

## **Future Directions (and Challenges) for Crime and Justice Research**

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This paper has been prepared for the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium. The Symposium provides the opportunity to recognise the outstanding contribution the Bureau and all its officers have made to the understanding of crime and criminological issues. Under the leadership of Dr Don Weatherburn since 1988 the Bureau has provided the highest quality crime and justice research and statistical analysis. Over that time the work of the Bureau has substantially informed and influenced the development of criminal and law enforcement policy in New South Wales. The Bureau has, of course, been recognised internationally for its groundbreaking research and innovative development work in areas such as justice modelling and crime mapping.

Crime and justice has always excited the attention of the media and consequently the community. To an observer there appears to be one constant; crime is out of control, sentences are too light and prison conditions are too soft. The media consistently highlights its outrage at examples of serious crimes or unacceptably light sentences. We should not be surprised that this drives governments and oppositions to respond in kind to these alleged expressions of community concern.

In reality our communities are rarely united on such issues and individual attitudes reflect a variety of opinions and positions on issues. The traditional 'law and order' debate invokes a range of views from 'zero tolerance' and harsh punishment to a focus on rehabilitation and prevention. To those of us who work in the justice field there is rarely any respite from the continuing conflict between polarised opinions on criminal justice policy. It seems that everyone has an opinion on 'law and order' but all too frequently those opinions are based on hearsay and information that bear little accord with reality. The New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) recently published an extremely useful study that, inter alia, tested respondents on their knowledge of crime and the criminal justice system. Not surprisingly the research identified a significant lack of understanding of crime and sentencing facts and trends (Jones, Weatherburn & McFarlane 2008).

This highlights two critical and perennial challenges for researchers and policy-makers. First, how do we ensure the community is better informed about the operations and impact of the criminal justice system to enable more informed community debate? Second, how can government be provided with better information and evidence upon which to base its decisions and policy making?

### **Community Understanding and Access**

There have been many studies and surveys that have demonstrated the desire and need for more knowledge within the community about actual levels and trends in crime and how the criminal justice system works. BOCSAR's 2008 study confirmed

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the earlier research in this area but also identified a strong desire from survey respondents for more information about crime and the criminal justice system.

In developing its State Plan in 2006 the New South Wales Government undertook a series of extensive consultations across the State both with peak community organisations and with individuals. An important part of the consultative process involved the provision to participants of detailed information and facts relevant to the key strategic issues. This resulted in extremely effective consultations with little time in the community consultations being spent debating inaccurate perceptions or misinformation.

Last century locating material relating to crime or the criminal justice system would have involved a visit to a library or to the actual research or justice agency. Over the past decade the ability to present accurate and up-to-date information to the community has been made dramatically easier with the expansion in the coverage and use of the Internet. Not only can information on crime and criminal justice be readily located and accessed but statistical information, research reports and evaluations of justice initiatives are invariably placed on websites. Producing accessible information does not ensure that it is actually used to inform either debate or decision-making but greater access to such information does enable claims to be more readily tested against the facts.

Another way of ensuring a greater level of community understanding of how the justice system works is to encourage greater participation by members of the community in the work of the system. Across the world governments have more recently been exploring justice initiatives, from diversionary to victim or offender support programs, many of which incorporate community involvement in those programs. Many diversionary programs, such as circle sentencing for indigenous offenders, indeed rely upon active victim and community involvement.

The second perennial challenge is ensuring government decisions and policy making are more evidence based. There have been substantial changes to the approach of governments to policy making across all sectors and this is a trend I will deal with in some detail as a driver contributing to crime and justice research.

## **Drivers of Change in Crime and Justice Research**

In considering the future direction of crime and justice research<sup>2</sup> I suggest there are three principal drivers; changes in substantive areas of research, changes in government/community priorities and expectations, and changes in research methodologies and practices. These drivers are not entirely discrete but they do provide a useful analytical framework.

### **Substantive Areas of Research**

Trends in the nature and extent of crime and systemic changes in processes and responses of the criminal justice system clearly influence the nature of research.

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<sup>2</sup> This paper is confined specifically to this area of research and does not canvass the substantial changes that have occurred in medical and forensic science in its application to the investigation and prosecution of crimes.

There are many excellent articles and books which track both historic and more recent trends in criminal offending and identify substantial changes in the way in which our criminal justice systems work.

