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THE WALCHA CRIME REPORT

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Funded by the Criminology Research Council

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Introduction

Chapter 1.	Researching Rural Crime	3
	Literature on Rural Criminology	4
	Public Perception of Crime in Urban Areas	10
	Public Perception of Crime in Rural Areas	14
	Research Locale	18
	Research Methodology	19
	Conclusion	23
Chapter 2.	Walcha, New South Wales	34
	Public Order in the 1860's	37
	One Hundred Years Later	41
	1985	43
	Social Control on the Penetration of the Criminal Justice System in Walcha	44
	Police in the Walcha District	44
	Other Criminal Justice Facilities	48
	The Social and Demographic Characteristics of Walcha	50
	Respondents	53
	Conclusion	55
Chapter 3.	Communalism	58
	A Sense of Community	60
	Participation, Trust and Dependency	67
	Quality of Life in Walcha	79
	Conclusion	89
Chapter 4.	The Perception of Crime in Walcha in N.S.W.	92
	Conclusion	103
Chapter 5.	Concern and Fear about Crime in Walcha N.S.W. ..	106
	Concern about Crime	107
	Fear of Crime	110
	Conclusion	124
Chapter 6.	Victimisation in Walcha	127
	Extent of Victimisation	137
	Conclusion	141

Chapter 7.	Images of Crime, Criminals and Source of Crime News	144
	Perceived Social Characteristics of the Typical Criminal	144
	Perceived Reasons for Crime	150
	Media and the Sources of Crime News	153
	Conclusion	157
Chapter 8.	Policing in Walcha	159
	The Daily Routine	160
	Types of Police Duties	170
	Bureaucratic Work	170
	Service-Welfare Work	172
	Order Maintenance	174
	Law Enforcement	177
	Police Attitudes	182
	Community Attitudes Toward the Police	186
	Conclusion	187
Chapter 9.	Conclusion	189
	Theoretical Implications	189
	Public Policy	191
	Policing	191
	Crime Prevention	192
	Practical Implications of the Research	195

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ABSTRACT

The perception of crime and the policing practices in a rural Australian Community was the focus of the research. The location for the research was the town and district of Walcha, New South Wales. Size, rural qualities, presence of a police station and accessibility were the reasons for selecting Walcha.

The research examined a wide range of crime related issues. The study specifically examined: attitudes concerning crime, crime avoidance behaviours, victimisation experiences, perceptions of criminals, the extent of criminality in the previous century, rural policing and a variety of community issues. The research used several different methodological approaches, such as an historical analysis of official crime records, a detailed literature review of rural crime studies, observation analysis based on the Walcha police station and interviews with a random sample of the adult population. Interviews were carried out with 191 individuals living in Walcha and the surrounding district. The respondents were selected from the electoral roll by means of a systematic random sample. The response rate was 87.0%.

The research, in terms of community analysis, found that Walcha possessed many characteristics that might be considered indicative of the traditional Australian rural community. The economy was agriculturally based, ethnically it was largely anglo-celtic and family ties going back several generations in the community were common. Respondents reported high levels of community satisfaction and organisational involvement.

The analysis of available court and police records from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided the historical perspective on crime in Walcha. This historical evidence revealed that while the impact of crime in Walcha has probably never been serious, the criminal justice system has been a significant factor in community relations. Public order offences have been the main problem encountered by police in Walcha in both centuries. The main differences between the past and the present have been the disappearance of labour relations from the criminal justice agenda and the proportionate decrease per head of population of the official crime rate.

Respondents did not report high levels of concern or fear of crime. Walcha was generally perceived to be safer than other rural towns and much safer than urban areas such as Sydney. However, respondents indicated a reasonably high level of crime avoidance behaviours and a significant level of crime victimisation. Approximately 14% of respondents claimed that they had been victims of crime in the preceding twelve months. Most of the crimes were minor and the majority were not reported to the police.

Community satisfaction with the local police was extremely high. The local police engaged in four basic categories of police work namely, proactive policing, reactive policing, welfare and bureaucratic work. Each police role is described and analysed and related to community conditions.

Respondents reported frequent utilisation of the news media, but cited informal sources as their main source of crime news. Their perception of the criminal produced a composite picture of a young, unemployed single male with little education. The main explanation for criminal behaviour selected by respondents was poverty/unemployment.

Finally, the theoretical, policy and practical implications of the research are discussed. It is argued that the focus on community is crucial to an understanding of public opinion and criminal justice issues. Policing strategies and practices in rural areas is considered in the light of our findings, as well as the development of community crime prevention programmes.

THE WALCHA CRIME REPORT

Introduction

Criminological studies have tended to focus on issues that have arisen out of, or have been closely related to, urban communities. The research to be reported is somewhat unique in that it is located in a locale that can be considered rural. It is distinctive in that the focus of the study is the community and then crime and not vice versa which is the usual approach in studies that have focussed on public opinion and crime.

In chapter 1 we set out the justification for this approach through presenting a general review of the literature on public opinion and crime. We note the absence of rural studies in criminology and then discuss the selection of Walcha as a research locale and the research methodology we pursued. Chapter 2 provides a description of Walcha and our respondents which is followed in chapter 3 with our findings of how our respondents perceived and participated in the community, which we have labelled communalism. The remaining chapters detail the results of our research on the perception of crime in Walcha (chapter 4) concern and fear of crime (chapter 5), victimisation (chapter 6), images of crime, criminals and source of crime news (chapter 7) and the policing of Walcha (chapter 8).

Chapter 1 Researching Rural Crime

Introduction

Criminologists who have referred to rural crime have consistently noted that there is a lack of statistics, research and discussion on the topic. Numerous sources have noted this over the years¹. Data is difficult to locate on rural crime issues, it is fragmented² and it is spread thinly over various locations and disciplines, such as social history and legal anthropology. Much of this material has been ignored by criminologists and therefore has failed to have an impact on rural criminological research or penetrate the urban bias of criminology³.

This urban bias is in effect a double play, as this bias is also infused with an arcadian perspective on rural life and rural

1. For example, Block, 1949; Boydell, 1985; Brakel and South, 1969; Burgess, 1915-16; Cronk, Jankovic and Green, 1982; Esselstyn, 1953; Galliher, Matoesian, Holik and Phifer, 1980; Gillette, 1917; Handberg and Unkovic, 1978; Karithi and Peale, 1986; Laub and Hindelang, 1981; Lundquist and Moore, 1929; Marenin, 1982; Sorokin, Zimmerman and Galpin, 1930; Sutherland and Cressey, 1978; Swanson, 1981; Vogt, 1922 and Yoke, 1932.

2. Cronk et al., 1982, note that in the United States

rural criminal justice scholars and advocates remain largely an uncoordinated and fragmented group with little national communication among themselves.(iii)

and Australia, or for that matter Britain, have hardly reached the stage where we could claim that there is a group who could be called rural criminal justice scholars or advocates.

3. Brantingham and Brantingham, 1984.

communities. Crime is not considered a rural problem, or at least not a very serious one, though this view was strongly criticised early this century⁴ and is again under attack by some criminologists in the United States⁵. Since we began this research, neighbourhood watch has taken off in New South Wales and the rest of Australia. One consequence of this is that it has focussed some attention on rural crime. At present the New South Wales Farmers' Association and the Victorian Farmers' Association are engaged in discussions with the police forces in their respective States⁶. The purpose of these consultations is to seek solutions designed for rural areas, not simply the implementation of programmes designed and operated in urban locales. So while some change in emphasis on approaches to and understanding of rural crime issues may be about to take place, at present the field of criminology either ignores or has a quite unrealistic and inaccurate perception of the rural crime problem.

Literature On Rural Criminology

While stressing the lack of material on rural crime and related issues, what material there is bears some exposition. This material can be considered within three broad periods of development in rural

4. Smith, 1933.

5. Carter, Phillips, Donnermeyer and Wurschmidt, 1982.

6. This is possibly also happening in other States. We have been in contact with these associations and, therefore, are in a position to make some comment on their awareness that rural crime problems may require a quite different approach to that found in urban locales.

criminology, each of which touched on distinctive issues. These periods are pre World War II, the post war period and the last decade.

In the first period the focus was on crime statistics, or more frequently the lack of them⁷. Juvenile delinquency⁸, problems with rural policing⁹ and the contrast with city crime, which was considered more serious and prevalent¹⁰, were other major areas of concern. Criminological theories (based on urban research) were not clearly articulated in the literature. Nevertheless, the implicit theoretical positions were contagion, social disorganisation and the rural environment as an insulator against, if not an antidote to, the spread of crime across the country¹¹. Contrary perspectives, or at least words of caution in accepting this arcadian view of rural society, were sometimes considered¹² but generally not examined. An exception was sometimes made about rural towns such as Sinclair Lewis's comment

7. Gillette, 1917; Lundquist and Moore, 1929 and Parmelee, 1921.

8. Burgess, 1915-16; Lundquist and Moore, 1929; Vogt, 1922, and Wiers, 1939.

9. Cole and Crowe, 1937 and Smith, 1933.

10. Clinard, 1942 and 1944; Hawthorn, 1926; Sorokin et al., 1930; Useem and Waldner, 1942 and Vuillemeir, 1921.

11. Burgess, 1915-16; Gillette, 1917 and Sorokin et al., 1930.

12. Aschaffenberg, 1913; Hoffer, 1936; Kelso, 1980 and Leeper, 1925.

God made the country, men the city, but the Devil made the country town¹³

and Gillette's description of rural towns as "infested with vicious habits and rowdyism"¹⁴.

Even these criticisms of rural towns were tempered by attributing an "urban" cause, such as city criminals moving into rural areas¹⁵, industrialism¹⁶, urbanism¹⁷ and the urban personality¹⁸. The dominant perspective was pro rural within a criminogenic paradigm of social disorganisation and disease. Even the legendary cases of the Jukes from rural New York and the Kallikaks from rural New Jersey were attributed to the draining of the best blood to the city¹⁹, or it was speculated

What the record of crime, vice, pauperism would have been had they been residents of cities can only be imagined²⁰.

The post second world war period, continued with many of these themes. However, it also focussed on a variety of other issues

13. quoted in Gillin and Reuben 1940, 319.

14. Gillette, 1917, 365.

15. Hoffer, 1936.

16. Cole and Crowe, 1937.

17. Smith, 1933.

18. Clinard, 1944.

19. Vogt, 1922.

20. Gillette, 1917, 367.

including: rural crime as folk crime²¹, the lack or inadequacy of rural criminal justice facilities and services²², urban migration to the city and the encroachment, spatially and culturally, of the city²³. The theoretical perspectives of the previous period were retained, though differential association, differential opportunity and anomie tended to receive special mention²⁴.

In the last decade the emphasis has become much more specific. The development of nationwide crime surveys in the United States, Australia and Britain, the close links that have developed between policy and criminological research²⁵ and the funding of research in the United States by the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration led to a new interest in rural crime, particularly public opinion research. This research focussed on fear, concern, victimisation and prevention²⁶, against a backdrop of the seriousness of the rural crime problem and the poor standard of criminal justice facilities²⁷ in rural areas. This became the

21. Dinitz, 1973; Galliher et al., 1980 and Gibbons, 1972.

22. Cronk et al., 1982; Denver Law Journal, 1970; Duke Law Journal, 1969 and Stott, Fetter and Crites, 1977.

23. Heller, 1977; Roucek, 1961; Stott et al., 1977 and Vedder, 1954.

24. Dahlin, Roche, Spader, Rumbolz, Swenson, Lapiere, Wise and Orr, 1981; Lagey, 1957 and Roucek, 1961.

25. Croft, 1981.

26. Carter et al., 1982.

27. Cronk et al., 1982 and Marenin, 1982.

modus operandi of criminologists working in rural locales, especially in the United States.

The message from the United States was that the official rural crime rate in the late 1970's equalled the urban crime rate of the mid 1960's. That urban crime rate gave rise to an unprecedented interest and funding of urban crime research. Nationwide crime surveys meant that data from rural locales could be extracted and highlighted. Consequently, the work of policy oriented monitoring organisations such as the National Center for Rural Courts in Williamsburg Virginia and the National Rural Crime Prevention Center, Ohio State University, began to receive attention.

Nationwide crime surveys have also been carried out in Britain²⁸, Ireland²⁹, Europe³⁰ and Australia³¹. These studies have provided limited data on rural crime, though there has been one or two studies directed specifically at rural areas³². These

28. Hough and Mayhew, 1983 and 1985; Maxfield, 1984; and Chambers and Toombs, 1984.

29. Breen and Rottman, 1985.

30. Van Dijk and Steinmetz, 1979-80.

31. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1979 and 1986.

32. The main study we have found in this area is that by Shapland and Vagg (1985), with the American research already cited being largely a replication of urban crime research. This study of Walcha has also emphasised the rural nature of the locale and one of the researchers (O'Connor) has subsequently carried out fieldwork in Braunston, Northamptonshire, England. That research attempts to provide comparative data with the Walcha study and a more direct link with the work of Shapland and Vagg. This data is in the process of being analysed.

developments have created an interest among some criminologists in rurality and a need to study rural crime, criminality and criminal justice as phenomena separate from the urban situation³³.

In this period a more explicit theoretical perspective began to be applied to this research on rural crime. Hirschi's social control theory³⁴ became widely accepted among American rural criminologists³⁵, with lifestyle and opportunity becoming key variables in both urban and rural research³⁶. The rural-urban distinction is retained through stressing the uniqueness of the rural lifestyle, though frequently bemoaning the possibility of convergence with urban lifestyles³⁷.

Theory still plays an ambiguous and mainly implicit role in the research and little consideration is given to the applicability of these criminological theories if rural lifestyles are distinctive. This is unfortunate, as one of the central constructs of rural sociology, namely community, could make an interesting contribution to criminological theory and an agenda for future research in rural areas. The importance of community as a conceptual tool in criminological research became even more apparent when we reviewed

33. Carter et al., 1982; Cronk et al., 1982 and Stott et al., 1977.

34. Hirschi, 1969.

35. Carter et al., 1982.

36. Bennett and Wright, 1983; Breen and Rottman, 1985; Carter et al., 1982; Cohen and Felson, 1979; Gottfredson, 1984 and Maxfield, 1984.

37. Carter et al., 1982; Heller, 1977 and Stott et al., 1977.

the literature and findings on public opinion and crime to give direction to our research. It is for this reason that community became a central focus of this study.

Public Perception of Crime in Urban Areas

There has been a large amount of research conducted on the public's concern with and fear of crime in urban areas. This research is diverse in terms of its conceptual and methodological approaches to the problem. Despite this diversity, it has produced a number of consistent findings linking fear of crime with certain social factors, which influenced the selection of variables to be considered in this study.

The most consistent variable associated with the fear of crime is sex. Studies in the United States, Britain and Australia have found females to be more afraid of crime than males³⁸. Baumer³⁹ in a review of these findings has noted several explanations to be found in the literature for the existence of a greater fear of crime among females. These explanations include: a greater degree of vulnerability due to relative lack of physical strength, the possibility of sexual assault, the effects of passive sex role socialisation, alleged irrationality due to failure to link fear with the probability of being attacked and the significance of rape as a bellwether crime for females.

38. Baumer, 1978; Clark and Lewis, 1982; Furstenberg, 1971; Garofalo, 1977 and 1979; Hindelang, Dunn, Sutton, Aurnick, 1973; O'Connor, 1981 and Wilson and Brown, 1973.

39. Baumer, 1978.

Age is another variable significantly related to the fear of crime, although the relationship is complex. Several studies have found the elderly to be disproportionately represented among those reporting a high degree of fear of crime⁴⁰. Other studies⁴¹ have found no relationship between age and fear of crime. Those who have found an association between age and fear of crime have generally attributed it to the physical frailty of the elderly, the over representation of females among elderly populations or the location of the elderly poor in high crime areas⁴². Some researchers have argued that the fear of crime among the elderly is actually a specific expression of a more general social dissatisfaction and that other issues are perceived to be more important by the elderly⁴³.

Socio-economic status is another social factor that has been found to be related to the fear of crime. Several American studies⁴⁴ have found individuals with low levels of education and/or income to have more fear of crime than individuals from a higher socio-economic status. Similar results were found in an Australian study by Wilson and Brown⁴⁵. The relationship between

40. Garofalo, 1979; Hindelang et al., 1973; Thomas and Hyman, 1979 and Wilson and Brown, 1973.

41. Furstenberg, 1971 and Yin, 1982.

42. Baumer, 1978.

43. Yin, 1982.

44. Garofalo, 1977; Hindelang et al., 1973 and Thomas and Hyman, 1981.

45. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

socio-economic status and fear of crime is usually explained by the objectively greater risks of victimisation for residents of poor neighbourhoods.

Race is another variable frequently associated with the fear of crime. In the United States a number of studies have found more fear of crime among non-whites⁴⁶. In particular, the racial composition of a neighbourhood has been found to affect the resident's fear of crime. Liska⁴⁷ reported that fear of crime was positively associated with the proportion of non-whites resident in urban neighbourhoods. However, it is not clear whether race per se is a factor. Non-whites in the United States are more likely to be poor, live in poor inner-city neighbourhoods, have fewer educational qualifications, etc. It is possible that the effects of race and class are confounded and it might be that the higher proportion of non-whites fearful of crime may represent a recognition of the objectively higher risk of victimisation among inner-city residents and the level of victimisation among non-whites.

Australian research has largely emphasised victimisation⁴⁸ and fear/concern about crime and criminal justice⁴⁹. Apart from the national surveys carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics,

46. Baker, Nienstedt, Everett and McCleary, 1983; Hindelang et al., 1973 and Garofalo, 1979.

47. Liska, Lawrence and Sanchirico, 1982.

48. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1979 and 1986; Biles and Braithwaite, 1979; Braithwaite and Biles, 1979, 1980a and 1980b.

49. Congalton and Najman, 1974; O'Connor, 1981; Vinson, 1974 and Wilson and Brown, 1973.

Wilson and Brown's study⁵⁰ is possibly the broadest and most extensive of the Australian studies. They found results similar to those noted in the American studies cited above. In particular they found a greater fear of crime among women, older people (also found by O'Connor⁵¹), manual workers, urban residents and those with only a primary level of education. The percentages of respondents showing concern and fear of crime among Australian respondents⁵² tend to be lower than that found in American studies.

Although there is a significant amount of research linking various social factors to concern with and fear of crime, there are a number of conceptual and methodological problems with this research. Conceptually it is not clear what is meant by fear of crime. Furstenberg⁵³ was possibly the first criminologist to make a clear distinction between what he called fear of crime and concern about crime. By fear of crime Furstenberg took a specific fear of victimisation to be the test, while concern about crime he understood to be 'a belief about crime as a social issue. This was to be distinguished from whether or not the individual believed that he or she was likely to be a victim. Other writers⁵⁴ have noted a

50. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

51. O'Connor, 1981.

52. Congalton and Najman, 1974; O'Connor, 1981 and Wilson and Brown, 1973.

53. Furstenberg, 1971.

54. Garofalo, 1979 and Lotz, 1979.

similar distinction, arguing that what has been considered fear of crime among many people may not be fear of victimisation per se, but rather a concern about their community's quality of life. This distinction between fear of crime and concern about crime offers a potential explanation of why certain groups who are least likely to be victims of crime - the elderly, women⁵⁵ - tend to show more fear of crime. It may be that they are responding to crime as a social issue, not crime as a particular personal fear, though this would warrant a detailed research study. Our own view, from the more general discussions we had with respondents, and not just on questions dealing with crime specifically, is that females do have a higher level of fear. Unfortunately, most studies have not sought to distinguish fear and concern and so consequently they have been used as interchangeable concepts. There is little consistency among research studies and so considerable confusion remains as to what is the level of fear and concern about crime.

Public Perception of Crime in Rural Areas

Criminology has begun to invest a considerable amount of time and resources to local and national victimisation and public opinion research. Rural-urban differences have been noted and some research

55. Caution must be taken in accepting the results of official crime statistics or victimisation surveys as they may underestimate the level of victimisation of these groups. We know that the abuse of the elderly, the young and wife abuse is extensive though largely hidden. This is also true for other forms of victimisation, which are gender and age specific, that may not be even recognised as crime, though causing injury to persons or property.

in rural locations has been carried out, which Donnermeyer⁵⁶ has summarised and reviewed for the United States. Shapland and Vagg⁵⁷ have conducted a specifically rural study in England and apart from national crime surveys which have also considered rural and urban findings we have been unable to find much evidence of extensive research specifically directed at rural locales.

In the United States, Phillips and his colleagues at the National Rural Crime Prevention Center, Ohio State University, began some pioneering work into rural crime prevention as part of their agricultural extension service work to rural inhabitants in the 1960's. The research was pragmatic, it was clearly oriented to the market and emphasised particular issues such as crime prevention, target hardening and the extent of victimisation, particularly from vandalism, among rural people. Unfortunately, the research was similar to urban public opinion surveys and consistently made comparisons with the urban situation of the previous decade to highlight the seriousness of the rural crime problem. This rural-urban contrast was reinforced with the analysis of the national victimisation studies that began around 1967.

The research mainly in the United states, though including Australia and England, indicated that fear, perceived risk of victimisation, seriousness of the crime problem, use of crime prevention techniques, etc., increased as one moved from rural to more urban

56. Donnermeyer, 1984.

57. Shapland and Vagg, 1985.

locations⁵⁸. However, it should be pointed out that there was not total agreement, nor have researchers concentrated on the same issues. Shapland and Vagg⁵⁹ found that there was no distinct rural problem set, and that vandalism was not perceived as real crime, though a number of studies suggest that vandalism is the most frequent victimisation experience of rural residents⁶⁰. Again the latter finding is not free from contention as other studies, while recognising the extensiveness of this type of victimisation, have shown theft to be more frequent⁶¹. Other interesting findings are that Larson⁶² found women to be more victimised in rural Dakota.

Though Shapland and Vagg⁶³ found this not to be the case in their English rural study⁶⁴. Open country victimisation is higher than rural town locales in the United States⁶⁵, with the protection of property through target hardening less prevalent in rural compared

58. Bankston et al., 1985; Bean and Lawrence, 1974; Carter and Beaulieu, 1984; Dahlin et al., 1981; Galliher et al., 1980; Larson, 1982; Marenin, 1982; Maxfield, 1984; Teske and Moore, 1980 and Wilson and Brown, 1973.

59. Shapland and Vagg, 1985.

60. Cox, 1981; Dahlin et al., 1981 and Donnermeyer and Phillips, 1984.

61. Carter and Beaulieu, 1984; Galliher et al., 1980; Holik et al., 1982 and Teske and Moore, 1980.

62. Larson, 1982.

63. Shapland and Vagg, 1985.

64. Jones, MacLean and Young (1986) found that in an inner city area of London females were victimised more frequently, which is the only English evidence we know of that has produced this result.

65. Dahlin et al., 1981.

with urban locales⁶⁶. Maxfield⁶⁷ contends that fear for personal safety is not a national crime problem in England, but an urban one, with the implication that it is both an urban and rural problem in the United States. The data for Australia⁶⁸ is not analysed in any detail, so it is not possible to say that the situation is closer to that found in England than in the United States. Although one would suspect there is less fear of crime in rural locales.

