



National Crime Statistics

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INFORMATION PAPER

NATIONAL CRIME STATISTICS

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1. INTRODUCTION

At a meeting in November 1987, the Australian Police Ministers Council (APMC) resolved to "review present arrangements for the production of national uniform crime statistics and to develop a proposed course of action to achieve an adequate system of national uniform crime statistics". Accordingly, the Council established the National Uniform Crime Statistics (NUCS) Committee chaired by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The NUCS Committee comprised the following: three members to represent the Police Ministers, three members to represent the Police Commissioners, and representatives from the National Police Research Unit (NPRU) and the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC).

The impetus for the formation of the Committee was a perceived lack of comprehensive, comparable and timely crime statistics to aid planning and decision making. The Committee's terms of reference included an examination of the need for national uniform crime statistics and the identification of appropriate data items. The Committee was also required to examine data comparability issues and to advise on arrangements for the production and publication of national crime statistics.

The APMC asked the ABS to Chair the Committee given its role as the national statistical agency and its expertise in the development of statistical collections. Furthermore it was seen as independent and not committed to any particular operational or policy interest. For its part, the ABS saw the review as an opportunity to be involved once again in an important area of national statistics that had not kept pace with developments in other areas of social concern.

The culmination of the APMC resolution, the establishment of the National Uniform Crime Statistics Committee and the subsequent creation of a National Crime Statistics Unit within the ABS was the development of a system for the compilation of national crime statistics. The first results of the new system were published in May 1994 for the reference period 1 January to 31 December 1993. The newly established series will thereafter be published six monthly.

2. THE NATIONAL CRIME STATISTICS UNIT

2.1 Background

During 1988/89, a major study of the adequacy of crime statistics was undertaken by the NUCS Committee. Its report, *Measuring Crime*, was presented to the APMC in May 1989. At the same meeting, the APMC formally resolved to adopt all the recommendations of the NUCS Committee's Report including the establishment of a National Crime Statistics Unit (NCSU) within the ABS with responsibility for coordinating the production and publication of national crime statistics. It was agreed that the NCSU be jointly funded by the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department, the ABS and the Police Departments of the States and Territories.

2.2 Aims

The NCSU was established to work in close cooperation with the police in the development, production and publication of national crime statistics. The aim of national crime statistics is

to provide comparable data across the police jurisdictions of each State and Territory. The statistics are to provide basic indicators of the relative level and nature of recorded crime in Australia and to provide a basis for measuring changes over time.

Differences in legislation and operational procedures between jurisdictions have resulted in comparability problems which, in the past, have precluded valid national comparisons. The challenge for the NCSU has been to reduce or eliminate jurisdictional differences, while balancing user needs with the practicalities of collecting and compiling data. It has accomplished this by developing standards for the collection, processing and dissemination of crime statistics, thereby substantially reducing the effects of legislative and procedural differences between jurisdictions. These national standards have been developed by the ABS in collaboration with each police force, the National Crime Statistics Advisory Group and the NCSU Board of Management.

2.3 Board of Management

A Board of Management was established comprising Police Commissioners and Senior Officers of the State and Commonwealth Governments. It has responsibility for overseeing the operations of the NCSU and ensuring the effective use of agencies' contributions. In doing so, the Board endorses the work program of the NCSU and monitors the Unit's progress, output and allocation of resources. The Board also reports annually to the APMC in regard to policy matters concerning the NCSU.

2.4 The National Crime Statistics Advisory Group

The National Crime Statistics Advisory Group (NCSAG) is a group of expert users which advises the Board of Management and the NCSU on the needs for and uses of crime data and on concepts, definitions, classifications and procedures. It also provides advice on the interpretation of national crime trends. The NCSAG includes representation from the AIC; the NPRU; the Commonwealth Attorney General's Department; two police jurisdictions; the South Australian Office of Crime Statistics; the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research; and the Crime Research Centre, University of Western Australia.

3. THE SYSTEM OF NATIONAL CRIME STATISTICS

3.1 A Staged Approach

Given the extent of the work needing to be done, a staged approach has been adopted in developing a set of national crime statistics. In the first stage, a set of data items for initial collection, collation and publication has been identified; they are subsequently referred to as the Stage 1 data set or items. They are defined in terms of:

- Offence type;
- Type of location; and
- Use of weapon.

The data items for Stage 1 are a subset of those proposed in *Measuring Crime* and, following the initial publication of crime statistics, the NCSU will gradually expand the offence scope of the collection and will introduce additional data items.

3.2 Scope of the National Crime Statistics Collection

For Stage 1, national crime statistics have been compiled for the following seven offence subdivisions based on the Australian National Classification of Offences (ANCO):

Homicide;
Sexual assault;
Kidnapping/abduction;
Robbery;
Blackmail/extortion;
Unlawful entry with intent; and
Motor vehicle theft.