In 2002 an analysis of the long-term trends in major crime identified substantial differences in the nature of crime but there were 'similar threads' such as alcohol related crime and the high level of imprisonment of those with mental health problems (Graycar & Grabosky 2002). It identified an increasing trend toward illicit drug use, together with alcohol use, driving drug related crime. Not much has changed in the 6 years since their study. Interestingly, the study also identified an increasing complexity in the justice system as well as the number of law enforcement bodies that, both within and outside Australia, were involved in criminal investigations. Not only has this complexity driven a need for greater cooperation between agencies but it has also added complexity to those undertaking research into issues relating to justice agency practices and responses.

We know that the high rates of indigenous imprisonment and offending continue to present a challenge for justice agencies in spite of numerous initiatives directed to prevention, diversion and support. Indeed following the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody the over-representation of aboriginal people in prisons increased rather than decreased despite governments implementing a range of initiatives (Aboriginal Law Bulletin 1994). The Standing Committee of Attorneys General supported the establishment of the National Indigenous Justice Clearinghouse, which is a web-based library of research resources and is jointly funded by the Australian Institute of Criminology and the NSW Attorney General's Department. The initiative has also supported the production of a number of research briefs on indigenous over-representation issues of interest to policy makers. Unfortunately it appears that addressing over-representation will continue to occupy the attention of governments and researchers for more years to come than anyone would wish.

The analysis of crime trends is growing industry but the more recent focus on crime prevention has highlighted the need to reconcile reported crime statistics with crime victimisation surveys. Governments are much more interested today in knowing whether apparent trends reflect actual changes in offending or changes in the propensity to report offences. The response required to an apparent increase in domestic violence will be quite different if it reflects an increase in reporting following a prominent campaign rather than an actual increase in incidence.

One area where the demand for research has increased yet the very infancy of the area makes research especially challenging is the development of entirely new areas of criminal behaviour. Over the past 2 decades these have primarily, although not entirely, arisen from advances in technology. Not surprisingly in these new crime areas very little information may be known; yet with a focus on prevention governments are very keen to know what is happening and how crime in these areas can be thwarted.

These kinds of emerging criminal behaviours include identity theft, computer crime, money laundering (including use of prepaid stored credit cards), cyber victimisation, international financial fraud and Internet fraud. Governments have traditionally

responded by creating new offences or increasing existing penalties but where the offenders are difficult to locate or operating from outside the jurisdiction prosecution is often difficult. Understanding the nature of these offences is critical not so much to prosecution but to prevention.

The scope of these changes in the substantive nature of offending and offences should not be understated (Grabosky & Smith 1998). The scope of telecommunications-related crime emerging in the digital age includes:

- Illegal interception of telecommunications
- Electronic vandalism and terrorism
- Stealing communications services
- Telecommunications piracy
- Pornography and other offensive content
- Telemarketing fraud
- Electronic funds transfer crime
- Electronic money laundering

In more recent years the growth in technologically driven crime has not accelerated and considerable research efforts have been directed to this area (Urbas & Choo 2008 p.6).

Changes in the nature of offending (such as security, immigration or violence offences) or the creation of new offences by parliaments pose particular challenges for those maintaining data collections whilst adding complexity to the tasks of researchers seeking to analyse statistical trends over time.

As Makkai indicated last year:

*“We still lack nationally consistent data on many emerging crimes such as cyber crime or particular categories of crime such as fraud and family violence. There have also been recording and reporting issues surrounding crimes such as assault and sexual assault. This has significant implications for building an evidence base on the overall level of violent crime in Australia and whether those levels are increasing, decreasing or stable.” (Makkai 2008 p.3)*

She also identified the “absence of comprehensive and accessible data on transnational and organised crime” an area that has a substantial impact now on the community. There are many challenges for researchers arising from these changes in the substantive nature of crime. Over time changes to the data systems maintained by police, courts and corrections complicate the analysis of longer-term collections. Information that may not have been seen to be relevant to criminology previously is now seen to be vital to exploring new theories and to evaluating criminological issues.

A good example of this absence of data is in the area of early intervention and diversionary programs for young people with cognitive disabilities or mental health issues. Naturally, the absence of good data has inhibited research and in turn limited the evidence base for good policy making.