Some interesting findings have emerged from studies examining inter and intra urban and rural differences⁶⁹. Boggs⁷⁰, for example, found several significant differences between urban and rural respondents. Rural respondents had lower expectations of crime in their neighbourhoods than urban respondents and were also less likely to take precautions against being victimised. The rural residents were also more satisfied with existing police protection and felt more confident that their neighbours would come to their aid if a crime occurred. Albrecht and Green⁷¹ also found rural residents to be more supportive of the police than urban residents.

66. Dahlin et al., 1981; Maxfield, 1984 and Phillips, 1976.

67. Maxfield, 1984.

68. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1986.

69. Albrecht and Green, 1977; Boggs, 1971; Conklin, 1975; Jones et al., 1986; Maxfield and Hunter, 1980; Maxfield, 1984 and Skogan and Maxfield, 1981.

70. Boggs, 1971.

71. Albrecht and Green, 1977.

Despite a growing interest, the amount of research on rural crime and related issues is limited when compared to research in urban areas. Furthermore, the research that has been conducted on rural perceptions of crime has tended to focus on issues highlighted by urban research and to use methods that have been employed and perfected in urban studies. Research that emphasises a distinctly rural perspective is limited, especially in Australia. This study was designed to place an emphasis on the rural locale by taking as our starting point an analysis of the community in which we could place our findings on crime and related issues.

Research Locale

Walcha, New South Wales, was selected as the research locale for a number of reasons. Geographically it was located within an agricultural rural district of New South Wales. Historically, it was the first town to be settled on the Northern Tablelands. From the middle of the last century it had a post office service (1851), a public school (1859), places of worship (Presbyterian Church 1857; Roman Catholic Church 1859; Anglican Church 1866), hotels (Apsley -pre 1850, Royal, New England, The Harp of The Erin, The Walcha and The Commercial) and newspapers (Uralla and Walcha Times 1876, Walcha Witness 1889). Consequently, it was a well settled community that suggested an ideal situation in which to relate community to the research problem. Court records were available for the 1860's which we felt would make an interesting contrast with our study. Pragmatically, it was only sixty kilometres from the University of New England where the researchers worked.

Though we have stressed the rural nature of the town and district, that it had a main highway running through the town meant that it was not cut off from the rest of the surrounding area. Its location we felt would make the town not too remote from other population centres and so we felt respondents would be able to contrast the situation with other locales. It is impossible to say whether the town and district was typical of rural New South Wales, though we did not gain the impression that it was atypical.

Research Methodology

Several methodological problems are commonly found in research on public opinion on crime. Most of this research has utilised public opinion research designs which are highly structured and frequently limited to a few questions or in the larger studies highly structured interviews. This is readily apparent in the study of fear of crime which has dominated this research. This has produced at least two major problems.

First, the public opinion and the highly structured interview format may have exaggerated the public's fear of crime by presenting it as an isolated social issue. As Bertrand⁷² notes, when crime has been presented in survey research with other issues, or when researchers have used an open ended format, crime has received less importance in the evaluations of respondents. This is readily apparent if one compares Gallup polls that have listed a series of social issues

72. Bertrand, 1982.

compared with direct questions on the crime problem⁷³.

Second, the survey research method has focussed primarily on uncovering the socio-demographic correlates of the fear of crime. This approach has been useful, but it also has its limitations. In particular, the absence of more in-depth community studies using a variety of methodological approaches has produced an unbalanced and possibly superficial analysis of the fear of crime.

Another methodological problem concerns the measures employed as indicators of the fear of crime. The research to date has generally used one of two approaches. In the first approach the emphasis has been on respondents' attitudes. Most of this research has used questions concerning whether the respondents feel safe walking after dark, whether there are places they feel unsafe in their community and whether they consider crime to be a significant social problem⁷⁴. The second approach has been to focus on crime avoidance behaviours. In this form of research, respondents are asked if there are specific behaviours they engage in in order to avoid criminal victimisation. Examples of these behaviours include installing extra door locks, having a weapon available, owning a guard dog, avoiding particular locations, etc.⁷⁵

Unfortunately the distinction between attitudes and behaviours is

73. Gallup, 1972, 1976 and 1978.

74. Block, 1971; Clarke and Lewis, 1982; Lotz, 1979 and Toseland, 1982.

75. Garofalo, 1977; Lavrakas and Lewis, 1980 and Wilson, 1971.

frequently ignored and the assumption is implicitly made that the two are interchangeable. Whether attitudes and behaviour have that close link in relation to fear of crime is unknown and therefore projects using these different methodological approaches to studying fear of crime may not be comparable.

In consideration of these problems with previous research in the area three approaches were used to study crime and the community in Walcha. The first approach was a participant observation study of the police in Walcha. The two principal investigators spent twenty one shifts during a seven week period observing the day and night routines of the police, both in the station and on patrol. There were several reasons for beginning the project with this observational research. First, the police were an obvious resource for finding out about crime in the local community since they represent the primary institutional response to the problem of crime. While we recognise that only a fraction of all crime comes to the attention of the police, law enforcement authorities deal with the more obvious crimes (e.g. street crime) and those reported by the public⁷⁶. They also have extensive knowledge of other criminal behaviour that has not elicited an official response. In short the police provided a useful window on crime that grounded our later research in specific data on the crime situation in Walcha. Second, as outsiders we felt that an association with the police would establish our research as legitimate in the community. We believed that this was particularly important because both of us were born

76. Bottomley and Coleman, 1976.

outside Australia. Given this fact and that the population of Walcha was overwhelmingly native Australian, we felt that gaining the trust and cooperation of our respondents could be more difficult than usual. Related to this was our impression that the police were highly regarded in the community, unlike some reports on inner city areas⁷⁷. This we felt would contribute positively to the research, as well as avoid any difficulties that might arise between our research and the police. We decided that the observational study would also allow the police to become aware of the non-threatening nature of the research. Finally, and most importantly, we felt that a knowledge of rural policing was crucial to understanding crime and the crime problem in a rural community. Familiarity with the day to day routines of rural policing enabled us to apply this knowledge to our questionnaire design, as well as forming a basis for comparison with our respondents' understanding of crime in the community.

The second major approach we used was historical. As previously noted, the destruction of the local newspaper offices in the 1930's placed a limitation on this approach. Nevertheless, we did obtain access to local court records for selected years in the 1860's and 1870's, as well as more data from the post second world war II period. From these sources we were able to draw an interesting, if limited, perspective on crime in the mid 19th and 20th century Walcha. While the historical data was interesting on its own account, it also served the purpose of grounding our research in the traditions and experiences of the local community.

77. Jones et al., 1986.

The third and principle approach we used was interviewing a cross section of the community. The interviews were administered by experienced interviewers, were taped, and generally took about an hour to complete. The interview schedule consisted of approximately seventy items, mostly structured questions. However, a substantial number of questions were unstructured and gave respondents the opportunity to talk generally about crime and the Walcha district. This allowed for the development of a conversational style and so the structured questions were frequently elaborated upon. While responses were recorded on the questionnaires, the recording of the interviews allowed us to grasp variations in the tone and mood (some respondents laughed, others became quiet, others responded with a question, etc.,) of the responses. The topics covered in the interview included: socio-demographic data, perceptions of community life and problems, membership in local organisations, participation in community activities, fear and concern about crime, crime avoidance behaviour, victimisation experiences, perception of criminals and exposure to the media. The crime related questions were developed on the basis of previously published research and relevant conceptual issues.

Conclusion

The review of the literature has indicated that rural criminological issues have largely been ignored. The little that has taken place has been an imposition of theoretical and research concerns developed within an urban environment. This has caused a number of theoretical and methodological problems that have largely been

ignored. This is particularly apparent in the study of public opinion and particularly in the area of fear of crime. We argue that the focus on community, as the starting point of the research, and not crime, should help to overcome some of these problems. This will give us data that has developed from and not been imposed on the rural environment. The rural urban contrast then takes on a new meaning. It becomes not simply a comparison of standardised variables developed within the urban environment, but an assessment of qualitative and quantitative differences between the two locales.

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Chapter 2 Walcha New South Wales

Walcha, New South Wales, is located in a rich agricultural area a considerable distance from a major population centre. It lies on an edge of the New England Plateau, forty kilometres from Uralla to the north, ninety three kilometres from Tamworth in the west, one hundred and seventy six kilometres from Wauchope in the east and one hundred and fifty two kilometres from Gloucester in the south. In between these towns or cities are scattered settlements, none as big as Walcha with its town population of 1,674¹. It is safe to argue that Walcha has a distinct territorial base; one of the characteristics that Bell and Newby² list as a precondition for a community. This isolation from larger population centres means that the town has a level of specialised services that makes it relatively independent in its day to day routinised practices; another characteristic deemed necessary to establish the existence of a community by Bell and Newby³. Its educational facilities range from pre school to a central high school, with students requiring further education being bused to Armidale. Some young people in the district attend the the private high schools in Armidale as day or boarding students. However, a majority of the young people attend school in Walcha, with some attending school in other locales. Walcha's medical facilities include a district hospital, an ambulance station and a number of doctors practicing in

1. Australian Census, 1981.

2. Bell and Newby, 1985.

3. Bell and Newby, 1985.

the town. In the town there are also legal and accounting practices, haulage businesses, hotels (five), sporting/social clubs and other facilities such as a library, a local newspaper, meeting places and churches. These facilities allow for the educational social and occupational requirements of many to be met, though not necessary to everyone's satisfaction or standard. In the next chapter respondents "sense of community"⁴ is discussed, though for the moment Walcha can be described as a community. What type of community it is and how this might bear upon the analysis of criminal justice and crime is a central theme of this report.

This description of Walcha has stressed its independence and relative isolation, though this is somewhat reduced by it being bisected by a main highway (The Oxley Highway). The highway runs east-west, connecting Port Macquarie in the east to Tamworth in the west, as well as being another route for those north of Walcha to the coast. It is not a busy highway, though it means that Walcha gets a number of people passing through the town and district. It also provides residents with a reasonable road out of their locale if they so desire. The existence of the highway is testimony to its history and location on the edge of the plateau. European settlers first came to Walcha when Sempill established a run in 1832⁵, which by 1861 was a postal village with a population of three hundred and fifty five⁶. The trip south over the range was

4. Willmot, 1984.

5. Walker, 1986.

6. Journal of the Legislative Council, 1961-62.

particularly burdensome, and this meant that the route to Port Macquarie and Newcastle was either through Walcha or Dorrigo east of Armidale where the outlet to the coast was much further north. The link to Port Macquarie was there at the inception of Walcha, as Oxley found evidence that convicts from Port Macquarie had penetrated the region before it was surveyed in 1818⁷.

Walcha was somewhat isolated, though on a recognised route to the coast of New South Wales, and so its development was reasonably slow and patchy. It was highly dependent on the booms and slumps in agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century. This is illustrated by the way in which the population peaked at 365 in 1867⁸ and declined to 246 in 1871⁹. Data for this period on the local economy is limited, but it seems that there was a fall in itinerant/casual workers in the region by 1871. Other changes in agricultural production saw the number of cattle in the region between 1863-1868 fall by 66%, the number of pigs and horses also declined between 1865-1870, while the number of sheep increased slowly in the first part of the decade¹⁰. The demographic characteristics of the region changed, with a decline in the proportion of Catholics and an increase in the percentage born in New South Wales living in the town¹¹. The significance of these

7. Walker, 1966: 8.

8. Oppenheimer, 1971.

9. Votes and Proceedings of the legislative Assembly, 1987.

10. O'Connor, 1986.

11. Votes and Proceedings of the Legislative Assembly, 1972.

changes will be noted when looking at the crime figures for this period. They are introduced here to illustrate that by the 1870's the locale began to take on a particular profile that was to influence subsequent developments. Regrettably there is little information available on Walcha in more recent times. Since the two local newspapers were destroyed in 1930 and 1932 by fire, a valuable resource of local history is missing¹². While Walcha was clearly of some importance in the early period of the State, being a gateway to the coast, one suspects that its significance declined as transport improved. Being neither historians nor with the resources to study the town during the last century or so, the period between its founding and today must be left somewhat blank. However, as the selection of our respondents shows, the links with previous generations in the locale are strong and direct. For example the names of original settlers, justices of the peace and major landowners of the 1860's are still with us in Walcha today, as many of their ancestors still live, work and contribute to the community. Though this is a regrettable void in our understanding of the history of the community, in the next section we will look at the available crime statistics over the last century and draw together the relevant historical data we were able to locate that might have a bearing on the crime statistics.

Public Order in the 1860's

Whatever may be the deficiencies of crime statistics today, it is

12. We have discovered in recent weeks that as part of a Bicentennial project a number of these papers have been discovered/extracted from various sources and placed on microfiche. It was too late to analyse these for inclusion in the report.

obvious that those of yesteryear must be treated with caution. Nevertheless, they are illustrative of order maintenance in the community and provide an interesting perspective from which to view our present study of Walcha. An analysis of the Bench Book of the Walcha Court of Petty Sessions from October 1860 to July 1873¹³ shows a remarkable continuity with the policing of order maintenance in the community today. Peace keeping in terms of establishing and maintaining public order through the control of street behaviour has remained fairly constant. What is distinctive between the two periods is that in the 1860's this order maintenance was indicative of a labour struggle, as well as an attempt to enforce conduct norms of sobriety and "proper" conduct.

The number of charges each year was between thirty and forty, though as table 2.1 indicates it reached fifty two in 1865. Defendants were predominantly male (94.5%) and though it was not possible to establish clearly their socio-economic background, it was evident that it was mainly shepherds and other agricultural workers who appeared before the courts on charges relating to public order. Plaintiffs were frequently landowners and employers. It was evident that if landowners or employers appeared as defendants in master and servant cases, the servant would frequently turn up as a defendant on a public order charge within the next few months.

13. A more detailed analysis is presented in O'Connor 1986.

TABLE 2.1
NUMBER OF CHARGES AND DEFENDANTS, OCTOBER, 1860
TO JULY, 1873, WALCHA COURT OF PETTY SESSIONS.

Year	Charges	Defendants	Male	Female
1860 (Oct-Dec)	14	14	12	2
1861	35	34	33	1
1862	27	25	25	0
1863	31	30	30	0
1864	32	31	31	0
1865	52	51	47	4
1866	37	37	34	3
1867	30	27	26	1
1868	37	36	29	7
1869	39	39	37	2
1870	30	29	29	0
1871	25	25	25	0
1872	30	30	30	0
1873 (Jan-July)	22	22	19	3
	--	--	--	-
TOTAL	441	430	407	23

Considering the size of the population (365 in 1867 and it went as low as 246 in 1871), thirty to forty civil and criminal charges per year indicates that a significant proportion of the community were involved in cases before the Bench each year. To this we can add applications for slaughtering, hawking, dancing, bagatelle and liquor licences to illustrate the significant role the Court played in the policing of the community.

Court days must have been lively and crowded, as on two separate occasions in the 1870's an individual fell off the verandah of the court. One received a broken arm and the other a broken leg. The court was clearly crowded

members of the Bench when sitting in Court are of necessity mixed up with Plaintiffs, Defendants and Audience and have no possible method of holding a private conversation....lock up keeper is compelled to use the Court Room as a place to cook his meals in the

only fire place in the building.¹⁴

While the variety of charges was extensive, the majority (73.5%) could be grouped under public order offences (30.6%), labour disputes (21%), violent crime (10%), theft (7.3%) and stock theft (5%). The control of labour and enforcement of respectability were issues of central concern to the court which "may be associated with the diffusion of middle class values"¹⁵. The analysis of the court records¹⁶ indicate that when the courts were not favouring the interests of the land owning group there was a trend toward arbitration in the labour disputes. Other charges such as drunkenness, obscene language and assault were dealt with summarily by fines and cautions. The more serious property offences and assaults were sent outside the community to a higher court. The findings suggest, not surprisingly, that the agenda for law and order in the Walcha community was being set in favour of property rights and middle class norms and values of sobriety and respectability.

A notable absence in the Bench Book records is the lack of attention paid to Aborigines. Despite this they were frequently mentioned in letters sent to the government by the Bench and Clerk of Petty Sessions during this period. Apart from two cases of assault on aboriginal females, one in 1860 and one in 1861, and the mention of an inquest held upon the bodies of certain Aborigines said to have

14. Copies of Letters Sent 1860-1878, Walcha Court of Petty Sessions

15. Sturma, 1983: 7.

16. O'Connor, 1986.

been murdered in December 1861, they were conspicuous by their absence. The first offence was "proved but provoked" and the defendant was fined, while the second case was dismissed with the plaintiff described as the "Gin before the court (who) was drunk and disorderly".

One Hundred Years Later

The records available for Walcha are limited, but fortunately we were able to obtain the police charge sheets for 1960-1967 for the Walcha district which gives us a reasonable basis for comparison with the Bench records of the Walcha Court of Petty Sessions. The following table briefly outlines the number of charges in this period and the sex of those charged.

TABLE 2.2

THE NUMBER OF CHARGES BY SEX OF DEFENDANT
BETWEEN 1960 AND 1967.

	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
No of Charges	60	86	96	121	149	146	160	196
Male	55	82	95	115	134	133	150	190
Female	5	4	1	6	15	13	10	6

A number of trends can be seen in this simple table. First, there was a steady increase in the number of charges laid. Second, the high proportion of male respondents found in the 1860's is continued. Third, the actual number of charges, despite the steady increase during the 1960's was possibly less than in the 1860's. Population figures are difficult to compare, but in the 1960's the population in the town of Walcha was approximately five times higher than in the 1860's if we take the highest population figure for that period. This would underestimate the ratio of charge to population,

even taking data most favourable to the 1860's and least favourable to the 1960's, and would suggest that the official crime rate was not higher in the 1960's.

The range of charges in the 1960's was extensive, but again showed an emphasis on public order offences as in the 1860's. The one significant difference was the absence of labour disputes. The following table presents a list of the most frequent charges between 1960 and 1967.

TABLE 2.3 SELECT LIST OF CHARGES FOR 1960 - 1967.

CHARGE	1960	1961	1962	1963	1964	1965	1966	1967
Drunkenness	18	32	26	32	64	33	57	72
Drunk on Reserve	2	2	1	9	0	0	5	0
Liquor Offences	2	1	1	0	0	4	5	2
Indecent offensive Language/Behaviour /Disturbance	3	5	10	2	4	8	4	2
Theft	1	0	1	1	7	5	0	12
Stock Theft	0	3	1	3	0	0	0	0
Assault	3	1	0	2	7	5	9	13
Traffic/DUI	20	26	25	35	37	55	52	49

Traffic has replaced the labour disputes and it is evident that the increase in traffic offences partly explains the steady increase from 1960 to 1967. The figures suggest that Walcha was not a place of extensive criminal activity in either period. Policing was clearly concerned with reconstructing a particular form of order expected in the community. It also appeared from the records of the 1960's that Aborigines were frequently charged with drunkenness, that some individuals appeared again and again and that the main occupation of defendants (where noted) was labourer.

1985

In twenty one shifts with the Walcha police, we apprehended one driver over the prescribed concentration of alcohol and observed some illegal spotlight shooting in the distance. No reports of crime were made during these shifts, though occasionally an incident or two happened outside the periods we spent with the police. We were not able to ascertain the precise number of charges laid in the past twelve months as we felt that an analysis of that material might be considered an invasion of privacy. We estimate that the number of charges was approximately 100 per annum, coming close to the figures of the early 1960's. The charges were similar, though there did appear to be more concern/emphasis on marihuana usage and spotlight shooting.

In Walcha today crime appears to be regarded as something that occasionally disturbs the police officer's role as peace officer. While the police tend to treat incidents on an informal basis, they appear to institute formal proceedings if their authority is being questioned or treated with disrespect¹⁷. Policing is based on what is considered acceptable behaviour within the Walcha community, therefore drunkenness and abusive language, as in the 1860's and 1960's, tend to predominate in the official charges laid. The police are extremely positive toward Walcha, they see it as a community

17. This had to be inferred from conversations with the officers, as we did not have the opportunity to observe arrests except in the case of the driver with over the prescribed concentration of alcohol. We were, however, able to observe the police informally dealing with order problems.

with little crime, where individuals respect each other, are generally not rowdy or drunk and they aim to keep it that way.

Social Control and the Penetration of the Criminal Justice System in Walcha

On our initial visits to Walcha, two experiences stood out which bear directly on the issue of social control. In the first instance we were acutely aware that we were strangers in the town and had the distinct feeling that our presence was being registered. Second, we noticed on one visit a crowd, of six to eight people standing outside the newsagent. They were awaiting the arrival of the local weekly paper which was late. Our later experience suggested that social control in a small country town is quite intimate, that there was a feeling that learning the news was an important feature of communal life and that Walcha was their town, unique and in need of preservation. In true academic fashion we latched on to this early observation and arranged for the local newspaper to give the research publicity. Photographs of ourselves and our interviewers appeared on the front page and helped to make us recognisable when meeting respondents. It worked, as many respondents had noted the information (it would have been difficult to have avoided it, as it was the only news item on the front page) and it seemed to us to have given a certain legitimacy to the research for having made the front page of their newspaper. It was considered their newspaper, though it was produced and published in Armidale.

Police In The Walcha District

In New South Wales in 1985 the formal mechanisms of social control

were highly centralised, as evidenced by the administration, control and development of the criminal justice system. The police force is centrally trained, administered and allocated to locales, similarly with the courts and correctional agencies. This would seem to suggest little scope for a small community to imprint its " brand " onto the formal social control processes. In one respect this is true, as there is no corporate logo for Walcha Police or its Court, and it does not even rate a correctional office or institution. There is a three cell police lockup, with other correctional services being administered outside of Walcha.

Nevertheless, there was a certain quality to policing that could be defined as being specific to Walcha. It is difficult to give precise empirical referents to this, but in our observation period with the police, we found that, while they recognised that there was one police force in New South Wales, rural policing was felt to be different. They expressed the view that the police in rural areas needed different qualities in that the communities they policed expected them to be different. Fortuitously towards the end of our observation period this was illustrated very well and showed how the community of Walcha, whether by design or not, had penetrated the criminal justice process.

Before we commenced the observation study of the police, one of the officers in Walcha was taken sick and was subsequently promoted and transferred to another police station. This meant that the station was one person short during our period of study and towards the end of our observation period the question of a replacement was very

much to the fore. They were worried that a super rookie cop, insensitive to the differences between rural and urban policing, would descend upon them. They felt that someone who would implement the letter of the law without considering how it had certain local qualities could cause trouble for themselves and community-police relations in general. This worry was expressed for several weeks. Speculations on the type of policeman who would come, the problems a new officer, especially if young and single, faces in a small fairly isolated community were made in conversations. Suddenly the mood changed when it was learnt that the new policeman had been brought up in a small town on the coast. There was an audible sigh of relief, in that they felt that their job of introducing the police officer to policing in Walcha would be much easier. Now this is not to imply that policing was simply dictated by the community. It was not so crude as that, nor would we imagine that community members would think that this is the case, but rather that slight differences in social control processes can be significant. While the outcome might be similar, the route to that control may vary. The variations between communities in many instances appear imperceptible, but sufficient we would argue to be recognised by community members. These variations illustrate how the community has penetrated the criminal justice system. The level and shape of this penetration will be detailed throughout the analysis of our results.