These offences refer to breaches of State/Territory criminal law. Federal offences (i.e. offences committed against Commonwealth law) are excluded from the Stage 1 collection.

Statistics for the Stage 1 offence categories in the national crime statistics collection generally relate to *completed* and *attempted* offences. The following subdivisions are treated differently:

- . Homicide (murder and attempted murder are classified as separate offence categories so are counted and published separately), and
- . Motor vehicle theft (attempted thefts of motor vehicles are excluded from the collection due to difficulties in distinguishing these offences from criminal damage of a motor vehicle).

The national crime statistics collection excludes conspiracy offences; threats to commit an offence; and aid, abet and accessory offences.

The statistics may include offences which at a later point in time are determined to be unfounded or are withdrawn by the complainant. In Stage 1 these offences are not differentiated although, at a subsequent stage in the development of the national crime statistics collection it is anticipated that data on the status of the recorded offences will be collated and published.

3.3 Data Sources

Data are derived from the information recorded on official police crime reports, including supplementary crime reports containing additional information that has come to the attention of police during the course of investigations.

State and Territory police forces are responsible for recording information relating to reported offences and collating crime statistics for their own jurisdiction. National requirements specify that offences should be counted in the State or Territory in which the offence occurred, regardless of which law enforcement agency completes the crime report or undertakes the investigation. There is some indication that this may not always be the case, particularly for offences such as motor vehicle theft which occur near State/Territory borders. However, investigations suggest that the problem is small.

There may also be some variability in the way offences that come to the attention of police are recorded. For example, there is a fine line distinguishing attempted murder and serious

assault depending on the perceived level of intent. Whilst the information received from States/Territories is subject to quality control checks, the NCSU has limited or no control over how offences are initially described and recorded.

3.4 Reported Crime

National crime statistics are compiled from administrative records relating to a select range of offence types *reported* or becoming known to police. Further offence types will be covered at a later stage. To the extent that crime is not reported to the police or particular offence types are excluded from the scope of the collection, the statistics present only a partial view of crime within Australia. An unknown proportion of total crime committed remains undetected by police or unreported by victims and/or witnesses. A more comprehensive picture of the nature and extent of crime can be gained by reference to other data sources such as crime victims surveys.

Differences in the level of reported crime between jurisdictions or over time can result from changes in community attitudes to reporting crime and/or changes in police procedures. The potential for such changes (which are not readily measured) need to be considered when interpreting these statistics.

3.5 Reference Period

Most jurisdictions report on the basis of the *date a crime report was processed*. In contrast national crime statistics are compiled on the basis of the *date an offence is reported*. This corresponds to either the date the offence was reported to police by a member of the public or when it was detected by police. The reported date may not necessarily be the date when the offence occurred, nor the date when the offence was recorded on a crime report or processed on a statistical system. Using the *date an offence is reported* basis ensures that statistics pertain to the same reference period across jurisdictions and reflect the actual number of reported offences during that period. Importantly, it eliminates the effect of changes over time, within jurisdictions and between jurisdictions, in data processing rates.

National crime statistics are compiled within a fixed time frame from the close of the reference period. It is set so as to allow time for the crime reports to be completed and processed by the jurisdictions. Significant lags in the processing by a jurisdiction may require subsequent revision of the national statistics.

4. CLASSIFICATIONS

4.1 Definition of Offence

An offence is an act considered *prima facie* to be in breach of the criminal law. Offences are classified according to national definitions in order to standardise offence categories and overcome jurisdictional differences in laws and offence classifications. The national offence definitions are broad and descriptive and may not fully correspond with legal or police definitions used within jurisdictions. Statistics presented in the publication of national crime statistics may vary from those of the individual States/Territories.

4.2 National Offence Classification

The national crime statistics collection has been developed using the *Australian National Classification of Offences* (1234.0). The classification, referred to as ANCO, was published in 1985 and provides a framework for classifying offences for statistical purposes. ANCO comprises nine divisions which are divided into subdivisions and groups. For Stage 1, a selection of ANCO subdivisions have been used as the basis for the collation and presentation of data on offences. The offences included are shown in the Stage 1 National Offence Classification below.

STAGE 1 NATIONAL OFFENCE CLASSIFICATION

<u>Division</u>	<u>Subdivision</u>	<u>Group</u>
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1

11		HOMICIDE
	111	Murder
	112	Attempted murder
	114	Manslaughter
	115	Driving causing death

13		SEXUAL ASSAULT
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14		KIDNAPPING/ABDUCTION
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2

21		ROBBERY
	211	Armed robbery
	212	Unarmed robbery
22		BLACKMAIL/EXTORTION

3

31		UNLAWFUL ENTRY WITH INTENT
35		MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT

4.3 Type of Location Classification

Except for blackmail/extortion and driving causing death, all offence categories in Stage 1 are classified by the type of location where the criminal incident occurred. A criminal incident may involve multiple offences which may occur at different locations. In these instances, 'type of location' refers to the initial site where the criminal incident took place. In classifying type of location, the ability to provide detailed information for each offence category varies between States and Territories. Where information is not available at the more specific group level, it is aggregated to the broader subdivision or division level.