Researchers are heavily dependent on justice agencies to maintain data collections that are accurate, comprehensive and consistent but regrettably collections are often not of this quality. More often than not agencies establish data collections for management purposes without full consideration of the information that would be relevant to potential research. An understanding of the nature of offending requires comprehensive information on offenders but unfortunately it remains an area of insufficient data.

## **Changes in Government/Community Priorities and Decision Making**

### **The Commitment to Evidence-based Policy**

Governments have been changing their approach to the decision-making processes they use to address crime problems with an increasing focus on improving the quality and effectiveness of their policy making. The Blair Government in the United Kingdom devoted considerable resources to improving its policy making and its 1999 White Paper on *Modernising Government* made its intentions clear:

*“This Government expects more of policy-makers. More new ideas, more willingness to question inherited ways of doing things, better use of evidence and research in policy making and better focus on policies that will deliver long term goals.”* (Cabinet Office 1999 Ch.2 p.6)

Many governments have followed the lead of the UK Government but this increasing recognition that good policy is based on good evidence raises issues for both researchers and policy makers. Researchers need to understand the needs and aims of policy makers. Policy makers, in turn, need to understand the value and limitations of research as evidence to inform their decisions. This understanding will be best achieved through much greater collaboration between policy makers and researchers.

Of course, policy is developed having regard to a broad spectrum of evidence and information. I have previously cautioned against the unquestioning reliance on research alone to drive policy making. Whilst research is a critical input to policy, regard must also be had to matters such as the community’s values, costs and the interests and rights of individuals.

*“Thus, in many situations, the development of effective evidence based policy or practice cannot rely solely on the unvarnished findings of research. Indeed, such an approach can be positively counter-productive given the gulf that exists between the ‘scientific’ and the ‘common sense’ view of the world, and the ever present risk that apparent certainties will be over-turned by events or the advance of knowledge.”* (Grayson 2002 p.2)

Researchers should not expect policy makers to delegate their decision making to researchers. In return policy makers need to recognise the enormous contribution that research can add to the effectiveness of their decisions. Policy making is not a science but clearly our policies need to be based upon reliable and quality information and evidence.

As relationships between researchers and policy makers strengthen, confidence also grows and so does the ability to recognise good quality research. There is a clear trend towards much greater reliance by governments on research and evaluations to inform change in criminal justice systems. Indeed, few governments have not taken up the same commitment to evidence-based policy making that the Blair Government did almost a decade ago.

The future still holds the same challenge for researchers and policy makers to find ways to cooperate and develop greater mutual understanding of the value and use of research. The interaction between policy and research must be seen to be two ways. There are regular conferences organised by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics directly aimed at fostering this greater interaction and understanding. More focused, relevant and helpful research will lead to better policy making. The AIC and the Criminology Research Council have both sponsored roundtables and workshops to bring together researchers and policy makers to discuss criminological challenges facing governments and the community. These roundtables often result in a more clearly defined problem, identified possible solutions and proposals for relevant new research projects. There is little doubt that this current trend to greater interaction will accelerate over the next decade as governments more actively engage with the research community to identify new solutions to justice related problems.

### **Therapeutic jurisprudence and research**

In fact, governments have been responding to changes in patterns of criminal and community behaviour in many ways. These responses range from the traditional 'law and order' responses, such as increasing penalties and reducing access to bail, to early intervention, diversion and rehabilitation programs.

The expansion of specialist courts has been a singular standout feature of the past decade. Moving courts from an adversarial approach to a 'therapeutic jurisprudence' role has demanded significant changes to the traditional way police, prosecutors, defenders and the courts have dealt with criminal offending. It represents a major cultural shift for all justice agencies and depends on greater collaboration with human service and health agencies both within and outside government. The issues thrown up by this trend for justice system participants and researchers are considerable. Therapeutic jurisprudence has led to the creation of a wide range of 'modified' court processes with initiatives such as drug courts, Koori courts, mental health courts and drug and alcohol diversion schemes.

This development has been accompanied by the realignment of governmental thinking on policy-making. The greater recognition of the importance of evidence-based decisions, I have already outlined, has been driving a need to rethink how evaluations are undertaken, particularly in this area of early intervention and therapeutic jurisprudence. Initially, many of the evaluations of these initiatives were based on subjective stakeholder and participant interviews but more recently there has been a shift to a more objective evaluation of whether they reduce reoffending by participants.