In formal terms there were three policemen stationed at Walcha (two during the research period), one at Walcha Road - a small settlement twenty kilometres from Walcha on the Sydney-Armidale railway line and one at Nowendoc, seventy one kilometres south of Walcha to

police the Walcha district. Both Walcha Road and Nowendoc are one person stations, with Nowendoc lying in a quite rugged and isolated district that requires a four wheel drive vehicle to move about the district in comfort. There was a police car at Walcha and Walcha Road, with a four wheeled drive vehicle at Nowendoc. Since the station at Walcha was one officer short during the period we spent with the police, we frequently met the officers at Nowendoc and Walcha Road when they did relief work at Walcha. The work load at Walcha Road and Nowendoc was not regarded as particularly onerous, but given the area covered by the Walcha district, it would have been extremely difficult for the Walcha station to service the whole area.

The police during the period of this research also acted as the motor registry office on Tuesday and Thursday and conducted driving examinations and so their ability to be out in the district was somewhat curtailed. Their motor registry role meant that a large proportion of the population came into the police station at least once a year. This played a significant role in policing the district, as it gave the officers an opportunity to talk to members of the community that they, on their own admission, might never come across in their routine policing activities in the district. They indicated how the experience made them realise how limited their contact was through formal policing, even among those groups who were generally defined by them as potential sources of problems. For example, the Aborigines in the locale were a particular focus of police concern/observation. It was recognised, through meeting many Aborigines registering motor vehicles who they would not see until

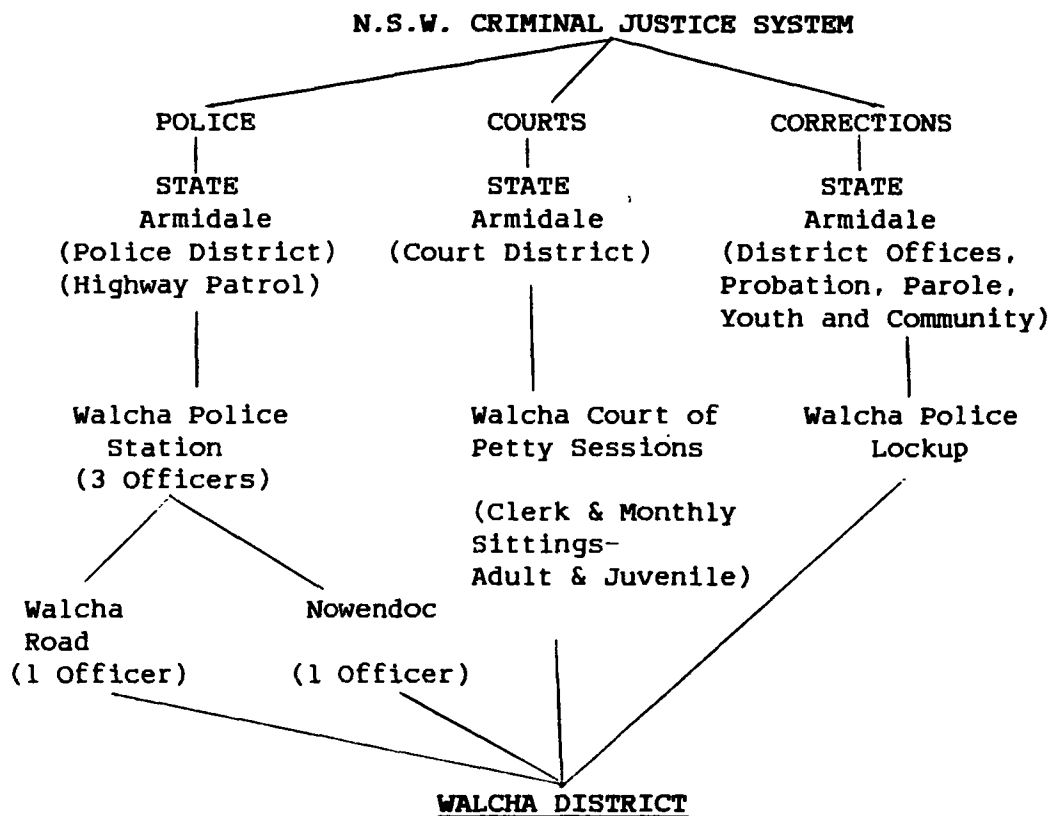
the next renewal date, that their contact was selective. Registering motor vehicles introduced the police to a wide section of the community, and both the police and community members used it as an opportunity to converse or raise points that might be or develop into problems. It was also an excellent source of information for the police. Driving examinations gave the police an opportunity to meet young people who were coming into that age category that the police thought warranted some extra attention. Similarly, the youth of the area saw the police in a role that was not simply one of law enforcement. One was struck by the ease and familiarity of the interaction between the two, even when it was evident that the officer's knowledge of the young person was informed through past confrontations/trouble. Shortly after the research project the administration of the motor registry office was withdrawn from the police and it would be interesting to conduct a follow up observation period to see its effect on policing. Chapter 8 deals with the issue of policing in Walcha in more detail.

Other Criminal Justice Facilities

Walcha has a court house with a permanent Clerk of Courts and a Magistrate who visits the court once a month to hear criminal and civil cases. The magistrate did not live locally, but through the Clerk of Courts the "localisation" of the court was possible. We were not able to study the court in any detail because there was only one court sitting during the police observation period. However, the Court was beside the police station so we could observe the considerable traffic in and out of the court house and the close

liaison between the Clerk of Courts and the Police. The one court sitting we did observe could not simply be described in legalese, as it was also a social occasion for the officials. Morning tea took a central place and the discussion that took place during the tea was both social and business, highlighting the particular characteristics of the town in which they were sitting. The magistrate, the police prosecutor and other out of town lawyers were being clearly briefed on the issues from a perspective that sought to emphasise the need to consider the locale/local understanding of the cases and not just the legal - policing issues being raised. Again, this was not something you could define concretely, as it was more one of commonsense being brought to bear on establishing the particular circumstances of issues/cases under scrutiny. The role of the police prosecutor appeared central and would bear further scrutiny, particularly his emphasis on community conditions and what he presented to the court. On this one occasion it was not possible to study the role of police prosecutor. However, it was interesting how he sought information on the community and offenders from the police and presented this material to the court.

The following diagram outlines the formal positioning of the various facilities of the criminal justice system in relation to Walcha. At this stage of the report all we wish to point out is that it is not a one way traffic. While the criminal justice system filters down to the community, the community also transforms the criminal justice system to suit the particular practices for the reproduction of order by community members. This will be considered in more detail in our analysis of policing in Walcha.



The Social and Demographic Characteristics of Walcha

The socio-demographic data available on present day Walcha, indicates a fairly typical rural community¹⁸. The Walcha district has a total of 3,712 persons, of which 1,674 live in the town of Walcha. The population includes few foreign born residents, as native Australians comprise over 95% of the district's population. Aborigines represent 2.8% of the total population. Among the foreign born residents, the vast majority are from the United Kingdom, Ireland and New Zealand. The Walcha district can be said to be populated by the traditional anglo-celtic Australian ethnic mix.¹⁹

18. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

19. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

In terms of its occupational structure the Walcha district reflects its rural base. Approximately 43% of the district's working population is engaged in some form of agricultural production (see table 2.4 below). The service centre function of the town of Walcha is indicated by the next largest occupational category, which is that of trade persons representing 17.5% of persons in the labour force. Clerical workers, comprising 7.6% of the labour force in the Walcha district, is the third largest occupational category.

TABLE 2.4 OCCUPATIONAL CATEGORIES OF EMPLOYED PERSONS IN THE WALCHA DISTRICT 1981

OCCUPATION	MALES	FEMALES	TOTAL	%
Professional and Technical.	54	57	111	6.6
Administrative, etc.	31	6	37	2.2
Clerical Workers.	23	104	127	7.6
Sales Workers.	38	42	80	4.8
Farmers, Fishermen, etc.	547	175	722	43.2
Miners, Quarrymen, etc.	2	0	2	0.1
Transport, Communication.	67	11	78	4.7
Tradesmen, etc.	285	7	292	17.5
Service, Sport, Recreation.	26	65	91	5.4
Member of Armed Services	0	0	0	0.0
Inadequately described, not stated.	44	87	131	7.8
TOTAL (source) ²⁰	1117	554	1671	100.0

Officially recorded personal income levels in the Walcha district are relatively low. Those individuals reporting their personal income as 6,000 dollars or less comprise 47.4% of the population. Individuals earning 6,000 to 12,000 dollars per year represent 29.8% of the population, 10.7% earn between 12,000 and 18,000 dollars and 6.3% earn more than 18,000 dollars per year. However, these income

20. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

figures are somewhat misleading. The Walcha district is a very productive agricultural region with numerous medium to large sheep grazing properties. The actual wealth of this region is not necessarily reflected in the personal income figures.

In terms of other major social characteristics, the Walcha district has a strong traditional orientation. The percentage of all residents now married is 46.3%. Divorced and separated persons account for 3.3% of the population, with a further 4.4% being widowed. The remaining 46% of the population has never married. However, if we exclude those under 15 years (29.5% of the population), only 16.5% of the district's population has never married²¹. The district has a fairly well distributed age profile. Persons under 15 years of age comprise 29.5% of the population, those aged 15 to 59 represent 58.1% and those aged 60 or more represent 12.4% of the Walcha district's total population²².

The Walcha district's housing is of a low density distribution that would be anticipated for a rural community. Of the 1,158 occupied private dwellings in the district, separate households represent 1,083 (93.5%) of the total. There are no semi detached homes, row houses or flats three stories or more in height. There is also a high degree of home ownership, with owners and purchasers accounting for 62.9% of all households in occupied private dwellings²³.

21. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

22. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

23. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

Respondents

The respondents for our study were selected by means of a systematic random sample drawn from the 1981 electoral roll²⁴. The number of individuals selected was 219, of which 191 were interviewed. The response rate was 87%.

A brief description of our sample indicates that we had a reasonable cross section of the community in our study. We interviewed 102 males (53.4%) and 89 (46.4%) females. The majority of the sample were married (83.8%), over the age of twenty (87.4%), caucasian (93.7%) and residing in the town of Walcha (69.5%). The following table presents the breakdown of the social characteristics of our respondents.

24. The geographical area covered by the electoral roll after this date covered an area considerably larger than the Walcha District and would have made selection of a sample very difficult.

TABLE 2.5 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS BY SEX, AGE, RACE, MARITAL STATUS, RESIDENCE, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME.

SEX			AGE			RACE		
	No	%		No	%		No	%
Male	102	53.4	>20 yrs	5	2.6	Caucasian	179	93.7
Female	89	46.6	21-30yrs	22	11.5	Aboriginal	5	2.6
			31-40yrs	59	30.9	Not Assessed	7	3.7
			41-50yrs	40	20.9			
			51-60yrs	26	13.6			
			61 + yrs	39	20.4			
MARITAL STATUS			RESIDENCE		EDUCATION			
	No	%		No	%		No	%
Single	14	7.3	1-5 yrs	28	14.7	None	6	3.1
Married	160	83.8	6-10yrs	25	13.1	Primary	70	36.6
Widowed	13	6.8	11-20yrs	26	13.6	Secondary	58	30.4
Separated/			20 + yrs	112	58.6	Technical	26	13.6
Divorced	3	1.6				Agricultural	5	2.6
De Facto	1	0.5				Tertiary	9	4.7
						Other	16	8.4
						Don't Know	1	0.5
EMPLOYMENT			NET INCOME		CHURCH MEMBERSHIP			
	No	%		No	%		No	%
Employed	120	62.8	>\$10,000	31	16.2	Yes	103	53.9
Unemployed	4	2.1	\$10-14999	32	16.8	No	86	45.0
Unpaid Work	31	16.2	\$15-19999	32	18.3	Don't Know	2	1.0
Retired	31	16.2	\$20-24999	13	6.8			
Don't Know	5	2.6	\$25-29999	20	10.5			
			\$30-39999	17	8.9			
			\$40-49999	7	3.7			
			\$50000+	14	7.3			
			Don't Know	22	11.5			

The data presented in table 2.5 indicate that many of our respondents lived in Walcha or the Walcha district for a considerable period of time, were employed, in unpaid work such as housework or retired. A number of respondents had fairly high net incomes and just over half indicated that they were members of a church. Given the high percentage of respondents in some categories and the obvious interdependence between some variables such as age and length of residence, a number of significant correlations were

found. The following is a general summation, as greater specificity would give an empirical rigidity to what are essentially descriptive categories in which our respondents can be placed.

Significant sex differences in the social characteristics of our respondents were few, though there were 13.5% (12) female compared with 1.0%(1) male widowed respondents, females compared with males were more frequently in unpaid work, 30.7% compared with 4.2% respectively and all the aboriginal respondents were male. Age gave the expected differences, with older respondents more likely to be married, have less education, have children and grandchildren in the district, and correspondingly less likely to have parents and grandparents in the district. The percentage employed decreased with age, though the net income of households was higher among the older respondents. This profile suggests that in later analysis the reader should bear in mind that the respondents show some differences on those variables e.g., sex, age, education, etc., that are usually employed in general cross tabulations.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have discussed several significant aspects of Walcha, New South Wales. In particular, we have focussed on Walcha as a community, noting its history, socio-economic structure and the nature of the locally based criminal justice system.

Several conclusions were drawn from this material. Firstly, Walcha clearly fits the image of a rural Australian community. It is small,

agriculturally based and has a population comprised of the traditional Australian anglo-celtic ethnic mix. In addition, many of the families in Walcha have been residing in the district for several generations.

Secondly, while Walcha has probably never had a serious crime problem, the historical data indicate that the criminal justice system has played a significant role in the community since its' early years. In some areas, such as public disorder, there are marked similarities between the official crime rates of this century and the last. In other areas, such as labour disputes, the role of the criminal justice system has changed considerably.

Finally, there are reasons to believe that the community is an important factor in local law enforcement, in particular, the statements of the Walcha police and our own observations of police-community interaction suggest that community is a critical concept for understanding crime and criminal justice in a small rural town and district.

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CHAPTER 3 COMMUNALISM

Crime surveys have typically focused on the crime situation and then related this back to the characteristics of the respondents and the particular locale in which they live. We began this study from a quite different perspective, in that we set out to engage in a community study of the perception of crime. Figure 3.1 outlines the format we began with and illustrates that the focus of the study is the community and then crime and not vice versa. After this research experience, we would not take such a rigid unidimensional approach in that the interdependence of variables rather than the one way flow causation model is more appropriate in terms of our research findings.

FIGURE 1: A COMMUNITY STUDY OF CRIME

Independent Variables	Intervening Variables	Dependent Variables
1.General Crime Rate	1.Community Participation	1.Crime Avoidance Behaviour
2.Local Crime Rate	2.Personal Networks	2.Perception of Crime Problem (NSW)
3.Victimisation Experience	3.Extra Community Contact	3.Perception of Crime Problem (Walcha)
4.Criminal Justice System	4.Exposure to Mass Media	4.Perceptions of Criminals/Criminality.
	5.Experience with the Criminal Justice System	5.Attitudes Toward Criminal Justice System
	6.Personal Characteristics	
	7.Property Ownership	
	8.Personal/Political Beliefs	
	9.Town/Non Town Residence	

In this chapter we consider community participation, personal networks and extra community contact, in an attempt to define the

community in which our respondents resided. The concept of community has troubled theorists and researchers in that there is no agreed upon definition of what constitutes a community. We have shown that Walcha can be considered to occupy a particular territory and that it has a certain independence through the provision of services within that locale. But community is something more than this. There is, as Willmott¹ argues, a qualitative dimension which he loosely terms a sense of community. First impressions, and these are not necessarily inaccurate, were that Walcha had that quality that could be defined as community. However, this would hardly satisfy our readers or provide a base for the analysis of our respondents perception of the crime situation. This chapter spells out in some detail further characteristics of our respondents and their perceptions of Walcha/Walcha district to illustrate why community makes an essential starting point for the analysis of our findings. It may at first seem strange in a crime survey to spend so much space establishing a claim that is probably non contentious to those familiar with Walcha. However, by outlining the communal features of Walcha we establish that it is a community and we give the reader an insight into the locale in which our results must be placed.

This emphasis on community tells two, maybe three, distinct stories that have a significant bearing on the analysis of criminal justice and the myriad of issues that it throws up. First, our survey is grounded in a particular locale and so the results should be read in terms of that locale and the particular knowledge held by our

1. Willmott, 1984.

respondents. This may appear to be stating the obvious. However, if taken seriously, it would represent a remarkable change in the present analysis of public opinion. Second, though the survey deals with matters largely developed outside of Walcha e.g., criminal justice, policing strategies, correctional policies, crime news, etc., their penetration into the community is filtered and constructed by respondents in their day to day lived experience in the community. The extent to which this is shown is limited by the research techniques used in this study. Nevertheless, as our analysis unfolds, particularly the analysis of policing, the contribution of the community to the development of criminal justice in Walcha will be illustrated. Third, policy decisions, as well as most research on public opinion, is presently being undertaken in a manner that ignores the obvious differences between locales and regions. To counteract this we argue that research should explore the structuration² of public opinion and other matters of criminological interest. This is particularly true in New South Wales today considering that the New South Wales Police Force is being regionalised to introduce community policing.

A Sense of Community

Our first entrance into the township of Walcha, as noted earlier, suggested to us that we were entering a somewhat private world. It felt somewhat like entering someone's house. We had the impression that we were under observation and the compact and neat physical layout of the town supported this feeling. This initial impression

2. Giddens, 1984.

helped us to decide to begin our fieldwork in the police station. The police station was located in a fairly central position and our alignment with the police would, we felt, be beneficial to a crime survey in Walcha. As we gained more knowledge of the locale and of past events through the analysis of court records of the 1860's and census material, we began to discover Walcha's continuity with the past. Table 3.1 confirms this among our respondents, as over fifty percent (50.3%), or their families, had settled in the Walcha district over fifty years ago. A majority of our respondents had a connection with Walcha that stretched over one third of the period the area had been settled by Europeans.

TABLE 3.1 WHEN RESPONDENT OR FAMILY FIRST
SETTLED IN THE DISTRICT

	No	%
Less than 10 yrs	29	15.2
10- 25 yrs	41	21.5
26- 50 yrs	18	9.4
51- 75 yrs	16	8.4
76-100 yrs	33	17.3
101-150 yrs	47	24.6
Don't Know	7	3.7
TOTAL	191	100.1

There were no significant differences by sex of respondent, though a higher percentage of males or their families (45.9% compared with 32.0% for female respondents) had resided in the district for more than fifty years. There was no significant difference between males and females who had resided more than twenty years in the district, though there was a higher proportion of females (25.8%) compared with males (15.7%) in the 60+ age category who had resided in the district for more than twenty years. There were no significant

differences in response by education of respondent, though age of respondent (sig. 0.0088), whether respondent resided in the town or not (sig. 0.0163) and the number of relatives in the district (sig. 0.0000) were significant.

There was an inverse U curve effect with age. This is illustrated in the following age distribution of respondents who, or their families, had been settled fifty years or less in the district.

TABLE 3.2 **THE PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS (FAMILY)**
WHO HAD BEEN SETTLED FIFTY YEARS OR
LESS BY AGE.

Age of Respondent	Fifty Years or Less %
Under 20 yrs	20.0
21-30 yrs	47.6
31-40 yrs	62.5
41-50 yrs	48.7
51-60 yrs	42.3
60 + yrs	32.4

Those residing outside the town showed a higher percentage who had settled less than 10 yrs (27.3%) compared with respondents living in the town (11.0%). Finally, as would be expected, the more relatives a respondent claimed to have in the district, the longer the period he or she was connected with the district. The generation which first settled in the Walcha district is indicated in table 3.3.

TABLE 3.3 GENERATION WHICH FIRST SETTLED IN WALCHA DISTRICT

GENERATION	NO.	%
Respondent	71	37.2
Parents	23	12.0
Grandparents	35	18.3
Great Grandparents	36	18.8
Great Great Grandparents	10	5.2
Siblings/Children	4	2.1
Don't Know	12	6.3
TOTAL	191	99.9

Thirty seven percent of our respondents were the first of their immediate family to have settled in the district, 2.1% were preceded by siblings or children, while 62.8% were preceded by parents, grandparents, great grandparents and great great grandparents. The penetration of family groups and relatives into the fabric of Walcha runs much deeper than this, even when the time-space relationship is fixed to the period of the research. Giddens³ argues that space and time, and how they intersect, are crucial to the analysis of social systems. Many respondents indicated that they had close relatives living in the district. Thirty percent (30.4%) had one or more parents, 45.5% had inlaws, 36.6% had siblings, 8.4% had grandparents, 26.7% had aunts or uncles, 39.3% had cousins and 75.4% and 21.5% had children and grandchildren respectively living in the district at the time of interview. The latter percentages are linked to the high percentage of married respondents (83.8%), of which 59.4% had children under 18 years presently living at home. A majority of respondents indicated that they had eight or more

3. Giddens, 1984.

relatives presently living in the district. Based on their estimates, a total of 2,176 relatives were noted for the 191 respondents. While this can only be considered a rough estimate, in a total population of 3,712, 2,176 relatives shows a considerable inter linkage by blood and marriage in the locale.

The physical environment and these demographic characteristics suggest that our respondents lived in a locale bounded by recognisable time-space conditions. This would suggest a high potential for identification and bonding with others in the locale, thereby contributing to respondents' knowledge of Walcha as a community. Before considering this, some further data is considered on respondents' more physical attachment to the district. It is stressed that the physical cannot be really be separated from the social, in that while owning property may be illustrative of a physical attachment it carries with it a considerable social and cultural significance in terms of living in the locale.

A high degree of attachment to community is also indicated by the pattern of home and property ownership. Seventy four percent (N=142) of our respondents own or are buying the home they were living in at the time of interview, with twenty one percent (N=40) also owning other property in the district. The percentage of owner/purchasers among our sample is higher than the 62.9% indicated in the census for the Walcha district⁴. Seventeen percent (N=32) owned a business in the district, covering a wide range from farming to

4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1983.

retail. In seeking to further establish their location in the district, respondents were asked whether since becoming an adult they had spent six months or more in a major city in Australia or overseas. The question was restricted to adulthood, as in rural areas some individuals spend time in urban areas at boarding school which we wished to exclude from the rural-urban comparisons dealt with in later questions.

The results indicate that about one third of our respondents (35.1%) had spent at least six months in a major city, with a majority of these respondents (58.0%) indicating that they had lived in Sydney, N.S.W., for six months or longer. Some interesting differences were found between respondents which suggest some tentative interpretations. There was no significant sex difference in response, but significant differences were found for the period they or their family had first settled in the district (sig. 0.0014), length of residence (sig. 0.0000), number of relatives in the district (sig. 0.0065) and education (sig. 0.0005). The results should be treated with caution due to the small numbers in some cells. The percentage who experienced living in an urban environment for six months or more fell as the number of years when first settled, or residence in the district, increased. As the number of relatives in the district increased, the percentage who spent at least six months in a city decreased. The percentage who spent at least six months in a city increased with the level of education of the respondent. There was no significant age or district-town difference in response. However, the percentage with urban experience was highest among 31-40 year old respondents (48.3%)

followed by 60 + year old respondents (39.5%), as well as for respondents living in the district (45.6%) compared with those living in the town (31.5%). These results suggest that respondents who have the least attachment to the locale in terms of length of residency and number of relatives have a higher probability of having lived in a major city for six months or more. Similarly, the fact that respondents in their 30's and those living outside the town have higher proportions with this type of experience ties in with the previous data on residence and relatives in the district. They appear to constitute a segment of the population which is most mobile. The difficulties that beset agriculture from time to time from draught, fluctuating prices and high interest rates, which result in varied employment practices and the buying and selling of properties may account for some of the mobility among this group.