TYPE OF LOCATION CLASSIFICATION

Division Subdivision Group

1		RESIDENTIAL LOCATION
	10	RESIDENTIAL LOCATION N.F.D.
	11	DWELLING
	110	Dwelling n.f.d.
	111	Dwelling - private
	112	Dwelling - non-private
	12	OUTBUILDING/RESIDENTIAL LAND
2		COMMUNITY LOCATION
	20	COMMUNITY LOCATION N.F.D.
	21	EDUCATIONAL
	22	HEALTH
	23	RELIGIOUS
	24	TRANSPORT
	240	Transport n.f.d.
	241	Terminal
	242	Conveyance in transit
	243	Car park
	249	Transport n.e.c.
	25	JUSTICE

26		OPEN SPACE
27		STREET/FOOTPATH
29		COMMUNITY LOCATION N.E.C.
3		OTHER LOCATION
30		OTHER LOCATION N.F.D.
31		ADMINISTRATIVE/PROFESSIONAL
32		BANKING
33		RETAIL
	330	Retail n.f.d.
	331	Chemist/pharmacy
	332	Service station
	339	Retail n.e.c.
34		WHOLESALE
35		WAREHOUSING/STORAGE
36		MANUFACTURING
37		AGRICULTURAL
38		RECREATIONAL
39		OTHER LOCATION N.E.C.
4		UNSPECIFIED LOCATION

4.4 Use of Weapon Classification

Murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, sexual assault, kidnapping/abduction and robbery offences have been classified according to whether a weapon was used in committing the offence and, if so, whether it was a firearm or some other weapon. In subsequent stages it is anticipated that the number of categories within the 'weapon used' division will be increased to produce information on a wider range of weapons.

USE OF WEAPON CLASSIFICATION

Division Subdivision

1		WEAPON USED
	10	Weapon n.f.d.
	11	Firearm
	19	Other weapon
2		NO WEAPON USED

5. NATIONAL COUNTING METHODOLOGY

5.1 The National Counting Rule

The national counting rule was developed in order to eliminate the effects of inconsistent counting practices across the jurisdictions.

The national counting rule is as follows: *for each victim within a distinct criminal incident, count the most serious offence per national offence subdivision. Within national offence subdivisions, the most serious offence is that classified to the group having the lowest numerical code.*

5.2 Concept of a Criminal Incident

Multiple offences (and their related victims and offenders) are grouped into the same unique incident if they are committed by the same person or group of persons and if:

- . they are part of actions committed simultaneously or in sequence over a short period of time at the same place; or
- . they are part of interrelated actions, that is, where one action leads to the other or where one is the consequence of the other(s); or
- . they involve the same action(s) repeated over a long period of time against the same victim(s) and only come to the attention of the police at one point in time.

5.3 Concept of a Victim

A victim does not necessarily represent a person. The nature of the victim varies according to the offence category:

- . for homicide, sexual assault and kidnapping/abduction, the victim is an *individual person*;
- . for robbery and blackmail/extortion, the victim may be either an *individual person or an organisation*;

for unlawful entry with intent, the victim is the *place/premise* which is defined as a single connected property that is owned, rented or occupied by the same person or group of people;

for motor vehicle theft, the victim is the *motor vehicle*.

National crime statistics do *not* attempt to measure:

the total number of distinct victims reported to police. National crime statistics may count the same victim more than once within a reference period. This occurs when a victim is subjected to multiple offences belonging to different national offence subdivisions, either in the same criminal incident or across different criminal incidents. For example, a victim who has been kidnapped, raped and murdered will be counted three times according to the national counting rule; once in the kidnapping/abduction subdivision, once in the sexual assault subdivision and once in the homicide subdivision. Alternatively, a victim may be counted more than once within the same national offence subdivision if the multiple offences relate to different criminal incidents or are reported to police at different times.

the total number of offences recorded by police. Not all types of offences are included in the national crime statistics collection. Furthermore, if a criminal incident involves multiple offences which belong to the same national offence subdivision and are committed against the same victim, only one count is included in the national crime statistics.

the associated charges resulting from a criminal incident e.g. aid and abet or accessory offences. These offences reflect the roles of offenders in breaching the law rather than representing the offence to which the victim was subjected.

6. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN STATE/TERRITORY AND NATIONAL STATISTICS

Crime statistics in Australia are collected, collated and published by each State and Territory police force. The national crime statistics described herein are compiled according to national guidelines and will differ from those published by individual jurisdictions as explained below.

6.1 Counting Methodology

State/Territory and national crime statistics differ because of the different counting rules that are applied in compiling the two sets of statistics. State/Territory crime statistics are usually offence based and measure the number of breaches of the criminal law whereas national crime statistics are compiled on a victim basis and measure the number of victims for each disparate offence category. This will result in disparities between local and national counts. The differences are particularly evident in the counting of sexual assault offences. For example, when counting sexual assault offences, some jurisdictions may count each separate offence in the case of multiple offence incidents whilst the national counting rule limits the count to one offence per victim.

6.2 Definitions

In Australia, each State and Territory has its own criminal code or act. National offence definitions have been developed in an attempt to overcome differences in the laws and ensure uniformity in the statistics. These definitions are descriptive rather than legal in nature and, while essential in order to achieve greater national comparability, will contribute to differences between local and national counts.

For example, the national offence definition of unlawful entry with intent incorporates burglary, break and enter and some stealing offences. New South Wales and Queensland use the offence type break and enter for stealing offences where a forced entry/exit has occurred. Stealing offences which do not involve a forced entry/exit are recorded as stealings, thefts or larcenies. The remaining jurisdictions use the offence type burglary (or a combination of burglary and break and enter offences in the case of South Australia, or unlawful entry in the case of the Northern Territory) for such stealing offences, whether there is a forced entry/exit or not. The national offence category, unlawful entry with intent, overcomes the definitional differences that exist between the jurisdictions.

6.3 Classifications

The national offence classification consists of a modified subset of ANCO offence categories. The modified categories are broad in contrast to the more specific (but divergent) categories of the States/Territories. National comparability is only achievable in terms of the broad categories. While the national figures overcome jurisdictional differences in laws and offence classifications they may differ from those of the individual States/Territories.

6.4 Reference Dates

When compiling their crime statistics, most jurisdictions use the date a crime report was processed as the reference date. For reasons outlined in Section 3.5 a different reference date is used for national crime statistics. Consequently, national and local counts may differ.

6.5 Scope of Offence Types

The national crime statistics include completed and attempted offences. However, motor vehicle theft is an exception because attempted motor vehicle theft is excluded from the Stage 1 collection. Jurisdictions differ in their treatment of motor vehicle theft and some include *attempts* when counting motor vehicle theft. This is another cause of differences in national and local counts.

7. CRIME RATES

Rates enable comparisons of offence categories to be made across the States and Territories. For all offence categories in the Stage 1 data set, rates are presented per 100,000 of the estimated residential population (ERP) for each of the States and Territories. The ERP at the mid point of each reference period is used to calculate rates. Thus, the March ERP is used for the reference period 1 January to 30 June; the September ERP is used for the 1 July to 31

December reference period; and the June and December ERPs are used for calendar and financial years respectively.

Denominators other than 100,000 of the ERP may result in different interpretations of the statistics. This is an important consideration for the sexual assault, unlawful entry with intent and motor vehicle theft offence categories where alternative denominators may relate more closely to potential victims. For example, as most (but not all) victims of sexual assault are female, users of the statistics may wish to calculate sexual assault per 100,000 of the female population. It is anticipated that future stages will differentiate relevant offences by the sex of the victim. This will allow more specific and hence more meaningful rates to be calculated. The national crime statistics publication will list ABS sources from which alternative denominators may be obtained.

8. USES OF NATIONAL CRIME STATISTICS

As crime is an area of interest and concern to the community at large, there is an obvious need for comparable national crime statistics. The principal feature of national crime statistics is that they are compiled using common concepts, definitions and procedures. As such they can be used to:

- i. **Provide descriptive information on offences occurring within Australia:** the application of national standards enables comparisons to be made between the States/Territories and over time.
- ii. **Evaluate different law enforcement policies:** the experience of one State can be of value to another in evaluating law enforcement practices, procedures and strategies.
- iii. **Identify national trends and develop national initiatives:** the criminal environment is complex and law enforcement involves interstate cooperation. National level initiatives in law enforcement policy require national information.
- iv. **Allocate resources:** State administrations need national crime statistics for budgetary purposes and when making submissions to the Commonwealth Grants Commission.
- v. **Place crime in the context of national economic and social factors:** national crime statistics can be linked to national statistics in other fields thereby making such information more informative and useful.
- vi. **Assist criminal justice planning:** national figures are useful for criminal justice planning, administration, and policy analysis and research.
- vii. **Provide information on risk factors to the general public:** comprehensive national crime statistics provide information that can be used to assess the risk of crime victimisation.

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