Of course, setting project objectives remains a challenge as many commentators on the justice system often believe there are simple solutions to address offending which are so intuitively right that they simply need to be implemented without much planning or evaluation. If evaluations are not built into programs from the beginning and if outcomes are not agreed upon up front then there will rarely be any benchmark or base against which to measure success.

Even where programs have clearly expressed outcomes they may be found wanting when formal evaluations and research are undertaken. BOCSAR's research in relation to circle sentencing is a very good example (Fitzgerald 2008). In this case the evidence did not support a conclusion that reoffending had been reduced but it did indicate strong community support for the programs (Fitzgerald 2008 p.6). It is becoming increasingly important to identify and separate these other positive impacts. Frequently the stated objectives for these kinds of initiatives are set too narrowly by reference only to reductions in reoffending. This was the difficulty with the circle sentencing program, which had identified a reduction in reoffending as its main aim. Broader objectives would capture the other benefits of building community involvement and cohesion or increasing social capital.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics at the start of this decade drew attention to the importance of social capital and it is clear that many of these criminal justice programs, by involving the community in the process, are building increased social capital and capacity within the local community (ABS 2006 p.21). It will become increasingly important to identify these hard-to-measure effects that appear to reflect aspects of these therapeutic and diversionary programs, which are so popular with participants and local communities.

### **The increasing role for research**

The increase in technologically driven or enabled crime has certainly evoked a significant response from government and substantial research funding has been directed to understanding trends and evaluating and developing new responses. Considerable research funding has also flowed to enable research into the substantial changes that have occurred in recent years in the way the criminal justice system responds to victims and particular offences such as sexual assault and domestic violence. Governments have also sought evidence of 'what works' to enable more effective responses to these more serious and unfortunately all too prevalent crimes. There are few definitive answers in these areas and what works in one community may not work in another; what has not worked in the past may work now.

Governments frequently establish inquiries or reviews, which traverse the same issues that have been considered in the past. To some extent the inquiries build upon each other. There have been many inquiries, into the handling of sexual assault allegations, which have had a significant and continuing role in improving the way the criminal justice system responds to these serious crimes. At the same time as they make recommendations for policy decisions they also effectively create new evidence bases. Inquiries of this nature generally support new research as well as recognising and drawing upon the library of research and evaluations that have been previously undertaken both within Australia and overseas.

The New South Wales Attorney General's Department has substantially modified its approach to research over the past decade. We have moved from seeing research as almost an after-thought in program development to an integral part of the development and evaluation of new programs. Funding for evaluations is now provided within the budgetary allocations for new criminal justice initiatives. This has reinforced the need for us to establish clear objectives and success (or failure) measures.

As government agencies develop a greater appreciation of the benefits of well structured research projects they will turn more to researchers to undertake specific research tasks directed to informing policy decisions. Substantial research funding is now provided through contracted research projects awarded by government.

Many of our key crime research organisations are now producing easy to read summaries of key research undertaken. The complexities of regression analysis, linear discriminant analysis, multivariate analysis and dependent variables are lost on many policy makers. These summaries are in brief bulletin form and convert complex statistical analysis to readily understood explanations of issues and findings. For example, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research produces Crime and Justice Bulletins and the Australian Institute of Criminology publishes its Trends and Issues series. Both of these series are highly prized sources of information for policy makers, who can access the more detailed findings if needed.

The policy makers in the NSW Attorney General's Department regard BOCSAR's Crime and Justice Bulletins as an extremely valuable source of data and information on a range of policy issues. The 'Psychosocial needs of court defendants' painted a very vivid picture of the level of disadvantage (economic, social and health) of a large cohort of people appearing in the Local Court Criminal jurisdiction (Jones & Crawford 2007). This was invaluable information to inform strategies designed to better address the needs of defendants. Equally, the Bureau's 'Screening juvenile offenders for further assessment and intervention', which identified the importance of multi-systemic therapy to insulate young people from a criminal career trajectory, has been very instructive in the development of early intervention strategies within NSW (Weatherburn, Cush & Saunders 2007).

The celebratory nature of this Conference encourages me to mention the value of some of the other work of the Bureau; in particular the evaluations of programs or court related initiatives. The transition from traditional court practices to an increased focus on problem solving courts has necessitated a greater focus on the impact of these new initiatives. The Bureau has evaluated, amongst many others, the NSW Drug Court (Weatherburn, Jones & Snowball 2008), Aboriginal Circle Sentencing (Fitzgerald 2008), the Domestic Violence Intervention Court Model (Rodwell & Smith) and the pilot program of Community Conferencing for Young Adults (People & Trimboli 2007).