Overall, the results suggest a certain compactness, even one might say physical segregation, about our respondents in terms of locale. This is particularly so in comparison with urban areas in Australia where there is a high level of mobility⁵. This is not to suggest that respondents don't travel in and out of the locale or that there is not a percentage of the population that moves in and out each year, but that there is a core to the locale in population terms that marks it off from other locales. Whether this is translated into a distinctive sense of community among respondents is a

5. Maher, 1984. Between 1971-76 43% of the population (an annual rate of 17% in 1975-1976) moved locally, inter and intrastate and internationally, with local movement predominant. The local movement was predominantly urban in nature.

qualitative judgement, but a judgement that can be informed by the involvement of respondents in activities, services and facilities that are Walcha in origin and practice.

Participation, Trust and Dependency

Walcha town and district was rated positively by respondents as a friendly place. (The term Walcha will be used henceforth, unless town/non town differences are being analysed). Only 4.2% rated Walcha poor/very poor, while 85.3% rated it good/very good. Similarly, only 3.1% gave nothing as a response to an 'open' question seeking their response to what they liked best about living in Walcha, while 15.2% responded nothing to what they liked least about Walcha. The following table lists the response given to these questions. It was an open question and up to three responses per respondent were coded to cover multiple responses.

TABLE 3.4 **RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF WHAT THEY LIKED BEST AND LEAST ABOUT LIVING IN WALCHA**

RESPONSE	BEST	LEAST
	No	No
People	98	20
Country Life	97	12
Work	30	7
Community Activities	20	60
Environment/Weather	74	82
Safety	13	0
Other	16	36
Nothing	6	29
No Response	2	3
Total	356	249

(Number of respondents = 191. Up to three choices per respondent were included in the table)

People and country life were most frequently mentioned by respondents as what they liked best about Walcha. Environment and community activities were most frequently mentioned as what they liked least about Walcha. Respondents appeared to have difficulty, or were reluctant, to say what they liked least about Walcha, in that we had more positive responses (limiting to three responses was more restrictive on the number of positive responses) to the question. That environment and weather were mentioned most frequently about what respondents liked least about Walcha is not surprising, as Walcha gets very cold winters with bitterly cold winds. It seemed that some respondents had difficulty in giving a negative reply and mentioning the weather was a fairly neutral or obvious response. This is not the case with community activities. Later we look at this in more detail when we consider the quality of life as perceived by respondents, which suggests that there is some dissatisfaction with some aspects of living in Walcha. One would expect this in any place, but it is noted here lest the impression is given that everyone finds Walcha an idyllic place to live in.

Membership of local organisations and clubs in the district was spread across a wide range. Nine percent (8.8%) of male respondents (N=9) were members of Lions (N=4), Apex (N=4) or Rotary (N=1), with 49% (N=50) being members of the Walcha Ex Servicemen and Women's Memorial Club. Nineteen percent (19.1%) of female respondents (N=19) were members of the Country Women's Association (N=9), Zonta (N=1) or Quota (N=9). These organisations tend to have a high public profile in most rural communities, but some have restrictions on

membership which reduces their potential as organisations that members of the community can easily join. They do not necessarily represent the level of membership in community groups in Walcha.

Illustrative of this is that 58.1% of respondents (N=48) 63.7% of which were male respondents, were members of a sporting club and a further 48.7% indicated that they were members of other organisations and clubs. A further 14.1% of respondents were members of a political party, 25.1% a professional or farmer organisation and 53.9% were members of a local church. Female respondents, and older respondents, were more frequently members of a local church. Male respondents, and respondents with higher levels of education were more frequently members of professional or farmer organisations.

While these figures suggest a fairly high membership in community groups and organisations, they don't indicate how active people are in the community in terms of meeting others. Newby⁶ suggests that organisational membership is a question that is biased towards middle class respondents. Allowing for this possibility, we asked a simple question about how often respondents attended or visited particular places, individuals and meetings. This provided a general indication of participation in community activities. The results are presented in the following table.

6. Newby, 1979.

TABLE 3.5: THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ATTEND/VISIT A SERVICE CLUB, SPORTING EVENT, HOTEL, NEIGHBOURS/FRIENDS HOME, COUNCIL MEETING, PARENTS AND TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, RSL AND A SPORTING CLUB.

Attend/Visit	Very Often		Often		Sometimes		Infrequently		Very Infreq		DK NA	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No.	%
Service Club	13	6.8	21	11.0	26	13.6	23	12.0	49	25.7	59	30.9
Sports Event	43	22.5	40	20.9	39	20.4	24	12.6	27	14.1	18	9.4
Hotel	7	3.7	19	9.9	35	18.3	20	10.5	52	27.2	58	30.4
Neighbour/ Friend	26	13.6	68	35.6	64	33.5	19	9.9	10	5.2	4	2.1
Local Council	0	0.0	2	1.0	4	2.1	11	5.8	63	33.0	111	58.1
P & T Assoc	7	3.7	12	6.3	15	7.9	11	5.8	31	16.2	115	60.2
Ex-Services	8	4.2	17	8.9	55	28.8	30	15.7	44	23.0	37	19.4
Sports Club	34	17.8	35	18.3	43	22.5	15	7.9	23	12.0	41	21.5

The analysis of response by social characteristics of respondents should be treated with caution given the high DK/NA response for some categories. Nevertheless, they show some interesting trends. Female respondents attended a service club, visited neighbours or friends and the parent and teachers association more frequently than male respondents. Male respondents attended sports events, hotels and the Ex-Services club more frequently than female respondents. Those living outside the town appeared to attend the P&T and visit neighbours or friends more frequently than those living in the town. Respondents living in the town attended the remaining categories more frequently. Twenty to thirty year old respondents attended a service club, sporting event, a sports club or visited neighbours and friends most frequently. Thirty one to forty year old respondents attended local government and P&T meetings most

frequently. Older respondents attended the hotels and Ex-Servicemen and Women's Memorial Club most frequently. Respondents who had lived in the town less than ten years were the most frequent attenders of service clubs, sporting events, hotels, local government meetings and sports clubs. This pattern was also reflected among those with the least number of relatives in the district. The results show a fairly high participation rate, with those apparently having the least ties with the community i.e., those with the least length of residence and number of relatives in the district being the most frequent attenders. Finally, 41.9% of respondents held a formal position in at least one organisation in the district.

These results give a general indication of the level of participation in community activities. Respondents were also asked how often they met particular individuals in the community. It was felt that this might be significant when considering their perceptions and reactions to crime, as well as being an indicator of the level of interaction between individuals. Table 3.6 presents the results of respondents replies to the question "On average, how often would you meet and talk with any of the following people in a week?"

TABLE 3.6 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO MET TALKED WITH NEIGHBOURS, RELATIVES, FRIENDS, POLICEMEN AND LOCAL COUNCILLORS IN A WEEK

	Neighbours		Relatives		Friends		Police		Councillors	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Very Often	71	37.2	57	29.8	68	35.6	8	4.2	9	4.7
Fairly Often	58	30.4	47	24.6	76	39.8	29	15.2	24	12.6
Sometimes	36	18.8	31	16.2	33	17.3	59	30.9	52	27.2
Infrequently	17	8.9	18	9.4	10	5.2	23	12.0	32	16.8
Very Infreq	4	2.1	13	6.8	1	0.5	53	27.7	49	25.7
DK-NA	5	2.6	25	13.1	3	1.6	19	9.9	25	13.1
TOTAL	191	100.0	191	99.9	191	100.0	191	99.9	191	100.1

Relatives residing with respondent were excluded.

A majority of respondents met their neighbours, relatives and friends very often/fairly often in a week. A bare majority met a policeman sometime in the week, with a lower percentage meeting local councillors. Overall these figures show a fairly high level of interaction and would suggest that, at least among our respondents, members of the community were not isolated from each other. The level of interaction with the police is quite high and suggests that the police in Walcha do meet community members fairly frequently. This was borne out in our observation of police work in Walcha.

There were few significant differences among respondents, though male respondents compared with female respondents more frequently met a policeman (sig. 0.0007) or a local councillor (sig. 0.0366) during the week. Female respondents met neighbours, friends and relatives more frequently than male respondents. Similarly, there were few differences between respondents by length of residence, though neighbours (sig. 0.0123) and relatives (sig. 0.0035) were more frequently visited by those who had lived twenty or more years and eleven or more years respectively in the district.

Though not statistically significant, those who had lived five years or less in the district, met friends, police and local councillors most frequently. Where the respondent resided was only significant in terms of meeting friends (sig. 0.0123) and police (sig. 0.018), with those living in the town meeting them more frequently. A similar trend was found for meeting neighbours and local councillors. Respondents over sixty years of age met their neighbours very often/often in a majority of cases (52.6%), while it is the younger respondents who tend to meet relatives and friends most frequently.

While the level of participation may give an indication of the level of interaction between community members, it does not tell us anything about the quality of that interaction. We sought this through questions related to trust and dependency on neighbours directed at issues associated with crime prevention. The general findings will be presented here, as the more detailed analysis will be dealt with later when considering crime prevention in detail. Table 3.7 presents the overall findings to a question asking respondents "Would you say that you strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree or are undecided about the following statements."

TABLE 3.7 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO STRONGLY AGREE (S.A.), AGREE (A), UNDECIDED (U), DISAGREE (D) OR STRONGLY DISAGREE (S.D.) WITH A NUMBER OF STATEMENTS ABOUT NEIGHBOURS.

	S.A.		A		U.		D.		DK/NA*	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
I would trust my neighbours to watch my house and property.	98	51.3	85	44.5	2	1.0	2	1.0	4	2.1
Most people in the neighbourhood (area) are truthful and dependable.	66	34.6	114	59.7	4	2.1	4	2.1	3	1.6
My neighbours can be relied upon to call the police if someone suspicious is on my property.	69	36.1	105	55.0	10	5.2	3	1.6	4	2.1
Most people in this neighbourhood (area) can be trusted.	60	31.4	119	62.3	7	3.7	3	1.6	2	1.0
If in trouble I could expect my neighbours to help me.	76	39.8	109	57.1	3	1.6	1	0.5	2	1.0
If my neighbours know I am away, they will keep an eye on my house even if I don't ask them to so.	66	34.6	105	55.0	9	4.7	6	3.1	5	2.6

* No respondent strongly disagreed with any of the statements.

Over ninety percent of respondents strongly agreed/agreed with the above statements, except the last one where the percentage was 89.6%. No respondent strongly disagreed with any of the statements and there was little to separate our respondents in terms of age, sex, etc. Nevertheless, it is possible to discern some shades of differences among respondents, which are similar to the differences we were able to discern in terms of meeting friends, neighbours, relatives, etc. First, 97.8% of female respondents compared with

92.1% of male respondents strongly agreed/agreed that they would trust their neighbours to watch their house and property. Respondents under fifty years of age had lower percentages strongly agreeing with all the statements. Interestingly, respondents who had lived five years or less in the district strongly agreed most frequently that their neighbours would call the police, that they could expect to receive help and that their neighbours would keep an eye on their property even if they did not request it. Given that they appeared to have the least contact with neighbours, it may be a case of expectations rather than actual experience.

One of the assumptions we made when designing the questionnaire, as well as being based on our experience in the town, was that there appeared to be a distinction made between old and new residents. The analysis so far reveals some subtle distinctions between respondents on the basis of length of residence and number of relatives they had in the district. Taking a direct approach we asked respondents whether they agreed or not with a list of statements that sought an opinion about old and new residents in the district. Table 3.8 presents the findings on the response given to a series of statements about new residents while table 3.9 gives the results for statements related to more established residents.

TABLE 3.8 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO STRONGLY AGREED (S.A.), AGREED (A), WERE UNDECIDED (U), DISAGREED (D) OR STRONGLY DISAGREED (S.D.) ON STATEMENTS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO ARE NEW TO THE WALCHA DISTRICT

	S.A.		A.		U.		D.		S.D.	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
It is hard for new people to become accepted in the community.	12	6.3	66	34.6	13	6.8	89	46.6	7	3.7
It is hard for new people to become active in community affairs.	2	1.0	24	12.6	17	8.9	133	69.6	11	5.8
New people usually don't try to become leaders in community clubs and organisations.	7	3.7	42	22.0	22	11.5	101	52.9	8	4.2
New people usually don't try to become involved with the community.	0	0.0	35	18.3	55	28.8	89	46.6	3	1.6
New people tend to be critical of the community.	3	1.6	64	33.5	35	18.3	79	41.4	1	0.5
People in this community make an effort to welcome new people into the community.	17	8.9	122	63.9	29	15.2	17	8.9	1	0.5
New people contribute the most to community decisions.	2	1.0	23	12.0	31	16.2	119	62.3	2	1.0

Table 3.8 suggests that there is some criticism of the role new people tend to play in the community, with the onus being on the new members to seek to make the effort. It is recognised by 40.9% of respondents that it is hard for new people to become accepted in the community, while only 13.6% agreed/strongly agreed that it was hard to become active in the community. A large majority (72.8%)

indicated that the community makes an effort to welcome new people. Here we can detect a conflict, as on the one hand it is suggested that new people are welcomed, but that they nevertheless find it difficult to become accepted. It is also suggested by one quarter of respondents (25.7%) that it is hard for new people to become leaders in clubs or organisations, while 18.3% indicated that new people don't try to become active.

There were few significant differences in response. What differences there were, as well as the direction of the response, were anticipated. There were no significant differences in response by length of residence, though those who had resided the least time in the community strongly agreed/agreed more frequently that it was hard to be accepted or become leaders in community organisations. Furthermore, they had the lowest percentage in agreement on the welcome statement. These findings were also reflected among respondents whose families had settled in the Walcha district the shortest time, with the difference on the statements concerning acceptance (sig. 0.0317) and difficulty in becoming leaders in clubs or organisations (sig. 0.0341) being significant.

The following table gives the response to statements concerning people whose families have lived a long time in the Walcha district.

TABLE 3.9 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO STRONGLY AGREED (S.A.), AGREED (A) WERE UNDECIDED (U), DISAGREED (D) OR STRONGLY DISAGREED (S.D.) ON STATEMENTS ABOUT PEOPLE WHO HAD LIVED IN THE WALCHA DISTRICT A LONG TIME.

PEOPLE WHO HAVE
LIVED HERE A LONG
TIME.

	S.A.		A		U		D		S.D.	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
are more active in community affairs.	8	4.2	115	60.2	19	9.9	43	22.5	2	2.1
receive the most respect in the community.	10	5.2	138	72.3	9	4.7	30	15.7	1	0.5
hold more leadership positions in community organisations.	5	2.6	100	52.4	31	16.2	52	27.2	1	0.5
have more influence in community decisions.	8	4.2	122	63.9	24	12.6	28	14.7	1	0.5
tend to socialise more with other people whose families have also been here a long time.	16	8.4	142	74.3	11	5.8	18	9.4	1	0.5

These results contrast quite markedly from those in table 3.8, in that a majority agreed/strongly agreed with all the statements. Individuals whose families had resided in the district a long time were considered different. It was also felt by 82.7% of our respondents that these individuals socialised with individuals whose families had also lived in the district a long time. Given the high percentages who agreed/strongly agreed that individuals whose families had lived in the district a long time were the most active (64.4%), most respected (77.5%), held the most leadership positions (55%) and had the most influence (68.1%), there were few significant differences to be found among respondents. Female respondents

disagreed/strongly disagreed more often than long term residents in the community were more frequently respected. Older respondents were more frequently undecided about whether such residents were more active in the community. Respondents with more than thirty relatives in the district agreed/strongly agreed more frequently (sig. 0.0246) that individuals whose families had resided a long time in the district tended to socialise among themselves.

Quality of Life in Walcha

We asked respondents whether things had changed in Walcha over the last five years. Prior to that question we asked them about living in Walcha and gave them a list of specific items to consider. This would have had the effect of both drawing their attention to certain situations that they might consider as representing an evaluation of the quality of life, as well as giving them a base from which they could assess whether Walcha was better or worse than five years ago. A simple question on change may give rise to a variety of interpretations which we sought to counteract by introducing to respondents, through our questions, cues as to the subject of the interview. We wished to avoid answers that might have referred to how the football team had played, the weather over the last five years, etc. Respondents were able to include such responses if they wished in their response to the things they liked best and least about living in Walcha.

Forty five percent (45.5%) of our respondents felt that things had changed for the better in Walcha in the last five years, with a further 36.6% considering that it had not changed in that period. Fourteen percent (13.6%) felt that the situation was worse than five years ago. Overall for a large majority of respondents it was a fairly positive response, in that the situation was no worse than five years ago. Though not statistically significant, 19.8% of female respondents compared with 9.3% of male respondents considered that things had changed for the worse in the last five years. As age of respondent increased so did the negative assessment of change in the last five years (sig. 0.0011). The only other significant difference was by length of residence (sig. 0.0122) with respondents who had lived 11-20 years in the district having the highest percentage (72.0%) who responded that things had changed for the better. Those who had lived in the district twenty or more years had the highest percentage (19.6%) who felt that it had got worse in the last five years.

Respondents were also asked to consider whether Walcha experienced problems that could be labelled public order situations. Table 3.10 presents the findings on respondents perception of public order problems in Walcha.

TABLE 3.10 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CONSIDERED THE FOLLOWING ARE PROBLEMS IN THE WALCHA DISTRICT

	Yes		No		DK No
	No	%	No	%	
Abandoned buildings and derelict property	58	30.4	129	67.5	4
Public drunkenness	37	19.4	143	74.9	11
Damage or destruction of street and road signs	104	54.5	84	44.0	3
Graffiti on public or private buildings	42	22.0	141	73.8	8
Rubbish on the streets or roadsides	60	31.4	126	66.0	5
Young people hanging around the streets or public places at night	59	30.9	95	49.7	37
Young people being disrespectful to adults in public	46	24.1	133	69.6	12
People making too much noise at night	27	14.1	133	69.6	31

Damage or destruction of street and road signs was the only item that a majority of respondents considered to be a problem in Walcha. Less than a third and generally closer to a fifth of our respondents considered the other items to be problems in Walcha.

The only significant sex difference in response was on the question dealing with abandoned buildings (sig. 0.0493). Thirty nine percent (38.6%) of female respondents compared with 24.2% of male respondents considered it to be a problem in the area. Though not statistically significant female respondents had a higher percentage indicating that public drunkenness, damage to road signs, graffiti on buildings, youth on the streets at night and people making too

much noise at night were problems in the district. Litter and youth being disrespectful to adults were more frequently considered problems by male respondents. The only significant difference in response by age of respondent was on disrespect by youths to adults (sig. 0.0017). Forty six percent (45.5%) of 21-30 year old respondents compared with 2.8% of 60+ year old respondents considered it to be a problem. This result was not in the expected direction and similarly the percentage response, though not statistically significant, was for a decrease with age in response to abandoned buildings, public drunkenness, damage to signs and youth on the street at night as problems. On the last problem, 50% of 31-40 year old respondents, compared with 3.8% of 60+ year old respondents considered youth on the street at night to be a problem. These results are interesting because previous studies have associated age and sex with fear of and concern about crime⁷. Given that some researchers⁸ have argued that fear of and concern about crime are linked with the perception of community disorder, these results raise interesting questions for subsequent analysis. However, the results may also reflect the fact that younger respondents tend to go out at night more frequently and, therefore, the question may tap a response based on experience.

Respondents who had lived 1-5 years in the district more frequently indicated (sig 0.0414) that abandoned buildings were a problem, while the remaining 'problems' were more frequently considered to be

7. Flanagan et al., 1980; Garofalo, 1979.

8. Lewis and Maxfield, 1980; Wilson and Kelling, 1982.

a problem as length of residence increased. This was particularly the case with damage to signs (sig. 0.0004) where 68% of those who had lived 11-20 years in the district considered it a problem in the district. Finally, respondents who lived outside the town had higher percentages considering all these examples as problems in the district, except for abandoned buildings.

It would appear that the perception of incivility⁹ or public disorder¹⁰ is quite low in the district. However, females are slightly more negative, as well as those living in the country, in their perceptions of the problems in the Walcha district. It would seem from our experience in the community, particularly in considering the problems of policing, that even this response may be painting a picture of Walcha that is more negative than the evidence would suggest. We found little graffiti in the area, and while signs were damaged, they seemed to have been used as target practice and, therefore, had a potted appearance rather than damaged in a way that made them unreadable. It was not evident that there was noise at night, youth congregating on the streets or being disrespectful to adults. Now this may be because the research was conducted during the winter and spring. This avoided the summer period when presumably there would be more young people out and about at night with time on their hands. Again this is not to suggest that Walcha was idyllic, but that the perception of problems may be based on many different factors, with respondents having variable tolerance

9. Lewis and Maxfield, 1980.

10. Wilson and Kelling, 1982

levels. It would appear that this response indicates that youth, graffiti and vandalism are generally expected to be problems. This is evident in overseas research, where they are consistently mentioned in public opinion polls as being problems¹¹. One important aspect of the quality of life is satisfaction with the community. In order to assess community satisfaction we asked a variety of questions drawn from previous research¹². Table 3.11 presents respondents' responses to a series of statements on Walcha as a place to raise a family, educate children, etc. The question read, "How satisfied are you with living in the Walcha district. For example, how would you describe Walcha or the Walcha district on each of the following. Would you say very good, good, fair, poor or very poor."

11. Gallup, 1972; 1976; 1978.

12. Miller and Crader, 1979.

TABLE 3.11 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO ASSESSED WALCHA AS A PLACE TO RAISE A FAMILY, TO EDUCATE CHILDREN ETC.

	Very Good		Good		Fair		Poor		Very Poor		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
AS A PLACE											
to raise a family.	73	38.2	87	45.5	23	12.0	5	2.6	0	0.0	3
to educate children.	18	9.4	96	50.3	58	30.4	16	8.4	2	1.0	1
for teenagers to grow up in.	10	5.2	49	25.7	80	41.9	34	17.8	12	6.3	6
with opportunities for young people to keep out of trouble.	13	6.8	66	34.6	67	35.1	32	16.8	7	3.7	6
where teenagers and young people can fit into the community.	16	8.4	92	48.2	62	32.5	16	8.4	2	1.0	3
to earn a living.	15	7.9	70	36.6	62	32.5	28	14.7	12	6.3	4
where people are friendly.	89	46.6	74	38.7	18	9.4	7	3.7	1	0.5	2
with opportunities for young people to get a job.	4	2.1	11	5.8	52	27.2	84	44.0	36	18.8	4
to occupy free time.	27	14.1	84	44.0	44	23.0	21	11.0	12	6.3	3

It should be mentioned that the selection of items was particularly directed at those areas which we 'picked' up during our observation period as topics that appeared to be causing some concern in the community. Nevertheless, a different picture now emerges about the quality of life in the community. Walcha is still regarded as a friendly place, with 85.3% of respondents rating it as very good/good on this item, with only 4.2% rating its as poor/very poor. A similar percentage (84.7%) rated Walcha as a very good/good place to raise a family, with no respondent rating it very poor. However,

when we specify the situation of teenagers or young people a quite different picture begins to emerge. For example only 30.9 % rated it very good/good as a place for teenagers to grow up in, 41.4% as a place for teenagers to avoid trouble and 7.9 % as a place for teenagers to get a job. Trouble was not specified. It is hard to imagine teenagers getting away with mischief or avoiding being observed getting into trouble in Walcha. However, as indicated earlier vandalism, graffiti and hanging around were perceived as problems by some respondents and these activities might well fit our respondents' definition of "trouble".

