14.7	50.0	4.5	16.1	23.1	18.4	18.2	12.1
Likely	42.4	36.1	34.9	.0	40.9	45.6	15.4	34.9	45.5	35.6
Not likely	31.5	42.0	46.6	25.0	52.3	32.2	53.8	41.4	36.4	43.9
Don't know	8.7	3.6	3.8	25.0	2.3	6.0	7.7	5.3	.0	8.3

Table 10: Crime prevention measures*

	%
Installed burglar alarm	13.8
Installed door locks	60.5
Installed window/door grills	33.3
Maintain watchdogs	36.0
Have a high fence around the property	23.9
Have a caretaker	3.6
None of these	14.7
Asked somebody to watch house when away	64.4
Have neighbours who watch anyway	14.0
Possess firearms	16.5

* Percentages based on total sample of respondents - multiple answers possible.

Table 11: Attitudes towards punishment*

	%
Preferred sentence for recidivist TV thief	
Fine	7.7
Community service order	48.0
Suspended sentence	4.0
Prison sentence	34.0
- Median sentence length	6-12 months
Any other sentence	6.4

* Percentages based on total sample of respondents.