The Bureau's work and more broadly the research work of all crime and justice arms our policy makers with facts, not anecdotes, and enables a much greater understanding of the nature of crime and how our justice system works in practice.

## **Future Research Methodological/Practice Challenges**

Many of the future challenges for researchers will come from changes in the way the justice system operates. I have referred to the impact of technology on the nature of offending but it has also affected how law enforcement and other justice agencies respond to crime. Technology has enabled many agencies to interact more closely with researchers in developing responses to crime and to developing crime prevention strategies.

In New South Wales one good example is the development of crime mapping technology. NSW Police now identify the geographical coordinates for all offences and this information is collected and capable of analysis by BOCSAR. The Bureau's Crime Report Series includes individual hotspot maps for specific crime categories and by identifying areas where crime is more prevalent potential contributing factors can be identified and addressed.

The use of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) is transforming our crime prevention strategies. Even more detailed than hotspot mapping are repeat victimisation maps, which have the potential to identify the precise location within a hotspot that an offence occurred. This has enabled specialists in the Crime Prevention Division of the NSW Attorney General's Department to identify environmental factors that made that specific location more vulnerable to crime. Hotspot maps have informed our recent crime prevention strategy to reduce theft from motor vehicles.

The production of 'proximity' maps, which identify the level of offending in proximity to a venue such as a licensed premise, enhances our insight into the factors that exacerbate offences such as assault and malicious damage. These maps also enable us to identify whether we can reduce the vulnerability of people in proximity to a crime risk area through education and raising awareness of good practices in personal and property security.

Crime maps are a useful tool for other agencies such as the NSW Department of Housing, which has recently utilised crime mapping technology to identify crime prone areas and develop appropriate prevention strategies. The potential value of this technology is only just beginning to be realised. For example, GIS maps that demonstrate the range and impact of street lighting can be overlaid on crime maps to demonstrate the relationship between street lighting and crime. This can assist Councils and other authorities to identify planning and maintenance priorities.

While this level of crime mapping has great potential there are a number of factors that are limiting the realisation of that potential. These factors include the way crime data is recorded, the way the crime is geographically coded and the tools used to geographically code. The more information that is collected about a crime the more accurately it can be coded. Continuing improvement in the integrity of crime data will improve the quality of crime maps, which will in turn assist in better informing situational crime prevention specialists.

I have already identified the challenge of setting the right outcome measures or goals for programs. There is definitely a strong role for researchers in advising

program designers on the kinds of outcomes that are capable of measurement. Encouraging policy makers to consider social capital outcomes such as health, community cohesion, participation and similar social functioning measures would be useful. Even at a more simple level looking at the seriousness and frequency of reoffending will be much more informative than simply analysing reoffending per se.

Researchers know the limits of their own research methodologies and should ensure that they contribute this knowledge to justice agencies. If there is to be more effective input from research we need to be more explicit about the potential dangers of misusing research. For example, researchers need to ensure that agencies are aware of the pitfalls in relying on research of a pilot program, designed within a local community, to propose adoption of the program across a wider community. Often programs start with small intensive local pilots and the results of these pilots need to be carefully expressed by researchers if they know their research is to be relied upon to scale the program up and to replicate it in quite different communities. Identifying whether local factors may have contributed to the pilots' outcomes will be essential to ensuring the correct decisions are made at a policy level. If the program has not successfully met its objectives researchers may well have identified a range of factors which could be very instructive to the refinement of the program to address those deficiencies. Researchers should identify those kinds of issues in their research and not feel constrained in providing appropriately qualified observations.

Policy makers are often frustrated by the absence of data, information or research. Where data exists it may be that the time taken to research and analyse that data in relation to some particular aspect is beyond the time available. Agencies and governments are constrained by all kinds of expectations and often the luxury of waiting for research or analysis to be completed is not available. Researchers need to assist in finding ways to accommodate these time constraints by modifying past approaches and finding new methods.

From a day-to-day management perspective justice agencies generally are continually analysing their own data for trends and are required by government to report regularly on their performance. However, where an agency is relying on a series of new initiatives to deliver outcomes for government this becomes more challenging. Annual or even quarterly crime statistical collections offer value if we are investigating trends over longer periods but they are of limited value in meeting the more immediate statistical needs of newly implemented justice agency initiatives or responses.