In more general terms, respondents were not too positive about Walcha as a place to earn a living. Forty five percent (44.5%) rated it very good/good in this regard. A somewhat larger percentage (58.1%) rated it very good/good as a place to occupy free time. This question was designed to pick up negative responses and, therefore, while we can detect a negativism that was not readily apparent in other responses, we should not read too much into it.

In terms of our socio-demographic variables there were few significant differences in response to the community satisfaction items. Female respondents tended to be more negative than male respondents on most items, with the difference on Walcha as a place to keep out of trouble (sig. 0.0461) and job opportunities for young people (sig. 0.0475) being significant. Seventy two percent (72.4%) of female respondents, compared with 57.0% of male respondents felt that the job opportunities for young people were poor/very poor and that 28.5% compared with 14.9% gave it a similar rating as a place

for young people to keep out of trouble. It was only in terms of Walcha being a friendly community and as a place to occupy free time that females (not statistically significant) tended to be slightly more positive than male respondents. Respondents aged 21-30 yrs were less negative than older respondents (sig. 0.0078) about Walcha as a place to occupy free time. Length of residence (sig. 0.0293), place where respondent resided (sig. 0.0002), when first settled (sig. 0.0429) and education of respondent (sig. 0.0252) was related to the response on Walcha as a place to educate children. Respondents with 1-5 years and 20+ years residency, living in the town of Walcha, whose families had resided for longer periods in the district or had less education were the most positive toward Walcha as a place to educate children.

In the same question we asked respondents to rate Walcha in terms of its roads and highways, medical facilities, the local council, local court, local police, sporting facilities and the availability of clubs and organisations. Leaving aside the court and police for the present, dealt with in later chapters, the results are presented in table 3.12

TABLE 3.12 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO RATED THE ROADS AND HIGHWAYS, MEDICAL FACILITIES, LOCAL COUNCIL, SPORTING FACILITIES AND AVAILABILITY OF CLUBS AND ACTIVITIES AS VERY GOOD TO VERY POOR.

HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE

	Very Good		Good		Fair		Poor		Very Poor		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Roads and highways.	5	2.6	43	22.5	88	46.1	35	18.3	20	10.5	-
Medical facilities.	57	29.8	115	60.2	17	8.9	1	0.5	0	0.0	1
Local council	12	6.3	89	46.6	73	38.2	4	2.1	5	2.6	8
Sporting facilities	110	57.6	66	34.6	12	6.3	1	0.5	0	0.0	2
Availability of clubs and activities	99	51.8	66	34.6	22	11.5	3	1.6	0	0.0	1

Response indicates that a large majority of respondents rated medical facilities (90.0%), sporting facilities (92.2%) and the availability of clubs and activities (86.4%) as very good/good in Walcha. There was considerable dissatisfaction with the roads and highways, 25.1% rated them very good/good, while a bare majority (52.9%) rated the local council as very good/good. Linking these findings with the results in table 3.11 and those considered earlier, it would be reasonable to infer that overall there is considerable satisfaction with community facilities in Walcha. Facilities appear to be used frequently and respondents interacted with neighbours and friends in the Walcha district. However, there are some exceptions to this general community satisfaction, especially concerning teenagers/young people and job opportunities that are not regarded as very good or good.

Conclusion

Walcha has a distinct identification as a community. This was evident to us on an experiential level and was also indicated by the self reports of our respondents.

As a community it has several distinctive characteristics. Perhaps the most notable is the link with previous generations who have lived in Walcha. This is evidenced by the large percentage of our respondents whose families have resided in the Walcha district for several generations. This historical tie is complimented in many cases by the existence of extended family groupings presently located in Walcha. This attachment to community is in contrast to the more mobile lifestyles experienced by most urban Australians.

Another significant characteristic of Walcha as a community is the high level of participation in local organisations and clubs. While Walcha may be somewhat isolated from urban Australia, local residents have been very active in developing the social resources available in the community. In many cases this has taken the form of membership in community organisations and activities.

Finally, most of our respondents perceived Walcha as a good place to live. In particular, most respondents had a high regard for the community facilities that were available in Walcha. Generally, they had a high regard for most government services and organisations. The main problem perceived by respondents was the lack of opportunity for young people. Like many country towns the absence of employment opportunities in Walcha means that many of its young people will eventually migrate to larger towns or cities.

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CHAPTER 4 THE PERCEPTION OF CRIME IN WALCHA N.S.W.

In purely objective terms, at least on the basis of our observation of the police in Walcha, it is clear that Walcha does not have a crime problem. However, the perception of crime and an individuals response to the crime situation cannot be dismissed or accounted for in purely objective terms. Risk, seriousness or what other objective variable that may spring to mind is not sufficient to establish the respondent's perception of the crime situation. The people of Walcha when asked about crime don't simply assess what they believe to be taking place. They take into account, frequently without being aware of this, the knowledge they have gained about crime from other sources and about other places. Thus the importance in studying what might appear to be a relatively crime free area is that it allows us to make some assessment of how crime and crime news has penetrated particular locales which may have few official incidences of crime. To reiterate a very hackneyed phrase attributed to W.I. Thomas "If men define situations as real they are real in their consequences". It must also be borne in mind that the tolerance level toward crime varies and, thus, even a few crimes, some vandalism, etc., may be regarded as unacceptable and have a marked influence on how individuals respond to crime in their community.

In this chapter we outline what respondents believed the crime situation to be. We have already have had some idea, considering some of the public order offences included in table 3.10, that the majority of respondents did not consider public disorder to be a problem in Walcha. It is also significant that respondents did not

list crime or public disorder in the community among the things they liked least about Walcha.

The first question respondents were asked about crime was, How serious a problem is crime in the Walcha area? Table 4.1 presents the results to that question and indicates that a majority (66.5%) considered that "it was not serious at all"

TABLE 4.1 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CONSIDERED CRIME IN THE WALCHA AREA TO BE A PROBLEM THAT WAS VERY SERIOUS, SERIOUS, SOMEWHAT SERIOUS AND NOT SERIOUS.

	No	%
Very Serious	1	0.5
Serious	2	1.0
Somewhat Serious	52	27.2
Not Serious	127	66.5
Non Response	9	4.7
Total	191	99.9

The response is fairly clear in that crime was not considered to be a very serious/serious problem in Walcha except for 1.5% of the sample. There were few significant differences in response except for age (sig. 0.0000) and whether respondents lived in the town or outside it (sig. 0.0297). Fifty percent of our 31-40 year old respondents considered crime in Walcha somewhat serious, which contrasts quite sharply with the percentage responses of 13.2%, 8.7% and 27.0% for 41-50, 51-60 and 60+ year old respondents respectively. Thus it was the younger respondents in our sample who perceived the crime situations as being somewhat serious. The very serious response was from a 21-30 year old female respondent, while the two serious responses came from an under twenty year old and a 51-60 year old female respondent. The percentage of respondents

living outside the town who felt the crime problem was at least somewhat serious was nearly twice as high (42.6% compared with 24.2%) than that for respondents living in the town. These percentages include the two out of town responses that considered the crime problem to be serious/very serious and the one serious response from a respondent living in the town. Though not statistically significant, female compared with male respondents have a lower percentage, 61.0% and 77.0% respectively, who considered the crime problem to be not serious. Respondents who have resided in the district 6-10 years have the highest percentage indicating that the crime situation is somewhat serious, which was also found for those with a tertiary ducation. (The number of respondents in some categories is quite small and so caution in reading these figures/statements should be taken).

Respondents were also asked to give their opinion on, "How much has the amount of crime in the Walcha area increased or decreased in the last year?" The response is given in table 4.2.

TABLE 4.2. THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO INDICATED THAT THE AMOUNT OF CRIME IN THE WALCHA AREA HAD INCREASED OR DECREASED IN THE LAST YEAR?

	No	%
Increased	15	7.9
About The Same	135	70.7
Decreased	22	11.5
Greatly Decreased	1	0.5
Don't Know	18	9.4
TOTAL	191	100.0

The difference, while not statistically significant, suggests that female respondents were more likely to consider that the crime rate

has increased. Similarly, 31-40 year old respondents, respondents who resided outside the town, or have lived in the district 6-10 years more frequently indicated that the crime rate has increased. When we consider response to specific crime rates in the area we find a similar pattern emerging. Again there were few differences reaching statistical significance.

Respondents were given a list of offences (seventeen) and asked to indicate how often did they think they occurred in Walcha. The offences included personal crimes, property crimes, public order type offences, "white collar" offences, offences generally associated with rural areas, and juvenile delinquency. The latter category was included to assess whether respondents saw juvenile participation in crime as significant. The list of offences in table 4.3 was presented to respondents in a more varied order, but for ease of reading and analysis they have been put in a more logical order. We selected terminology that we felt would be understood by our respondents and we were not concerned with the precise legal definition.

TABLE 4.3 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CONSIDERED THAT THE FOLLOWING OFFENCES OCCURRED VERY OFTEN TO VERY INFREQUENTLY IN THE WALCHA AREA.

OFFENCE	Very Often		Often		Some-Times		Infre- quently		Very Infre- quently		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Petty Theft	12	6.3	44	23.0	79	41.4	38	19.9	11	5.8	7
Shoplifting	6	3.1	16	8.4	59	30.9	63	33.0	22	11.5	25
Breaking and Entering	0	0.0	11	5.8	55	28.8	70	36.6	46	24.1	9
Car Theft	0	0.0	5	2.6	40	20.9	84	44.0	57	28.8	5
Tax Evasion	10	5.2	18	9.4	28	14.7	31	16.2	29	15.2	75
Fraud	2	1.0	6	3.1	21	11.0	39	20.4	53	27.7	70
Vandalism	8	4.2	23	12.0	83	43.5	60	31.4	11	5.8	6
Juvenile Delinquency	0	0.0	8	4.2	75	39.3	67	35.1	27	14.1	14
Drunk and Disorderly	3	1.6	15	7.9	59	30.9	66	34.6	27	14.1	21
Drink-Driving	29	15.2	59	30.9	77	40.3	16	8.4	3	1.6	7
Drug Use	14	7.3	43	22.5	70	36.6	24	12.6	9	4.7	31
Arson	0	0.0	1	0.5	16	8.4	40	20.9	107	56.0	27
Assault	1	0.5	1	0.5	27	14.1	72	37.7	71	37.2	19
Stock Theft	2	1.0	15	7.9	73	38.2	48	25.1	31	16.2	22
Theft of Farm Machinery	0	0.0	4	2.1	29	15.2	59	30.9	66	34.6	33
Illegal Spotlight Shooting	19	9.9	63	33.0	63	33.0	22	11.5	6	3.1	18
Trespassing	5	2.6	26	13.6	53	27.7	60	31.4	31	16.2	16

The results in Table 4.3 support the findings on the more general questions that crime is perceived as an infrequently occurring phenomenon, though some interesting differences do emerge. In no case did a majority of respondents consider any of the above offences to be occurring very often/often in the Walcha district. The percentages for drink driving (46.1%) and illegal spotlight shooting (43.9%) come close to a majority response. The next highest percentage is for drug use (29.8%) followed by theft (26.3%), trespassing (16.2%), vandalism (16.0%), tax evasion (14.6%) and shoplifting (11.5%). The remaining offences have percentages at or below ten percent.

These results appear to reflect policing practices in Walcha, as well as the general publicity given to particular offences in New South Wales at the time, especially drink driving and tax evasion. The police tended to arrange their patrolling around the hotels, especially at the weekend, and later in the night they patrolled for illegal spotlight shooters. The police saw the hotels as possible sources of trouble in themselves, though a majority of respondents (50.7%) felt that drunk and disorderly offences occurred infrequently/very infrequently. Again this partly reflects policing strategies, as the aim was to quieten things down if trouble did arise, rather than detain and arrest offenders.

Overall the results suggest that in terms of theft, it is petty theft that is considered somewhat of a problem in Walcha, followed by tax evasion and shoplifting. Breaking and entering and car theft were felt to be occurring infrequently/very infrequently, 60.7% and 72.8% respectively, in the Walcha area. It should also be noted that over one third of our respondents were not able to answer, or at least did not offer a response to, the question on tax evasion and fraud. Nearly a majority of respondents (49.2%) felt that juvenile delinquency occurred infrequently/very infrequently, while only 4.2% felt that it occurred often/very often. The response to vandalism, frequently an offence associated with juveniles, was not as positive. Considering the results from other studies¹ and the publicity attached to this offence, it is safe to conclude that our respondents did not think that this was a frequently occurring

1. Donnermeyer and Phillips, 1984.

offence. The police frequently remarked how the town was generally free of vandalism, though they added the rider, that this might not be the case in future. In their view there was a need to keep the public aware of the problem that might be faced with vandalism.

The result on drug use was expected, though it did not, in our opinion, reflect the situation in Walcha. It is possible that the response was influenced by the media attention to drug use and police concern about drug usage. The police frequently referred to the one or two cases of marihuana use found in Walcha in the last few years. It is highly probable that the 29.8% who responded very often/often was a consequence of this extensive publicity and police concern. Assault, the one violent crime we asked about, drew a 74.9% response that it occurred infrequently/very infrequently. Finally, of the offences frequently associated with rural areas, only spotlight shooting was perceived to be an offence that occurred frequently. Stock theft and the theft of farm machinery was not perceived to be occurring often, with trespassing slightly more frequent.

The only significant differences in response by sex of respondent were for juvenile delinquency (sig. 0.0424), drink driving (sig 0.0397) and illegal spotlight shooting (sig. 0.0011). Female respondents considered juvenile delinquency to be occurring often/sometimes more frequently than male respondents, 56.3% and 39.2% respectively, and drink driving very often, 21.4% and 11.0% respectively. Male respondents compared with female respondents more frequently considered, 53.2% and 40.5% respectively, illegal spotlight shooting to be occurring very often/often. The percentage

differences for the other offences were not significant. Nevertheless they showed a clear trend in that female respondents generally considered offences to be occurring more frequently than male respondents. The offences where this was not the case were trespassing, drug use, assault, tax evasion and fraud. Generally speaking, and this is in line with the earlier and more general questions on crime, female respondents tend to be of the view that crime occurs somewhat more frequently in Walcha than male respondents. Age of respondent was significant in terms of the response on vandalism (sig. 0.0087), drink driving (sig. 0.0009), trespassing (sig. 0.0028), theft of farm machinery (sig. 0.0284), shoplifting (sig. 0.0008) and drunk and disorderly (sig. 0.0292) offences. Respondents under thirty years of age considered these offences to occur more often/often/sometimes compared with older respondents except for vandalism which had 31-40 year old respondents considering it occurred more often. Thus older respondents tended to indicate that the offence rate was less frequent than younger respondents, a finding consistent with other studies². This is an important finding as our review of the literature indicates that older respondents have more fear of and concern about crime. While this is also the finding for levels of fear and concern among females, in this study female respondents tended to perceive the crime rate as more frequent and serious than male respondents. Length of residence was significant only in response to breaking and entering (sig. 0.0241) and tax evasion (sig. 0.0222). Those who had resided twenty plus years, followed by those who had resided 1-5 years, indicated that breaking and

2. Smith and Gray, 1985.

entering occurred more often. The percentage who considered tax evasion to have occurred very often/often decreased markedly with length of residence. Finally, respondents living outside the town considered all offences, except fraud, to occur more frequently than respondents living in the town. Response was significantly different for car theft (sig. 0.0246) and trespassing (sig. 0.0023). This is a result consistent with the previous finding of those living outside the town more frequently considering the crime problem to be somewhat serious and increasing. Offences generally associated with non town rural locales, such as stock theft and theft of farm machinery were not considered to be frequent. This is interesting considering that our non town respondents were more likely to have considered the crime rate to have increased and to be somewhat serious.

Finally, in terms of general questions on crime we asked respondents to compare the crime situation in Walcha with other rural areas in New South Wales and to that of Sydney. The results comparing Walcha with other rural areas are presented in table 4.4., broken down by sex of respondent.

TABLE 4.4 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF MALE AND FEMALE RESPONDENTS WHO CONSIDERED THE CRIME PROBLEM IN WALCHA COMPARED TO OTHER RURAL AREAS TO BE MUCH MORE SERIOUS TO MUCH LESS SERIOUS

CRIME PROBLEM IN WALCHA IS	Rural New South Wales					
	Total		Male		Female	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Much more serious	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
More serious	1	0.5	1	0.5	0	0.0
About the same	65	34.0	29	28.4	36	40.4
Less serious	75	39.3	45	44.1	30	33.7
Much less serious	34	17.8	18	17.6	16	18.0
Don't Know/Non Response	16	8.4	9	8.8	7	7.9
TOTAL	191	100.0	102	99.9	89	100.0

Table 4.4 clearly indicates that a majority of respondents (57.1%) considered the crime problem in Walcha to be less serious or much less serious than in other rural areas. No respondent indicated that it was more serious. There were no significant differences in response, though as table 4.4 indicates, female respondents had a higher percentage indicating that the crime situation was about the same. Similarly, respondents who had resided 6-10 years in the district, were aged 41-50 years, lived in the town, had more than thirty relatives in the district, had the highest percentages indicating that the crime situation was about the same.

The comparison with Sydney was even more clear cut with no respondent considering the crime situation the same or more serious in Walcha. There was wide agreement that crime was much less serious in Walcha compared with Sydney (85.9%), with a further 6.3% indicating that it was less serious. The crime situation was also perceived to be different as 52.9% of respondents considered that there were types of crime committed in Walcha and other rural areas

that were unlikely to be found in cities such as Sydney. Among these respondents, 68.3% mentioned cattle duffing, 16.8% spotlight shooting, 4.9% growing marihuana and 3.0% mentioned farm machinery theft. Considering the response to the frequency of these crimes previously noted, it indicates that specifically rural crimes are not felt to occur that often. The only significant difference in response was that respondents living outside the town, compared with those living in the town (sig. 0.0136), more frequently indicated (70.2% and 48.0% respectively) that there were crimes in Walcha and rural areas that were unlikely to be found in cities such as Sydney.

Without reading too much into the differences outlined above, many of which were not statistically significant, one interesting pattern emerges with respondents living inside and outside the town. It appears that respondents living outside the town perceive crime to be occurring more frequently, and that the crime situation is more likely to be the same as that in other rural areas. However, they also place a greater emphasis on a distinction between the crime situation in Walcha and that found in urban areas. This would appear to suggest that their perspective on crime is formed by a rural-urban distinction. That they consider crime to be more frequent does not necessarily imply that it is close to the urban crime situation, though they do consider theft of farm machinery and cattle duffing to be less frequent than town respondents. However, these latter crimes they felt distinguished the rural from the urban crime situation. The results suggest that locale may influence findings in a complex way that has been ignored by research in this area.

Conclusion

How then are these results to be interpreted, as they are somewhat of a puzzle to the criminologist who usually expects respondents to identify a clear crime problem. In comparison with surveys conducted in urban locales, it would be safe to say that our respondents do not perceive crime to be a significant problem in their community. Consistent with these surveys, they also consider the 'problem' to be worse elsewhere. However to assess our findings in this way may hide an important point about public opinion on crime. In the first instance, while our respondents may not consider crime to be a serious problem in the sense that they perceive crimes to be occurring infrequently, the level of crime that does exist may be sufficient to make them attentive to, even somewhat disturbed by a level of crime that would possibly be regarded as insignificant in another locale. The evidence on this will be presented in the following chapters.

Second, it may well be that respondents are aware of the crime 'problem' elsewhere and therefore even slight changes in Walcha may initiate a response that links this with developments elsewhere. The results on drug use may be an example of this. Objectively, the number of drug offences in Walcha is small, but one got the impression from observing the police and talking informally to community members that the occasional drug offences were indicative of how the crime 'problem' was coming to Walcha. Similarly, the results on juvenile delinquency and vandalism appear promising in comparison with other surveys, but the community was not complacent

about this. In fact while we were conducting the research the 'blue light disco' was introduced to the town. This was organised by the local police and members of the community. It was felt that there was a need to provide supervised activities for young people so as to keep them out of trouble; a view that is given support by the previous results on the quality of life in Walcha where the facilities for young people were criticised.

Finally, we can detect that respondents do make a distinction between rural and urban crime patterns, both in terms of the extent and nature of the offences committed in the different locales. An analysis of their perception of the crime situation should take into account that they begin with a conception of crime that flows from a different base from respondents living in urban locales. The rural urban differences noted here, and the ones in later chapters, are very general, but it would seem that they might warrant closer scrutiny in future studies. Suffice to say, our rural respondents, while having a generally positive perception of the crime situation in Walcha vis-a-vis other studies, in the context of their locale this perception may still represent a concern about crime. This, and their fear of crime is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 5 CONCERN AND FEAR ABOUT CRIME IN WALCHA, N.S.W.

In the analysis of the public's perception of crime, the concepts of concern and fear, like the concepts of rurality and community have caused considerable definitional problems and debate. Beginning with Furstenberg's¹ seminal paper showing that pollsters and researchers confused the concepts, the criminological literature has debated the problem². Without really coming to a satisfactory solution.

Our approach has been a pragmatic one. We considered the literature, assessed the most frequent approaches to the analysis of concern and fear of crime and adapted them to our study. To analyse the concern about crime held by our respondents we review some of the results already presented on problems in the district. We then consider responses to questions that specifically sought to ascertain concern about crime.

In relation to fear of crime we asked respondents specific questions on how safe they felt in certain situations, whether women in certain situations were at risk of being victimised, whether they avoided certain individuals or places in the district and whether certain avoidance procedures were adopted because of their perception of the crime situation. In this way we have covered a wide range of attitudes and beliefs, while at the same time tapping

1. Furstenberg, 1971.

2. Dubow, et al., 1979.

a general behavioural response to their perception of the crime situation.

Concern About Crime

Results presented in chapter three and chapter four, gave a general indication that concern about crime was not something that respondents perceived to any great extent when assessing their community. In table 3.4 dealing with what respondents liked best and least about Walcha crime was not listed. Although table 3.10 suggests that a majority of respondents (54.5%) considered damage to street signs a problem, with 22.0% and 19.4% also considering public drunkenness and graffiti respectively a problem in the district. As respondents were given these 'problems' to consider, the results do not indicate that there is a set of problems linked to public order and civility³ that would form an obvious base for concern. Similarly, the results on trust, presented in table 3.7 indicated that nearly every respondent (98.4%) felt that most people in the neighbourhood could be trusted. In particular they expect their neighbours (95.8%) to watch their house and property, expect to receive help if in trouble (96.9%), and for the police to be called if someone suspicious was on their property (86.1%). In return respondents said they would keep an eye on their neighbour's property even if they were not asked (84.6%).

These results suggest that respondents consider that they live in a community that is trustful and supportive. One would expect this to

3. Maxfield, 1984.

lead to a reduction in, or at least not contribute to, concern about crime. In chapter four we indicated that respondents offered opinions on the crime situation, though they did not consider the district to have a high level of crime. Violent crime and burglary, crimes that generally appear to engender concern about the crime situation⁴, were not considered frequent occurrences in Walcha.

It is from this base that we must now consider specific questions related to concern about crime. However, despite the lack of obvious concern about crime in Walcha it should not be assumed that our respondents' replies are any less significant or valid when concern is highlighted. While concern about crime is not something that immediately springs to mind when considering community life in Walcha, respondents may still be concerned and worried about crime when asked to specifically consider crime.

Despite the apparent lack of concern about crime indicated by general questions concerning the community, it is possible that specific questions on crime might elicit a different response. We asked respondents how concerned and worried they felt people in the Walcha district might be about crime. This approach was used as it was felt that while respondents might be reluctant to give a negative response considering their positive assessment of life in Walcha, they might not be so reticent about how others perceive the crime situation. Following this general assessment of concern in the community by respondents, we then sought to locate this concern

4. Shapland and Vagg, 1985; Maguire, 1982. Hough and Mayhew, 1983 and 1985; Maxfield, 1984.

in more specific terms by asking respondents about feelings of safety in the community from property and personal crimes. Finally, we sought respondents' behavioural response to the crime situation in terms of precautionary measures they took for themselves and neighbours in terms of property and personal safety. This, we suggest, is the closest we can get to assessing fear in a survey of this kind.

Table 5.1 presents the results of respondents' response to the question "How concerned do you think the people in Walcha are about crime"

TABLE 5.1 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY SEX OF RESPONDENT, WHO THOUGHT PEOPLE IN WALCHA WERE CONCERNED ABOUT CRIME.

	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE	
	No	%	No	%	No	%
Very Concerned	32	16.8	13	12.7	19	21.3
Concerned	87	45.5	52	50.9	35	39.3
Not Particularly Concerned	55	28.8	28	27.5	27	30.3
Not Concerned at all	12	6.3	8	7.8	4	4.5
DK NA	5	2.6	1	1.0	4	4.5
TOTAL	191	100.0	102	99.9	89	99.9

There was no significant sex difference in response. The results do, however, indicate that a higher percentage of female respondents felt that people in Walcha, 21.3% compared with 12.7% for male respondents, were very concerned about crime. The percentage of respondents indicating that people were very concerned/concerned increased with age of respondent (sig. 0.0100) and their families length of residence in the district (sig. 0.0159). Those with lower levels of education (sig. 0.0457) had a higher percentage in the

concerned/very concerned category. Respondents residing in the town also had a higher percentage (not statistically significant) indicating that residents were very concerned/concerned about crime. However, the small number of respondents in some categories suggests caution in interpreting these results.

Following this question on concern, we asked respondents whether they thought people in Walcha worry about crime a lot. Thirty two percent (32.5%) answered yes. Forty percent (40.2%) of female respondents compared with 27.6% of male respondents answered yes. These results suggest that most respondents do not consider the crime problem to be serious in Walcha, while a majority of respondents (62.2%) feel that people in Walcha are concerned about crime. Furthermore, a sizeable minority, particularly among female respondents, felt that people worry about crime a lot. In comparison with urban crime surveys⁵, these results would appear quite good. Nevertheless, they are somewhat disturbing. Crime is not considered a serious problem, though it is perceived that crime elicits considerable concern and worry in the community. It is evident that what appears to be a relatively free crime locale is not untouched by concern and worry about crime.

Fear Of Crime

Four specific questions were asked about safety, two dealing with the general perception on "How safe do you think most people feel in

5. Hough and Mayhew, 1985; Smith and Gray, 1985.

the Walcha district - in terms of property crimes such as theft, having your house broken into and vandalism - in terms of personal crimes such as assault, robbery and rape". These two very general questions were followed by more specific questions on " How safe would a woman feel - when walking alone on a street at night in Walcha or the Walcha district - going alone to a hotel in Walcha?" The results are presented in the following table.

TABLE 5.2 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS WHO CONSIDERED WALCHA DISTRICT TO BE VERY SAFE TO VERY UNSAFE IN TERMS OF PROPERTY CRIME, PERSONAL CRIME, A WOMAN WALKING ALONE AT NIGHT OR GOING ALONE INTO A HOTEL IN WALCHA.

	PROPERTY CRIMES		PERSONAL CRIMES		WOMAN WALKING ALONE AT NIGHT		WOMAN ALONE IN A HOTEL	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Very Safe	69	36.1	88	46.1	63	33.0	56	29.3
Safe	51	26.7	58	30.4	74	38.7	60	31.4
Reasonably Safe	64	33.5	42	22.0	47	24.6	54	28.3
Unsafe	4	2.1	1	0.5	3	1.6	6	3.1
Very Unsafe	2	1.0	1	0.5	2	1.0	2	1.0
DK NA	1	0.5	1	0.5	2	1.0	13	6.8
TOTAL	191	99.9	191	100.0	191	99.9	191	99.9

The first point to mention is that respondents were not racked by indecision. Only in the case of a woman entering a hotel alone did more than one percent of respondents fail to offer a response. The results in table 5.3 show that most respondents considered Walcha to be a safe place, both in terms of personal and property crime and for women, although in the latter case the response was least positive for women alone in a hotel. Given the results previously presented this is both an expected and surprising result. Expected in that crime was not considered a serious problem in Walcha. The

more positive response to the personal crime situation accords with this response. We had a clear majority considering it safe/very safe on all four items, with the percentages reaching the nineties when reasonably safe is included, except in the case of a woman entering a hotel alone where it was eighty nine percent.

The results were consistent by category of respondent, as there were no statistical differences in response by sex, age or the other characteristics we have been noting. Female respondents tended to have a slightly higher percentage in the reasonably safe category, but in terms of women walking alone at night or entering a hotel they actually had a slightly higher percentage responding very safe (the differences were slight but not in the expected direction), though a lower percentage responding safe.

The most surprising result is the response to women walking alone at night or being alone in a hotel. Most crime surveys, where questions are asked about women walking alone the response have not been so positive⁶. Some researchers have suggested that the findings indicate that women, particularly in urban areas, are living under a curfew⁷. Our results would suggest that this was not the feeling held by our respondents in Walcha. We asked the question about a woman being alone in a hotel simply to tap whether women were perceived to be under a form of curfew. It should be noted that

6. Garofalo, 1977; Hindelang et al., 1973.

7. Jones, et al., 1986.

because respondents feel a woman might be safe or reasonably safe alone in a hotel, it does not mean that women actually go alone to hotels in Walcha.

Worry/fear about personal safety, along with worry about crime, are the two main dimensions of fear of crime according to Maxfield⁸. They tap both fear of street crime, which is relatively rare and the more frequent occurrence of household crimes and theft. There is one other aspect which we have already touched upon and that is the cognitive and normative aspect to fear. This, according to Soethorst⁹ is found in the individuals knowledge or information on the subject (cognitive) and opinion or attitudes (normative) towards crime. Our results so far indicate that respondents cognitively or normatively do not have a significant base upon which to base their fear. But this should be treated with caution, as fear is basically a threat to oneself¹⁰, and as our results will show there is a fear about crime among our respondents, particularly a worry about personal safety among a sizeable minority of female respondents. While this may represent a fear of the unknown rather "than to specific knowledge of nasty acts or people"¹¹, it can and does have a significant impact on lifestyle and participation in the community.

8. Maxfield, 1984.

9. Soethorst, 1982.

10. Maxfield, 1984.

11. Shapland and Vagg, 1985: 3.

Assessing the impact of crime more directly, and at the same time coming closer to a measure of fear of crime as personal threat, we asked respondents whether they took a series of measures to protect themselves from crime when in Walcha or the Walcha district. Precautionary behaviour varied considerably, with some precautions having a more marked effect on lifestyle than others. Consequently some precautions would suggest more fear about crime. In table 5.3 we have noted this by presenting the response on precautions that many would regard as commonsense, even if there was not a high or medium crime rate. These precautions include house insurance, locking doors, etc, the kind of behaviours that neighbourhood watch schemes seek to encourage. In table 5.4 we note the response to activities that require a particular effort at a social level such as informing neighbours or police that one is going away or watching a neighbour's property. These activities are the kernel of neighbourhood watch schemes which imply that these activities in communities have diminished over the years. In table 5.5 we note the acceptance of precautions that clearly intrude on one's life to a marked degree, such as avoiding going out at night, certain people, certain locales, etc.

TABLE 5.3 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY SEX OF RESPONDENT, WHO HAD HOUSE INSURANCE AND TOOK TARGET HARDENING PRECAUTIONS AGAINST CRIME IN WALCHA AND THE WALCHA DISTRICT

	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
House Insurance	139	72.8	78	76.5	61	68.5	8
Lock Doors And Windows When Leaving The house	101	52.9	52	50.9	49	55.1	3
Leave Lights On When Away At Night	102	53.4	54	52.9	48	53.9	6
Own A Gun Or Dog For Protection	20	10.5	10	9.8	10	11.2	5
Lock Car	82	42.9	48	47.1	34	38.2	7
Avoid Leaving Valuables In The Car	134	70.2	71	69.6	63	70.8	8

The two most frequent precautions to be taken are house insurance, which simply helps to defray the cost of crime if it occurs and not leaving valuables in the car. A bare majority (52.9%) of respondents lock doors and windows when leaving the house, while a similar percentage (53.4%) leave lights on when away at night. It is interesting that this should have a similar percentage to a target hardening procedure that would appear more likely to restrict an intruder. It may be that this response is also tapping a worry about personal safety, in that leaving the lights on is simply reassuring to the individual returning to the house at night. There are many other possibilities, such as it is easier to find one's keys to fit in the lock if there is a light on, it is more cheerful to come back to a lighted house, etc. We should not simply jump to the conclusion that concern/fear is being tapped.

In general the result on locking doors and windows is somewhat lower than that found in research in rural locales in America, though there are some wording differences in the questions asked which make

comparison difficult. Dahlin et al.,¹² found that 33% don't lock the house when not at home and that town residents lock up more. We also found this, but the difference between respondents living in and outside Walcha town was not statistically significant. Gorse and Beran¹³ found in the rural town of Lincoln, Ohio that 64.8% always locked their doors with a further 15% indicating that they sometimes locked their doors. The American rural research has also found that a majority of respondents lock the house when home at night, a question we did not put to our respondents. The percentages taking this precaution equalled or was higher than that found among our respondents for when out of the home¹⁴.

A minority of respondents locked their cars, a finding also found by Phillips¹⁵ in rural Ohio. Finally only a small percentage in our survey owned a dog or gun for protection. There was a significant difference between respondents living in and outside the town (sig. 0.0028), with 6.2% of those living in town compared with 19.6% living outside having a dog or gun for protection. This result was against the trend for taking precautions by town and non town respondents. Respondents living outside the town took most of the precautions less frequently. The result then is probably a reflection of a need for dog and gun ownership among respondents working on the land. The comparison with American studies is quite

12. Dahlin et al., 1981.

13. Gorse and Beran, 1973.

14. Carter and Beaulieu, 1985; Donnermeyer et al., 1983; Dahlin et al., 1981.

15. Phillips, 1976.

remarkable on gun ownership. Teske and Moore¹⁶, in a Texas study, found that only 13% of their rural respondents did not keep a gun in the home, while 76% of Phillips¹⁷ respondents in rural Ohio felt that a gun, pistol, rifle or shotgun should be kept for protection.

Significant statistical differences in response were limited to the town-non town difference already indicated on ownership of a dog or gun and having insurance. Respondents whose families had settled fifty to seventy five years ago, followed by those over a hundred years ago, have the lowest percentage (sig. 0.0312) having house insurance. There was no sex or age differences to be found in taking these precautions. However, female respondents tended to have a slightly higher percentage taking all the precautions except insurance.

It is interesting to compare the results of the Walcha study with Wilson and Brown's¹⁸ research which included the rural town of Laidley. The questions in Wilson and Brown's study are not identical, though there is enough similarity with the Walcha data to note some interesting similarities and discrepancies between the two studies. For example, the percentage of Walcha respondents locking doors and windows was almost identical with those taking the same precautions in Laidley, 53% and 51% respectively. In contrast, 41% of the Laidley sample kept a watchdog compared with only 10.5% of

16. Teske and Moore, 1980.

17. Phillips, 1976.

18. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

the Walcha respondents who owned a dog or gun for protection. Only one percent (1%) of the Laidley sample kept a gun for protection from crime. Wilson and Brown's¹⁹ found that the percentage of urban respondents locking up their homes ranged from 72% in Brisbane to 75% in Sydney. The urban samples were less likely to have watchdogs than Laidley respondents (Melbourne 24%, Brisbane 30% and Sydney 32%), though more likely to own a gun (Brisbane 6%, Melbourne 8% and Sydney 10%).

Turning now to precautions that involve others, (table 5.5), we find that few respondents (12%) notify police when going away for a few days. In line with the data presented on trust, a majority of respondents (64.4%) asked neighbours to watch their house, with a higher percentage (88%) actually watching their neighbours' homes or properties. Obviously a good deal of watching takes place without a request to do so. Again this matches the data on trust, as many respondents expected or thought that their neighbours would watch their homes. Requesting them to watch their homes may not be felt to be necessary. Why so few respondents inform the police when they are away is open to conjecture, though we found that many respondents expected their neighbours to call the police if they felt it to be necessary.

19. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

TABLE 5.4 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY SEX OF RESPONDENT, WHO ENGAGED IN CRIME PREVENTIVE BEHAVIOUR.

	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Ask Neighbours To Watch House When Away For A Few Days Or More	123	64.4	64	62.7	59	66.3	12
Notify Police When Away For A Few Days Or More	23	12.0	13	12.7	10	11.2	6
Watch Neighbour's House /Property When They Are Away	168	88.0	91	89.2	77	86.5	5

The data have not shown a great deal of worry about property crime, though enough to suggest that there is an underlying level of fear that encourages respondents to take some precautionary measures. It is important, however, that we don't simply assume that the response indicates or implies a fear of crime. The response may indicate routine activities engaged in by individuals, without necessarily considering crime as the reason for their actions. For example, locking one's house may involve a variety of behaviours which indicate quite different levels of fear. On leaving the house one may simply lock the front door and assume that the windows and back door are shut, or one may go to each room and check they are shut. One may lock the front door but not the back door²⁰. If special locks have been installed it may take some time, even skill, to make sure that everything is secure. So locking the house for one person may be simply shutting the door behind them and letting the lock do the rest, while for another it may mean engaging the dead lock.

20. Shapland and Vagg, 1985, found that failure to lock the back door to be a common occurrence.

etc. Experiences from visiting houses in city and rural areas, and observing the security in these houses, it would be reasonable to infer that locking the house may represent qualitatively different activities and consequently indicating a difference in fear²¹.

It is important to keep this potential for a qualitative difference in response in mind when considering the data in table 5.5. Avoidance behaviour, along with the previous data on personal safety, or the safety of others in the community, have generally been taken as indicators of fear in crime surveys²². Avoidance may also be qualitatively different in that being unable to avoid a particular activity, such as walking alone at night, may create quite different levels of fear. If this is the case, and commonsense would suggest that it is, then comparative analysis with other studies must be treated with some caution. Bearing this in mind, the data presented in the following table suggests that the level of fear on a simple cataloguing of avoidance behaviour is not high in comparison with other studies.

21. The researchers live in small city in a rural locale with a population of approximately 20,000. It is a city that has a number of individuals who regularly move to the city from larger urban centres. It is interesting to observe how their behaviour changes and becomes more lax in terms of home security. This is even more apparent when they decide to live outside the city. One suspects, if asked about locking their house they would reply in the affirmative, but it would be a qualitatively different act to the one they routinely did in more urban locales. It would be interesting to study this aspect of crime prevention in depth, as it might highlight even further the rural-urban differences.

22. Hindelang et al., 1973.

TABLE 5.5 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF RESPONDENTS, BY SEX OF RESPONDENT, WHO AVOIDED BEING ALONE, CERTAIN AREAS OR INDIVIDUALS AS PRECAUTIONS AGAINST CRIME IN WALCHA OR THE WALCHA DISTRICT.

	TOTAL		MALE		FEMALE		DK
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No
Avoid Going Out Alone At Night	38	19.9	6	5.9	32	36.0	3**
Taxi/Drive To Avoid Being On The Streets At Night	56	29.3	13	12.7	43	48.3	5**
Avoid Certain Parts Of Town Or District	24	12.6	12	11.8	12	13.5	2
Avoid Talking To Strangers	76	39.8	25	24.5	51	57.3	4**
Take More Precautions When Certain Types of People Are Near Home/Property	121	63.4	62	60.8	59	66.3	6
Avoid Certain People In The Area Because You Think They Are Trouble-some	73	38.2	46	45.1	27	30.3	3

** Significant difference in response, sig. 0.0000.

The results suggest a number of interesting facets to the fear of crime in Walcha. In the first instance, only 12.6% avoided certain parts of the town or district, with the male and female response being similar. Hotels were noted by fourteen of these respondents, while a further seven indicated the aboriginal reserve as areas they avoided. Apart from this minority of respondents, we can say that respondents did not indicate that they felt restricted by the crime situation to certain areas in Walcha town or district. The situation changes slightly with time of day, particularly for female respondents. While a minority of respondents avoided going out alone at night, or tended to drive rather than walk, over one third of our female respondents (36%) avoided going out alone at night and nearly one half (48.3%) avoided being on the streets at night.

How these results are to be interpreted is problematic. While they show a significant difference in male - female response, the form of that fear is not discernible from these simple questions on avoidance. As indicated in previous research in Australia²³, the response may be tapping sex role socialization in that females may feel that they should respond that they don't walk alone at night. It may also be very sensible cautionary behaviour, given the comments of some judges and officials in the criminal justice system about the dangers and foolishness of females being out alone at night. Whatever criticisms we might wish to make about such a position and how it discriminates against women and places restrictions on their lifestyles, clearly such a view is operative among certain groups in our society. To infer that it is evident of a curfew on women imposed by the crime situation²⁴ may be placing too strong an emphasis on crime, at least in rural areas. Other factors restrict the lifestyle of women in our communities.

What is being argued here is that the extent of fear as assessed by the response to avoidance of walking alone at night is quite problematic. In some instances it may be totally restrictive for some females, while for others it may be simply something they avoid when they can. This view is supported somewhat by the percentage who take a taxi or drive at night. Both male and female respondents take this precaution in larger numbers, which would seem to suggest that there is an intermediate stage in avoidance behaviour at night. The

23. O'Connor, 1983.

24. Jones et al., 1986.

results also indicate that a majority of females respondents (57.3%) avoid talking to strangers and take precautions (63.3%) when certain types of people are near their home or property. The percentage was 24.5% and 60.8% respectively for male respondents. Male respondents compared with female respondents, 45.1% and 30.3% respectively, more frequently avoided certain people because they thought they were troublesome. Again this may be highlighting different experiences and socialisation. Males may have more experience of troublesome people (the level of victimisation among young male adults would bear this out), while females may be encouraged to be more careful of strangers and types of individuals who are considered to be troublesome.

It is interesting to see how the Walcha results compare with Wilson and Brown's findings²⁵. The Walcha and Laidley respondents reported almost identical percentages who used motor transport to avoid being on the streets at night (Laidley 30%, Walcha 29.3%). The urban sample in Wilson and Brown's²⁶ research were much more likely to take this precaution (Melbourne 53%, Brisbane 61% and Sydney 61%). However, the Walcha respondents were considerably less likely to take the precaution of avoiding going out alone at night. Only 19.9% of the Walcha respondents took this precaution compared with 37% of respondents in Laidley 37%, 48% in Melbourne, 49% in Brisbane and 51% in Sydney²⁷. There is a clear trend for both the

25. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

26. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

27. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

Walcha sample and the rural Laidley sample to take fewer precautions against crime than the urban samples of Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

CONCLUSION

These results suggest that in terms of avoidance, worry about property crime and perceived safety in the community, respondents in Walcha experienced quite a low level of fear when compared with respondents in other crime surveys²⁸. This is true for both male and female respondents and it suggests that concern and fear of crime is responsive to the actual and perceived crime situation in a particular locale.

28. Kinsey, 1985; Wilson and Brown, 1973; Jones et al., 1986.

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CHAPTER 6 VICTIMISATION IN WALCHA

I don't know whether we have any crimes, do we?
(Respondent)

Too safe. Everyone leaves everything open.
(Respondent)

It was clear from both formal interviews and informal conversations respondents did not perceive the community to have a serious crime problem. This feeling also extended to the police, who felt that Walcha, compared with other small towns and especially the cities, was a fairly orderly and secure community. Nevertheless, feelings were expressed about the possibility that the situation could change. As presented by one respondent commenting on crime in general, she said

Well, I wouldn't think there is hardly a day ... you don't read about murders or rape and the fact that people's homes and privacies have been invaded, and I think we are frightened that it will come to the country. We appear to have been immune. Its the basic feeling it could come, it could happen to us.

This feeling of safety, while at the same time a perception that outside developments may change that situation, was expressed by other respondents

They are probably more conscious of it now than they have ever been, say five years ago, because there are more things happening. The influences of places like Tamworth and Armidale that have got bigger, people travelling there are more conscious of, but when they get back to Walcha they feel safe again....But they feel safe. It is coming through but not to the level of somebody living say on the south side of Tamworth compared to living on the south side of Walcha.

Or, as another respondent commented when asked what she liked best about the community.

in this part of the area, the attitude of people, the co-operative nature of people, their concern... they are more concerned about their community. I feel .. (um).. lower crime rate, just some of the values that society used to have thirty years ago.... that have been lost in the larger cities.

The size of the community was also mentioned by another respondent as having the effect of preventing criminal activity.

They would be more conscious of wrong doing because of a close knit community. They are very conscious of the fact that they could be more likely to be found out, more likely to be shamed in the eyes of other members of the community or their particular circle.

These opinions were undercut somewhat by the reports of multiple precautions many residents took to protect themselves from victimisation. As we noted in chapter 5, these precautions were less frequent when compared with other Australian studies carried out mainly in urban areas¹, though their frequency in Walcha was still substantial. This raises the question of to what extent precautionary behaviour is merely habit, a commentary on future expectations or a realistic effort to protect the individual from victimisation. The clearest way to assess this issue is to look at the extent of victimisation in Walcha.

Our respondents were asked whether or not they had been a victim of the following crimes in the previous twelve months: breaking and entering, theft, robbery, threats of violence, physical violence or vandalism. Of a total of 191 respondents, 28 reported at least one

1. Wilson and Brown, 1973; Congalton and Najman, 1974; ABS, 1979 and 1986.

incidence of criminal victimisation in the last year and 7 respondents reported being the victims of more than one crime. While this total represents a minority of respondents, it is still substantial. Approximately 14.1% of respondents, or one in seven reported being victims of crime at least once in Walcha in the preceeding year². Although, the general impression of Walcha as a peaceful community is widely shared by our respondents, it is clear that Walcha is far from crime free.

It is interesting to compare the victimisation figures in Walcha with other victimisation studies in Australia. In Australian studies covering approximately a decade from the early 1970's to the early 1980's there was a wide range in the amount of victimisation reported. In one of the earlier studies, Wilson and Brown³ reported annual victimisation levels for two Brisbane suburbs of 8.97% and 11.3%. A study by Congalton and Najman⁴ in Sydney found a much higher victimisation rate (23.6%) with evidence that the number of multiple victimisations was also high (11.3%). In a more recent national study⁵ the victimisation rates reported for households and persons in Australia were 8.9% and 9.8% respectively.