Where new initiatives have been implemented it is simply not possible to wait for 2 or 3 years to see whether there has been a reduction in reoffending. There is a community, and therefore a government, expectation that the success of a program will be able to be identified at a much earlier stage.

The conduct of randomised trials raise greater issues today than they did in the past. Not only because of the new urgency about all decision making but with a greater identification of fairness and equity it is simply less acceptable to deny individuals access to a program (such as drug treatment) simply to enable a randomised evaluation to be conducted of the program itself. There is increasing pressure to find more ethically acceptable methods for evaluating such programs.

The BOCSAR has been especially creative in this area. The problem of randomised trials had been particularly acute for us in recent years as we seriously expanded our drug diversion and aboriginal court diversion programs. The Bureau has developed a tool for predicting the likely rate of reoffending for a particular cohort. This forecasting tool, Group Risk Assessment Model (GRAM), will allow us to assess the actual rate of reoffending of program participants against the tool's prediction without the need to deny access to the program to otherwise qualified participants (Smith & Jones 2008). In many respects this will enable a much more acceptable method of testing the effectiveness of our programs without denying access to those programs to enable proper evaluation.

Of course, we know that the criminal justice system is far from perfect, that the system is very complex and that simple causal relationships rarely exist. Many of our measures of effectiveness can be improved as they do not reflect the kinds of significant procedural changes we might make that are directed to achieving less identifiable benefits; for example, greater involvement of a victim leading to greater acceptance by them of the process and outcome.

### **Some questions to ponder**

Whilst we have seen a proliferation of justice system innovation especially in the diversionary and jurisprudential area it is important to remember that they are generally directed to addressing underlying causes of offending. With this in mind there must come the point where the diseconomies of scale require a rethinking of specialist courts and an endeavour to mainstream the benefits and outcomes achieved by these specialist courts. The systemic questions for researchers will be what do these courts and diversionary programs have in common and what are the factors likely to increase their success rates and conversely what features detract from their effectiveness.

The quest for what works will continue but at a more sophisticated level. It will not be sufficient to know that the Drug Court at Parramatta works well but why does it work well there and what may affect its effectiveness if it were located elsewhere. Many of these programs are heavily dependent on particular personalities driving them. Success may be more related to the particular style of the presiding judicial officer or the influence of the senior parole officer than the model itself. These issues need to be more clearly identified and analysed.

Participants in the criminal justice system are definitely beginning to work more closely together and we will need to know how we measure the effect of co-operation or its absence and what are the best ways to promote co-operation. As the drive to reduce offending increases and the focus turns to reducing re-offending we need to know which programs are more effective and what are the key levers to reducing re-offending. While some work has been done on the nature of resilience factors in individuals we remain very much in the dark as to what motivates individuals with entirely similar backgrounds to embark on different courses. Why do some people move down the offending path while others become successful leaders in their communities?

Much of our criminal justice system is directed to influencing the behaviour of individuals yet much of our focus is on how the system works. There needs to be more research at an individual level. How successful is the criminal justice system at influencing personal conduct and what other arms of the government and non-government sectors can influence or encourage law abiding behaviour. What effect does the behaviour of leaders and role models and their portrayal by the media, have on the behaviour of young people? Governments have spent considerable resources over the years on deterring drink driving yet many of the programs reinforce the view that some drinking and driving is acceptable; for example, no more than 2 drinks in the first hour and one thereafter. In Europe many countries have promoted the view that if you are planning to drive you do not drink at all. How aligned are our preventive strategies to effective reduction in offending through behavioural change?

Finally, we need to understand better the complexities of our systems and processes as they impact on individuals. Most modelling to date has been quite complex, reflecting the system itself. We need some innovative thinking about the interrelationship of parts or processes within the system and how particular decisions impact on outcomes. What are the relative impacts on an individual of a harsh prison term or a dressing down by a judge or rehabilitation programs? Which approaches are more successful in changing anti-social attitudes?

Many of our perennial challenges, such as aboriginal over-representation and sexual assault, will continue to demand research attention as we search for solutions. Working together I have little doubt that researchers and policy makers can make a difference. For victims every little difference is a big difference and for every offender, who becomes law abiding, there are fewer victims.

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