2. For the sake of consistency we have excluded from this figure the one or two respondents who indicated that they had been victimised in other locales. Respondents in some interviews appeared to interpret the question as being confined to Walcha. Consequently, there may have been a few victimisations in other locales that we did not detect.

3. Wilson and Brown, 1973.

4. Congalton and Najman, 1974a; 1974b; 1974c.

5. ABS, 1986.

It is clear from the comparisons with these previous urban studies, that the 14.1% victimisation rate found in Walcha is easily within the range of victimisations found in other Australian studies. While caution must be taken in comparing these results due to variation in methods of data collection, it is obvious that a rural environment is not necessarily a crime free environment. Nevertheless, the nature of that crime may be substantially different or at least perceived so by our respondents.

(Laughter) Chooks for one thing, oh quite a few little things, you know, I miss my mail, well, somebody's taken them gardening tools, things like that you know.

One respondent mentioned that she had been a victim which her husband disputed and she replied

Yes I have ... Just cosmetics, loose change, cat food, nothing serious.

The same crime and victimisation can mean quite different things to people living in different communities and therefore we must be careful in making comparisons. While our rate of victimisation appeared significant, our respondents did not generally consider the level of victimisation in Walcha to represent a threat to social order. For example

The only thing that sort of happens in the town is someone comes and robs the club and I reckon its mostly outside people that do it. And that happens occasionally you know I don't think its ever been a local one that'd be in it but you know they knocked the golf club off (sometime) ago. I don't know, but I remember talking about it.

Another respondent put it

Well, its not too bad, really, we haven't sort of had any serious crime. We have a bit of a problem with the dark kids, but they - you know, they respect their own but what's yours is theirs too.

Similarly,

I don't think it's serious at all, I haven't heard of any lately There's, you know, we have had a spasm of it. You'd find probably after the show (the annual Walcha Show) that somebody's broken in, but not all the time⁶.

Or as another respondent stated,

They are not a violent lot around here. It is just that you know some people may do something silly but it is never serious.

Respondents in Walcha who were victims, were in terms of socio-demographic characteristics very similar to non victims. Below is a comparative table of selected socio-demographic characteristics between crime victims and the non victims in the Walcha sample.

TABLE 6.1 MARITAL STATUS, EDUCATION AND INCOME OF
CRIME VICTIMS AND NON VICTIMS.

	VICTIMS %	NON VICTIMS %
Marital Status		
Single	3.7	15.5
Married	77.8	84.5
Education		
None	7.4	3.7
Primary	22.2	46.0
Secondary	40.7	28.9
Technical	22.2	13.2
Agricultural	3.7	2.5
Tertiary	3.7	5.0
Net Income		
Under \$10,000	8.3	19.9
\$10 - \$14,999	25.0	18.4
\$15 - \$19,999	16.7	20.6
\$20 - \$29,999	25.0	19.9
\$30 - \$49,999	16.7	13.4
Over \$50,000	8.3	7.8

While there are some differences between victims and non victims in terms of marital status, education and net income, the general picture is one of similarity. For example, a similar percentage of victims and non victims were married (77.8% and 84.5%), with the main marital status difference being that more non victims were in the single category. Again in terms of education the pattern was similar, with 74.1% of victims and 70.3% of the non victims having a secondary level education or less. The largest differences were in the primary (22.2% and 46.0%) and secondary (40.7% and 28.9%) levels of education respectively. Finally, income similarities between victims and non victims were strong, with 50.0% and 48.9% respectively, having a net income less than \$20,000.

The differences in socio-economic characteristics between victims and non victims were somewhat larger in terms of sex, age, length of residence and place of residence, but again similarity was more evident than dissimilarity. Table 6.2 presents the results.

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6. The court records of the 1860's and police records of the 1960's also indicate that the annual Walcha Show affected the number of charges heard at court or processed by the police.

TABLE 6.2 SEX, AGE, LENGTH OF RESIDENCE AND PLACE OF RESIDENCE OF VICTIMS AND NON VICTIMS

	VICTIMS %	NON VICTIMS %
Sex		
Male	48.1	54.0
Female	51.9	46.0
Age		
21 - 30 yrs.	14.8	11.8
31 - 40 yrs.	51.9	27.3
41 - 50 yrs.	11.1	21.7
51 - 60 yrs.	7.4	14.3
60 + yrs.	14.8	21.7
Length of Residence		
1 - 5 yrs.	25.9	12.4
6 - 10 yrs.	18.6	12.4
11 - 20 yrs.	11.1	13.7
20 + yrs.	44.4	61.5
Place of Residence		
Walcha Town	55.6	70.6
Walcha District	44.4	29.4

Females were somewhat more likely to be victims than males and they constituted a majority, albeit a small one, of the victims. This result is not in the expected direction, as the official crime picture and victimisation studies tend to suggest more male victimisation⁷. In terms of age, a substantially larger number of victims were in the 31-40 year age category (51.9%) than non victims (27.3%). Proportionally, there were fewer victims in the 51 - 60 and 60 + year age category which has also been found to be the case in other studies⁸.

7. ABS, 1986.

8. Phillips and Wurschmidt, 1979.

This higher than expected level of female victimisation should be placed in the context of the Walcha community where respondents did not consider women to be unusually exposed to victimisation. For example, in response to a question dealing with the safety of women entering a hotel alone in Walcha, one female respondent commented:

Oh I don't know, but I suppose I'd say safe. I don't think there's any, eh, one can do much harm here, unless it was strangers come to the town or something like that. But just ordinary people, I don't think so.

In more general terms a female respondent commented on her freedom to move around town as well as having a safe environment for the children in the following manner.

I feel safe riding, you know riding in the town or just doing chores within the town.... and your neighbours are close, you know.. like the neighbours are sort of close if you want to leave your children with a friend you know, they're not far from your own home.

Nevertheless there was an awareness that females were perceived to be in a different situation than males. As one mother said

Well I have a daughter. Girls are more the ones you are concerned about. I have got boys too, but I think every mother is concerned about their child's welfare. The way, you know, things you hear on the wireless these days.

As noted earlier, this is reflected in the higher percentage of female respondents who took precautions to prevent victimisation. Among those who had lived in Walcha for five years or less, the proportion of victims was higher than that for non victims (25.9% and 12.4% respectively). In contrast, those who had lived in Walcha for more than twenty years had proportionally less victimisations. Thus it is new people to the district who proportionally experience more victimisation. Finally, respondents who lived outside Walcha

town were slightly overrepresented among victims. This is an interesting result as it suggests that victimisation is as prevalent in rural districts as in rural towns. This is borne out by a respondent's comment that

Well, you see around the area they don't feel very safe at all because I know one lady, she was in hospital and see, in the Walcha paper they put, you know, who's in hospital, and she asked not to have her name put in 'cause last time she was in hospital her house was broken into. So in town itself I don't think it's too bad but in the outlying areas I think it's bad.

Another factor that appeared to be focussed on by respondents living outside the town was theft from mail boxes. While this was not necessarily regarded as serious, a number of respondents reported this to be a problem.

I can't get groceries or things out on the mail unless I'm there to meet the mail. I get bread every mail day. Sometimes its just bread that's taken, but over the last twelve months I've probably lost one lot of groceries, one lot of bread and a few cheques..... but sort of once you become aware of it, well, you make sure you're there to meet her if you're getting something out.

This problem with isolation and mail boxes has been found in other overseas studies⁹.

These socio-demographic characteristics of victims show considerable similarities to those of non victims. However, the overall pattern is interesting, in that it shows that females and those living out of town had a slightly higher proportion who were victims. This may indicate differences in the patterns of victimisation between urban

9. Donnermeyer and Phillips, (1984) found that mail boxes were a particular target of vandalism.

and rural locales. That victims were more likely to be younger was expected, though it was also interesting that those most recent to the district were most likely to be victims.

Extent of Victimisation

In order to study the extent of victimisation in Walcha, respondents were asked to indicate whether they had been victims of certain crimes. Six crimes, breaking and entering, general theft, robbery, threatened with violence, assault and vandalism, were described for respondents to indicate whether they had been victims. The number and percentage of the total sample responding positively to the selected crimes listed in table 6.3¹⁰.

Table 6.3 THE NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF VICTIMISATIONS

Type of Crime	No	%
Breaking and entering	5	13.2
General theft	22	57.2
Robbery	0	0.0
Threatened with violence	4	10.5
Assault	2	5.3
Vandalism		
Total	38	100.1

As previously noted, these figures represent 28 victims, with 7 victims reporting more than one case of victimisation. The percentage of the sample who were victims in Walcha was 14.1%. The most common form of victimisation was theft, and it constituted more than half (57.9%) of all victimisations. Breaking and entering and

10. Included in this table is one Walcha respondent who was victimised in Sydney.

vandalism were the next most common crimes, each representing 13.2% of all victimisations. The remaining crimes of threatened violence and assault account for 10.5% and 5.3% of all victimisations respectively. None of the respondents indicated that they had been robbed. Crimes against the person were relatively infrequent, with over half of those being in the threatened with violence category.

An indication of the type of victimisation and the general lack of concern about the victimisation is given in the following comments by respondents.

We don't even know when it happended. Do we? Cause we woke up on a Sunday morning... It was on a Friday or a Saturday I suppose (front door found open and lock broken).... Oh it didn't really worry me... Aw it passes your mind, but around here it doesn't really worry you...They didn't come in, like the door was open. They could have come in and took what they liked. They're not real new doors, they're pretty old, the timber, all you got to do is push on them, the lock would fall off of it.

Or, as another respondent said about his victimisation for the theft

I just accepted it ... part of life, had to happen.

The proportion of victimisation across these offences differ from those of both Australian and overseas studies of victimisation. The ABS study¹¹ found that crimes against persons (assault, sexual assault and theft with violence or threatended violence) accounted for 21.1% of all victimisations against households and persons in a one year period in a national sample. In comparison, crimes against

11. ABS, 1986.

persons in Walcha (threatened violence and assault) only accounted for 15.8% of all victimisations. Although the acts included in the category against persons differ, it seems that the rate of violent crime is lower in Walcha.

The types of victimisations found in Walcha also differ from foreign studies of rural crime. In a study of victimisation in rural Ohio USA, Phillips and Wurschmidt¹² found vandalism to be the most commonly reported victimisation (38%). However in Walcha, vandalism comprised only 13.2% of all victimisations with general theft being the most common type of victimisation (57.9%). Even cases of theft and vandalism which appeared to be particularly annoying and which involved the police, the victims engaged in restitutive negotiations and appeared to downplay the incidence. For example, in one case where a group of kids wrecked a shed the response was

Yeah just kids and smashed all the walls, they had diesel fuel there because the building has been renovated and put all new windows in there. They smashed all the windows and just made a general mess in the shed well I think the actual parents of the children were in Sydney at the time ... one of the mums did come to (my husband) and offered to pay for the damage done ... (He) said it's not clear you have caused it so just make sure your kids behave themselves from now on.

Another victimisation involved a theft of a sum of money from the respondent's house. Unfortunately the tape was inaudible for that section of the interview. Nevertheless, her response to the crime situation in Walcha shows how she was not too disturbed by the

12. Phillips and Wurschmidt, 1979.

incidence, though she was annoyed that someone had come into her house and stolen her purse containing more than \$100.00.

Crime? (laughter) I never took much notice of the crime until it happened to us here a couple of weeks ago ... (Interview - so at the moment crime is a problem to you?) Oh .. could be, it could be.

As other victimisation studies have found¹³ only some crimes are reported to the police. This was also the case among our respondents who were victims in Walcha, as only fourteen of the twenty six victims said they reported at least one victimisation to the police. Of these fourteen victims, eleven indicated that the police were at least "reasonably helpful". Only two victims indicated that the police were not helpful. Though this shows a relatively high level of satisfaction, in only five cases were the criminals apprehended. Interestingly enough, catching the criminal did not seem to increase the level of satisfaction. This is indicated by the fact that in the five cases where victims indicated that the criminals were caught, one was dissatisfied and another was non committal.

The community response to the victim was also examined. In only thirteen cases did the victims claim that community members were aware of the incident. This would seem to indicate that the victimisation may not have been too serious in some cases, as it is a small community and respondents did indicate that gossip was a major source of crime news (chapter 7). As one respondent remarked

13. ABS, 1986; Donnermeyer and Mullen, 1984.

It just seems to flash over the town in no time at all if there is something that goes on. If something goes on here you will soon find out about it. If you don't know today, you'll soon find out about it tomorrow.

Nevertheless, we have a situation where victims indicated that less than half of victimisations in the community over the past year were felt to be known about. In the cases where the victim said community members were aware of the crimes, the response to the victim was described as generally helpful. Two of the thirteen victims described the response as unhelpful.

Conclusion

In previous chapters we have argued that Walcha does not have a "crime problem". This argument was based on our own observations as well as the comments of the police and our respondents. However, while Walcha may not have a "crime problem" in a sense of being a community where social life is threatened by crime, clearly there is crime in Walcha. According to the reports of our respondents, approximately fourteen percent had been victims of crime in the preceding twelve months. Of this fourteen percent twenty five percent reported that they were victims of multiple offences, either at the same time or on a subsequent occasion. These figures are comparable to those found by the Australian Bureau of Statistics 1983 Crime Victims Survey¹⁴ which reported that 8.9% of household and 9.8% of persons in a national sample had been victims of crime over the previous year. While the victimisation figures produced by our study and those of the ABS cannot be directly equated due to different response formats, it is obvious that Walcha does not

represent an island of crime free life in a society experiencing an increasing crime problem.

Nevertheless, the extent of the "crime problem" in Walcha should not be exaggerated. Many of the crimes reported by our respondents were of minor importance. In many cases they did not even lead to contact with the police. The most socially disruptive crimes - crimes against the person - constituted only 15.8% of all victimisations.

It is in light of these facts that the community's crime related attitudes and behaviours can best be understood. In particular, the relatively high rate of crime prevention behaviours and the low levels of fear of crime might be seen as quite appropriate for a community with a definite, but relatively small rate of crime.

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CHAPTER 7 IMAGES OF CRIME, CRIMINALS AND SOURCE OF CRIME NEWS

Respondents in this study did not perceive crime to be a serious problem in Walcha. Nevertheless, they did engage in a variety of measures to protect themselves and their property from crime. These activities presuppose attitudes and beliefs about the nature of crime and criminals and the possible motives for criminal behaviour. These attitudes and beliefs were sought in this study, as we felt this would give a more rounded picture of the community's perception of the crime situation in Walcha. Accordingly, respondents were asked a series of questions about their images of crime and criminals and whether they differentiated between what they felt generally to be the situation in Australia and in Walcha. They were also asked about how they received their news and what specific sources of information they used for news about crime.

Perceived Social Characteristics of the Typical Criminal

Respondents were asked to describe their image of the typical Australian criminal. The question was first presented as an open ended question. Following the respondents' replies, our interviewers then asked questions about specific possible characteristics of the criminal including the criminal's sex, age, marital status, education, occupation, social class, race and length of residence in the community.

There was widespread agreement concerning the criminal's sex. Just over one half of all respondents believed the typical criminal was

male (50.8%), nearly one third of the sample said that criminals could be either male or female (36.5%), with the rest of the sample (13.6%) responding that they did not know or not answering. None of the respondents claimed that the typical criminal was female.

The perception of the typical criminal's sex varied significantly according to the respondent's sex. Male respondents were significantly more likely to perceive the criminal as being male. Female respondents were more like to view the typical criminal as being of either sex (sig. 0.0119).

There was also general agreement concerning the typical criminal's age. Nearly half of the respondents (49.7%) stated that the criminal could be a person of any age. However, when an age was specified, the criminal was perceived to be a young person. The age categories most frequently mentioned were 15 to 20 years (13.6%), 21 to 30 years (14.7%) and 31 to 40 years (2.6%). No respondents believed that the typical criminal was older than forty years of age. The proportion of respondents stating that they did not know or not answering the question was 19.4%.

The main variation among respondents on the perceived age of criminals was based on their educational level. Respondents with more than a secondary level of education were more likely to claim that 15 to 20 years was the probable age category of the typical criminal (sig. 0.0076).

Opinion was divided as to the typical criminal's marital status. The largest group of respondents (35.1%) perceived the criminal to be single, with the next largest response being don't know or no answer (32.5%). Approximately one quarter of respondents (24.1%) said that the criminal could be of any marital status, with 1.6% selecting married, 2.1% divorced or separated and 4.9% de facto as the marital status of the criminal.

Generally respondents perceived criminals to have a low level of education. The most common response to the typical criminal's level of education was that he or she had left school at 15 (46.1%), followed by 24.1% of respondents stating that they didn't know or failing to answer the question. Nearly a quarter of respondents (23.6%) claimed that the criminal could have any level of education. Only 4.7% specifically considered the criminal to have completed high school and 1.0% replied that the criminal was still at school. Given the emphasis on vandalism and juvenile delinquency in public opinion surveys in Australia and overseas, it is evident that these categories of offenders are not prominent in the perception of the typical criminal in Walcha.

The highest level of agreement on the criminal's social characteristics was in relation to the occupational status of the typical criminal. A majority (61.3%) perceived the criminal to be unemployed, with only 3.6 % and 0.5% respectively stating that the criminal was in an unskilled or skilled job. A further 17.8% of respondents stated that any occupational status was likely to be found among criminals. A small percentage of respondents (2.2%)

considered the typical criminal to be working full time as a criminal. Tertiary educated respondents were more likely to perceive the criminal as unemployed, whereas respondents without tertiary education were more likely to perceive the criminal as coming from any occupation (sig. 0.0000).

Respondents were more divided in terms of the criminal's class background. The most common response (35.1%) was that the criminal could be of any class, with approximately one quarter of respondents (27.2%) indicating that they did not know or did not answer the question. Among the remaining respondents, 28.3% chose lower class, 5.2% working class and 4.2% middle class. No respondent selected upper class. Again respondent's educational level was a significant factor in the perception of the criminal's social class. Tertiary educated respondents were more likely to perceive the criminal as lower or working class than respondents with primary or secondary levels of education (sig. 0.0054).

Race was not a factor highlighted by respondents. Forty percent (40.3%) considered the criminal to be of any race with a further 36.1% not responding or indicating that they did not know the race of the typical criminal. When respondents did select a particular race or ethnic group, the responses were white Australian (11.0%), Aboriginal (7.9%), European (3.7%) and other (1.0%).

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate how long they thought the criminal lived in the community. There were no strong feelings about this among respondents. Fifty eight percent (58.1%) stated

that they did not know or did not answer the question. The next largest group of respondents (17.8%) did not select any defined length of residence. Two percent (1.6%) selected less than one year, 3.1% one to five years, 13.1% six to ten years and 6.3% felt that the criminal lived all his or her life in the community.

The following table 7.1 provides a composite picture of the results described above. Particular attention should be paid to the DK/NR answer. The high percentage of respondents in this category is indicative of the problem we outlined earlier with fixed format questionnaires. That respondents had difficulty in giving their image of the criminal is informative about their perception of crime and criminals and should not be treated as failure in technique. We took the open ended approach, because in an earlier study by one of the researchers¹ it was found that respondents were quite willing to fill in age, sex, marital status, etc. The inclusion of an open ended question along with structured questions allowed us to examine whether that was a response initiated by the question format or one held generally by the respondent.

1. O'Connor, 1981

TABLE 7.1 SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE TYPICAL CRIMINAL

SEX	%	No	AGE	%	No	Marital Status	%	No
Male	50.8	97	15-20 yrs.	13.6	26	Single	35.1	67
Female	0.0	0	21-30 yrs.	14.7	28	Married	1.6	3
Either	35.6	68	31-40 yrs.	2.6	5	Div/Sep	2.1	4
			40 + yrs.	0.0	0	De facto	4.9	9
			Any age	49.7	95	Any	24.1	46
DK/NR	13.6	26	DK/NR	19.4	37	DK/NR	32.5	62
EDUCATION			OCCUPATION			SOCIAL CLASS		
At sch.	1.0	2	Unemployed	61.3	117	Lower	28.3	54
Left at			Unskilled	3.7	7	Working	5.2	10
15 yrs.	46.1	88	Skilled	0.5	1	Middle	4.2	8
High Sch	4.7	9	Any	17.8	34	Upper	0.0	0
Tertiary	1.5	1	Full time			Any	35.1	67
Any	23.6	45	criminal	2.1	4			
DK/NR	24.1	46	DK/NR	14.7	28	DK/NR	27.2	52
RACE			RESIDENCE					
W/Aus	11.0	21	Less than					
Aborig.	7.9	15	a year	1.6	3			
European	3.7	7	1-5 yrs.	3.1	6			
Other	1.0	2	6-10 yrs.	13.1	25			
Any	40.3	77	All their					
			life	6.3	12			
DK/NR	36.1	69	DK/NR	58.1	111			

A composite social image of the typical Australian criminal type emerges from these social characteristics. The criminal is an unemployed male of any age, but more likely to be young, and single. He left school at fifteen, is more likely to be lower class, is not from a particular racial group and it is not known how long he has lived in the locale. The variation in non response suggested that respondents were fairly certain about the sex and occupation of the criminal. They were somewhat more uncertain about the age of the criminal. The remaining characteristics were quite problematic for a quarter to more than half of the respondents.

This criminal social type corresponds to criminal images found in previous research by one of the present authors². In that research the social image of the thief, vandal and violent criminal was that of a youthful, unemployed male from a lower or working class background who left school at fifteen. These results are in substantial agreement with the results of this study in Walcha. Social characteristics are not simply descriptive categories, as they carry with them the potential for explanations as to why someone is a criminal. The significance of placing the criminal in categories such as the unemployed, working class or youth is that it may imply both a view of criminality and an explanation as to why individuals are involved in crime. In order to examine the explanations for crime among Walcha residents, we asked respondents in an open question about the possible reasons they thought a person engages in criminal activity. We followed their initial responses with probes about the possible importance of a variety of factors commonly associated with crime in the academic and popular literature. These factors included family, bad companions, personality problems, economic factors, poverty and unemployment and whether the criminal had a grudge against society.

Perceived Reasons For Crime

Respondents were extremely vague about the reasons for crime and

2. O'Connor, 1981. The research, some of which is unpublished, was carried out in 1976 in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia and in 1982 in Armidale, New South Wales. The Armidale study was confined to students in years eleven and twelve studying at the private High Schools.

criminality, until we probed the specific areas mentioned above. Family experience was selected by less than thirty percent (29.8%) of respondents as an explanation, with 64.4% rejecting this as an explanation. Female respondents selected this explanation more frequently than male respondents (sig. 0.0097). Bad companions was selected by a slightly higher percentage of respondents (34.6%), though again a majority of respondents (59.7%) did not select this as one of their explanations for why an individual might engage in criminal activity. The only significant difference among respondents was that non town residents were more likely to select this explanation (sig. 0.0110) than town residents. Personality problems, along with family experience, were the least popular explanation for criminal behaviour among our respondents. Thirty percent (29.8%) selected these explanations, with a clear majority (64.9% and 64.4% respectively) rejecting them. Finally, in terms of explanations that can be considered directly focussed on the individual or his or her immediate situation, the explanation that received the most support was grudge against society. This was selected as an explanation by 38.7%, though again a majority (56.5%) rejected this explanation.

Explanations which located criminality within broader social developments appeared to have more support. A majority of respondents (56.0%) selected poverty/unemployment as a reason for crime, with respondents having a higher level of education more likely to select this explanation (sig. 0.0442). A more general explanation which sought to highlight particular economic factors in which the criminal might be placed was only selected by 34.0% of

respondents. Finally, respondents were asked if there were any other additional reasons they could think of as explanations of crime. Slightly over one third of respondents replied (34.6%) with a wide range of explanations that were not contained in the list of responses given above.

The following table 7.2 presents the findings. Respondents could select any number of the explanations. It is interesting to note the small DK/NR percentages, as unlike the previous table, they show that respondents had a far more definite view on what they considered to be the causes of crime. Thus we have the interesting situation that respondents were not too sure about the social characteristics of the criminal, but were quite willing to indicate their opinion on the causes of crime.

TABLE 7.2 **EXPLANATIONS FOR CRIMINALITY SELECTED BY RESPONDENTS**

EXPLANATION	YES		NO		DK/NR	
	%	No	%	No	%	No
Family experiences	29.8	57	64.4	123	5.8	11
Bad companions	34.6	66	59.7	114	5.8	11
Personality problems	29.8	57	64.9	124	5.2	10
Grudge against society	38.7	74	56.5	108	4.7	9
Poverty/unemployment	56.0	107	38.7	74	5.2	10
Economic factors	34.0	65	60.7	116	5.2	10

The selection of explanations is interesting, as crime seems to be explained by external factors rather than the personal situation of the criminal. One possible implication of this might be that since respondents see the causes of crime located in structural conditions of society, they might also believe that solutions to the crime problem must tackle these underlying structural issues. This would also suggest that treatment or rehabilitation would not be favoured

as possible solutions to the crime problem among our respondents. This does not necessarily suggest that support for rehabilitation or treatment of criminals is lacking. However, if there is support, our findings concerning the causes of crime suggest that it would probably be for reasons based on humanitarian goals. Unfortunately these issues are beyond the range of the present study.

Media and the Sources of Crime News

Public opinion on social issues must be based to some extent on information provided by the news media. Accordingly we asked our respondents a series of questions about their use of the news media in general and about their sources of crime news in particular.

Our respondents made frequent use of the news media, with the local paper being a particularly important source of news. A large majority of respondents (89.5%) claimed that they read the local paper every week. (The Walcha News is a weekly paper.) Table 7.3 presents the level of readership of the local paper.

TABLE 7.3 READERSHIP RATES FOR THE WALCHA NEWS

RESPONSE	%	No
Every week	89.5	171
Less than once a week	3.7	7
Seldom/Never	5.8	11
DK/NA	1.0	2
TOTAL	100.0	191

These figures bear out the comment we made at the beginning of the report about the importance of the local paper in the life of the community. The paper was not only a source of news, but more

importantly it appeared to be a source to confirm information that was already part of the communal news. Thursday, the day of publication, appeared to take on an added significance in Walcha.

In contrast, the national daily papers such as the Sydney Morning Herald, the Telegraph or the more local Northern Daily Leader, were somewhat less popular. Only 37.2% of respondents said they read a national paper every day, with equal percentages (15.7%) reading a daily paper several times or once a week. A substantial percentage of respondents (28.8%) read a national paper seldom or not at all.

Table 7.4 presents the number and percentage of respondents who watched the local and national news on television. A large majority indicated that they watched both the national news (81.7%) and local news (71.2%) daily. The lower figures for the local news may be accounted for by the fact that extensive local news was given only on the commercial channel.

TABLE 7.4 THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS VIEWING LOCAL AND NATIONAL TELEVISION NEWS.

RESPONSE	LOCAL		NATIONAL	
	%	No	%	No
Everyday	71.2	136	81.7	156
Several times a week	15.2	29	13.1	25
Once/Twice a week or less	11.5	22	5.7	9
DK/NR	2.1	4	0.5	1
TOTAL	100.0	191	100.0	191

It is clear from the results that our respondents frequently read the local paper and watched the news on television. Nevertheless, the news media were not their main source of news about crime in Walcha. When asked specifically about their main source of crime

news, the largest number of respondents replied gossip, followed by the local paper. The findings are presented in table 7.5.

TABLE 7.5 SOURCES OF CRIME NEWS

RESPONSE	%	No
Gossip	47.1	90
The Walcha News	27.8	57
Radio/Television	15.2	29
Other papers	1.6	3
The local police	0.5	1
DK/NR	5.8	11
TOTAL	100.0	191

It would appear that the media were an important sources of news about crime outside the community, but that in the community local information networks provided the news. As remarked earlier the local newspaper seemed to confirm the news, not present the news as new. This role of the media as providing support for existing images and views of crime and criminals is supported by studies of crime and the media³. It should be noted that the media were provided with the news about crime in Walcha largely by the police. Therefore, the news would have probably been in circulation before it reached the printer's plate. A regular feature of the police officer's week in the office was the phone call from a print media or radio journalist seeking information on crime in Walcha. These enquiries occurred a day or two before publication or going to air, so there was plenty of time for the news to be circulated.

Despite the popularity of informal sources of news about crime,

3. Cohen and Young, 1973.

crime does not appear to be a frequently discussed topic in Walcha. This was evident by the sense of disbelief/wonderment/amusement expressed by community residents that researchers would be out in Walcha asking individuals about crime. A feeling that even the Walcha News put across when it commented in the gossip column about the research:

We have often wondered what attitude criminals take to crime. Perhaps someone should take a survey on people's attitudes and perceptions of honesty. Could be fascinating.⁴

This lack of attention to crime, is evident from the response to a question about how often our respondents talked to neighbours about crime. In Walcha, as our data has shown, neighbours are constantly in use as watchers or believed to be watching respondents homes and property. Therefore, this question should provide a reasonable indication of the impact of crime in general social intercourse. Table 7.6 presents the results.

TABLE 7.6 THE PERCENTAGE AND NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS WHO TALK TO NEIGHBOURS ABOUT CRIME.

RESPONSE	%	No
Very Often	2.1	4
Often	6.3	12
Sometimes	31.4	60
Seldom	39.8	76
Never	19.9	38
DK/NR	0.5	1
TOTAL	100.0	191

4 Walcha News, September 19, 1985, 2.

A majority of respondents (59.7%) seldom or never talked to their neighbours about crime. This indicates that crime was not a very frequent topic of conversation. Talking with neighbours about crime was associated with age of respondent (sig. 0.0108), respect for the police (sig. 0.0265) and the more relatives a respondent had in the district (sig. 0.0000). Nevertheless, the frequency of talking about crime with neighbours was low.

Conclusion

Only one explanation for criminal behaviour - poverty/unemployment - was selected by a majority of respondents. Respondents' own social characteristics had a limited effect on the explanations selected. Sex was related to the selection of family experience, education with poverty/unemployment and location of respondent with bad companions. The results, like those on the social characteristics of the criminal, were similar to the results of the previous research carried out by O'Connor (see footnote 2), in that poverty/unemployment was also frequently selected by respondents.

The data on the perception of crime and criminality and the source of crime news would suggest that respondents have a general image of who is the criminal, that poverty/unemployment is the main reason for crime and that the news media are not the major sources of crime news for respondents in Walcha. It would appear that crime is not a major topic of conversation, but when it is discussed, the source of news comes from gossip rather than the media.

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CHAPTER 8 POLICING IN WALCHA

Seven weeks were spent observing police-community interaction. The primary location for the participant observation part of the study, which occurred prior to the interviewing of respondents, was the Walcha police station. Periods of observation covered complete shifts. There was no period, other than the introductory meeting with the Walcha police, when the two principle researchers were present at the same time. The Walcha police offered complete co-operation. At no stage were we excluded from the normal routines of the shifts. We did not experience at any time the feeling that certain matters were not pursued because of our presence. The response to the research was very similar to that of our respondents, in that there was some amusement, if not surprise, that anyone would consider the crime situation in the Walcha district worthy of research. The police expressed a sense of disappointment that they could not offer us more help, in that they felt we were seeking crime and public order situations to observe and report upon.

The police station became the centre of our fieldwork. The police spent a considerable portion of each shift, except for the night shift, in the station. We accompanied the police officers on duty when patrols or enquiries were being made. Consequently we were able to observe a mix of activities that covered a wide range of police duties that comprised the policing of a small town.

Before outlining these duties, it should be noted that the police in Walcha, though under the control of the Chief Inspector at Armidale,

had considerable autonomy in deciding shift patterns and what constituted their routine. The only exception was on Tuesday and Thursday of each week when the station acted as a motor registry. Walcha was a three person station and there were one officer stations at Walcha Road and Nowendoc. These stations were under the control of the sergeant at Walcha. The officers at Walcha Road and Nowendoc sometimes did a relieving shift at Walcha, but generally they had a considerable degree of autonomy in their work practices.

The Daily Routine

In order to gain a perspective on the experience of everyday policing, we arranged our observational periods to cover day, evening and night shifts. There was a significant continuity of tasks throughout all periods of duty. However, there was sufficient variation in police work to divide a descriptive account of the daily routine into three periods: morning, afternoon and night.

The morning segment of a shift usually involved a large amount of office work. The paper work was considerable and this appeared to be a popular time to get it over and done with. Locals tended to visit the station around mid morning and so the officers felt it important to handle the paperwork quickly. In this way the officers felt more at ease to handle the service and policing requests from the public. Another important factor in getting the paperwork over with was that it quickly put aside the demands placed on police from outside the community. The paperwork came from Sydney, Armidale and to a lesser extent other police stations and handling it quickly meant being

well briefed if superiors suddenly contacted them. This concern with handling the paperwork was evident in the visits officers made to the station while off duty to check that nothing important had come in the morning mail. The centrality of paperwork was not that it took control of their daily routine, except for most of Tuesday and Thursday when motor registration took place. Unlike urban policing¹, it was managed in this way so that it would not be an ongoing interference in their daily routine. That morning routine is illustrated by the following cases in a typical daily encounter between the police and the public.

Case 1:

A builder from out of town who was working in the Walcha area stopped in to inquire about a fellow worker from New Zealand obtaining a driver's licence. He was informed that the Walcha police could not help him and he was referred to Armidale. The man appeared to be known to the police and this short request extended to about fifteen minutes conversation with the officers.

Case 2:

A local woman came in to inquire about registering an old truck or utility for use on her property. The cost of registration was higher than she had anticipated and she left without pursuing the matter further.

Case 3:

An insurance salesman from out of town stopped in to try and sell a superannuation policy to one of the police officers. The response was friendly but the officers were not interested. After a short casual conversation the salesman left.

These three cases are fairly representative of a slow morning when the police were not working on motor vehicle registration. The

1. Paper work seems to be the bane of the urban police officer.

volume of business was low and most of the interactions dealt with non-criminal issues concerning some form of licensing. However, this disguises the opportunity such requests gave to the police to casually pursue matters that were more directly related to public order and crime. This was particularly the case with young people who came in to take a driving test or renew their car registration. Conversation generally touched on who was driving what vehicle around town, that reports of messing about on High St. had come in, that Mrs X or Mr Y has been complaining about noise from cars, etc. If the young person had previously been in trouble with the police, there was usually an effort to enquire how things were going, advice on what not to do and generally warning the person to behave sensibly on the road. Youth-police interaction appeared to be quite friendly and one did not get the impression that young people sought to avoid or end these conversations at the earliest possible moment. On other occasions it may be someone who the police knew was having trouble with their kids and so they would make enquiries. In most instances they did not have to raise these issues, as the visitor would often bring them up after their initial request had been settled.

Afternoons tended to involve somewhat more varied tasks and the police were more likely to be out in the community, either driving around or visiting individuals. There were a number of reasons why patrols took place in the afternoon. First, it offered an attractive break from the paper work that characterised the morning period. Second, it was a time when more people were out and about in the town. Afternoons were a time when people from outlying properties

frequently visited the town, school was out by mid afternoon and in winter time it was often the most pleasant time of the day. Third, the morning's work occasionally meant that the police had to follow up a request or complaint that had been brought to their attention. Patrols were then frequently added on to the particular items of business that had to be attended to. The following cases are examples.

Case 4:

A woman stopped by the police station in the morning to deal with legal matters related to a motor vehicle accident. The motor vehicle had been taken by her son without her permission and was wrecked. The woman failed to give the police all of the necessary information which meant that the police had to track her down at the smash repair yard (she had no telephone). After obtaining the necessary information the officer did a brief patrol of the town.

Case 5:

A summons had to be served on a woman because of some welfare irregularities. The whole family at one time or another had had problems with the social security department. When the officer went to deliver the summons the woman was not at home. The officer did a patrol of the town, checked the schools and drove out of town past the aboriginal reserve and then returned to try to serve the summons again. The attempt was unsuccessful though the mother was seen driving past. She was pursued and told to tell her daughter to expect a visit. He explained what the matter was about, that she was to appear in court and if there were any problems to come and see the police. The conversation then turned to other members of the family and the officer gleaned information about where they were at present, who was working, etc.

The night shift was considerably different from the morning and afternoon shifts. At night there was an emphasis on patrolling. Members of the public rarely visited the police station at night, instead the police were more likely to be out in the community.

Night patrols were more specific and were directed at areas where the police thought there might be trouble, rather than simply showing a presence. It was remarked a number of times that daytime patrols in some of the more remote parts of the district were simply done because the public liked to think the police were out and about. At night the patrolling concentrated around the town, particularly the hotels, closed businesses, parts of the highway close to town and the Walcha - Uralla Rd. Some rural areas were patrolled intensely, especially if there had been reports of spotlight shooting in the area. The aboriginal reserve and the more populated areas of the district received a passing visit once or twice on most shifts.

In all this patrolling the police rarely went on foot. On only one occasion did an officer leave the station on foot to have, as he called it, "a wander down town". The officer had just returned from vacation, had not been to Walcha for a couple of weeks and felt that he wanted to have a chat with some of the locals to bring him up to date. It was also a beautiful bright sunny afternoon and there were many people walking in the main street. He remarked how the public liked to see an officer walking about, though his decision may have been influenced by the fact that it was a nice sunny day and that he liked to chat. He actively sought people out on the street to converse with and he visited a number of shops. Within a minute or two of stepping onto the main street it was all action. The locals seemed to enjoy the chance to say hello. It was similar to a walkabout by politicians at election time, or at least that was the impression it left on the researcher. It should be stated that while

members of the community obviously appreciated this foot patrolling, they appeared to accept that the police must use motor vehicles in such a large district. The general community response suggested considerable community support for the police. Even individuals who were stopped and questioned by the police, some who might have had cause to be negative, did not show any overt signs of hostility. The following two cases illustrated this. It should be stated that lack of an overt negative response does not necessarily mean that the policing of their behaviour was appreciated or accepted as just.

Case 6:

One evening while on patrol about 10.00pm the officer stopped the patrol car on the main street and got out to check a few of the local businesses. While standing around chatting a very noisy car with a number of young people in it roared past. It was obvious that it was being done as a bit of a lark and the officer noticed no rear lights on the car. The car was pursued but the officer was not in a hurry as he knew who the driver was, and he felt he should talk to him and tell him not to drive the car until the lights were fixed. Within a few minutes the car was found parked outside one of the hotels. The conversation began with considerable good humour and advice, but it became apparent that the young driver was well over the prescribed level of alcohol. He was politely asked to get out of the car. He had considerable difficulty remaining in an erect position. He was taken to the patrol car, placed in the front seat and the officer administered the preliminary breathalyser test.

Before the test was administered the young man kept asking to speak to the sergeant. He gave veiled threats that the Blue Light Disco which he helped the police to run would be in jeopardy if he lost his licence. The officer was extremely patient and simply carried out the test. When the test proved positive, the drama started. He started to moan and groan and say he was ill and that he had kidney stones. He had to be taken to the hospital, the doctor called out, who, with the sister, did not display too much sympathy for the young man. It was suspected that the doctor gave the young man a good talking to, as after his examination he calmed down and basically accepted that he had to face up to the fact that he was driving with over the prescribed level of alcohol. He now changed his position and claimed that he had only two beers with his mates and his finance

to celebrate his engagement. He claimed that they must have spiked his drinks.

All this drama took time. A breathalyser machine and operator had to be found to do the test within the required time limit. This meant arranging with Armidale to get the machine and operator to Uralla, a fast drive to Uralla and conducting the test. The test proved positive and so the young man was taken back to the Walcha Police Station charged and bailed. By this time he was extremely cooperative and was interested and inquisitive about all the charging procedures. He left in good humour, though naturally not pleased that he was to face the court in a few months.

This was the one case where a researcher was present when an arrest was made and was also fortunate in being able to attend the relevant court hearing. The young man chatted amicably with the arresting police officer in court and after the case was heard stayed to have another chat. On subsequent meetings with the police he did not display any hostility.

Case 7:

One of the researchers arrived at the station one morning to find that the officer on duty was sporting a black eye. It seems he was called out to the Walcha aboriginal reserve by one of the inhabitants who complained about some young people riding around on motor cycles. He said that once he arrived and was talking to the young Aborigines who were riding the motor cycles, a number of other Aborigines clustered around him. One stepped forward and "planted a fist in his eye". He had a struggle, arrested him and put him in the cell for the rest of the night. It was a cold night and it is likely that the officer was not overly concerned about how comfortable the prisoner was in the cell. The officer's explanation for the attack was that a few months ago he arrested the person for a traffic offence and felt he probably had a grudge against him.

Now it happened that in the melee at the reserve he lost the badge from his police hat. So it was decided to go to the reserve to try and find it. While driving through the town the offender was noticed. The officer stopped and, surprisingly in light of the events of the previous night, chatted in a very non aggressive, conciliatory manner with the young man. The Aboriginal was polite, no mention was made of the previous night's events, and at the subsequent court case the same response was observed.

This last case is clearly taken from the police officer's perspective. We should not read too much into the alleged

unprovoked attack, as there may have been another side to the incident. What is significant is that police - aboriginal relations were not overtly hostile, even among those who received special attention. This is not to suggest that the Aboriginals accepted the policing of their behaviour as fair or just. Rather they appeared to be resigned to the fact that they would be over policed. Despite reservations and objections about that form of order maintenance, they appear to consider the Walcha police as not too bad. This was evident by the responses of the few Aboriginals who were respondents. They had little good to say about the police, but at the same time they were not completely negative toward the Walcha police. In one interview, the respondent began to complain about the police and his friends, who were listening to the interview, immediately took him to task. They wanted to get across the message that the police over police Aboriginals and in many instances abuse their powers, but that in Walcha the police are reasonably fair. They don't like being policed, but have apparently resigned to the fact that the police will periodically visit the aboriginal reserve and that Aboriginals will be arrested for drunkenness, bad language, etc. However, their actual treatment by the police is not in itself considered unfair. The perceived injustice is the selection of Aboriginals as a target group to be policed.

Not only are Aboriginals targeted, but they also experience a high level of double policing because of the nature of rural policing. As noted, the police seek to informally deal with matters, unless there is an obvious and serious breach of the criminal code, as in case 6. As found in research on police work, the demeanour of the offender

or suspect is crucial in the decision of whether to arrest or caution a person². With informal policing, the police tend to lecture the suspect, give a stern warning, and seek signs that the suspect is appreciative of the informal action. We noticed that this approach to Aborigines was not appreciated, nor did it appear that they felt that they should simply stay and take the lecture without response. In this way Aborigines were put in double jeopardy. The alleged offence placed them in danger of arrest and their response to the informal policing increased that risk as it appeared not to be appreciated by the police. Furthermore, their response to policing per se was not positive and therefore informal contact created the potential for arrest due to the interpretation placed on their behaviour. Given that the only arrest we observed was of a white Australian, the above comment is based on what the officers said and the few occasions where police-aboriginal contact appeared to get close to the arrest stage. The incident reported in case 7 was, on the officer's recounting of the event, largely because the officer had decided to give all those involved a lecture which was not appreciated. He appeared to accept that he may have handled the situation poorly. He said he did not appreciate the backchat (it was a very cold night and he did not want to spend the night arguing over a matter which was obviously a reasonable source of a complaint by someone on the reserve.) and felt he should have been more cautious in his approach.

2. Sullivan and Siegel, 1974: Banton, 1964.

This interpretation of police-aboriginal relations is further supported by what we noted as the police concept of the "good Aborigine". We dislike that label, but it was the term they used and it shows once more the emphasis on order maintenance and not crime control as the major function of policing in the district. Officers remarked on more than one occasion how the task of motor registration meant that they saw a large number of Aborigines who never came across their paths in the pursuance of order maintenance in the Walcha district. They mentioned this, as they themselves were aware that there was the potential to label every Aboriginal as troublesome which would be unjust and incorrect. When out on patrol we were frequently pointed out Aborigines who they considered to be "good aborigines". It should be pointed out that the officers were not engaged continuously in the positive and negative labelling of Aborigines. It was simply that on some occasions they pointed out particular Aborigines which fitted their concept of the "good Aborigines". We tried to find out what was meant by this concept, but were at a loss to clearly define what was meant. It seemed the quality was related to politeness, being in work and not drinking, though aboriginal pensioners were also pointed out as "good Aborigines". It was the quality of politeness and respect for the police that appeared to figure prominently in the officer's mind. Given the emphasis on informal policing this concept then takes on added significance, as the officer no doubt approaches any Aboriginal with his understanding of which category the person fits into. Again this could only be observed on the occasions when we stopped to talk to Aborigines while out on patrol. On these occasions you could feel an increase in

tension/officiousness/abruptness (all slight, but nevertheless noticeable) when meeting Aborigines that they felt were not in that good category.

To put this in perspective, it was also apparent that the persona of the police officer changed when meeting members of the white community they felt to be troublesome. Nevertheless, they did not engage, or at least did not overtly express it, in this good/bad distinction. It should also be said, and this can only be based on our understanding of black-white relations in the community, that the police did not appear to be overtly or covertly more prejudiced than the rest of the community. In fact we suspect that the police are possibly less prejudiced, a finding suggested by other researchers in New South Wales³.

Types of Police Duties

The work of the Walcha police involved a wide variety of tasks. These tasks can be classified under four headings, bureaucratic work, service-welfare work, order maintenance and law enforcement.

Bureaucratic Work

The largest single source of work for the police was bureaucratic work, mainly in the area of motor vehicle registration. The Walcha

3. Ronalds, Chapman and Kitchener, 1983.

police handled motor vehicle registration two days a week, but as noted earlier, requests for advice and help at other times often focussed on this area. Judging from their remarks about the work itself, the police perceived this aspect of their work to be extremely tedious and unrewarding. This was evident with their expressed satisfaction that this task was to be taken away from rural police in the near future. Another major source of paper work was their role in licensing, granting permits and checking or providing statements requested by other government departments. There was a steady stream of people each week requesting firearm certificates, permits to carry wide loads, hunting licenses, permits to purchase gelignite, statements for people requesting visas for foreign travel, etc. These were all official tasks, not at the discretion of the police, that involved a considerable amount of time and form filling in triplicate.

Finally, there was a significant amount of paper work created directly by reactive and proactive policing in the district. Accident reports had to be filled out, arrest reports made, paper work for the Court of Petty Sessions had to be completed and the one hundred and one items that came in from Police Headquarters or Armidale had to be filed, responded to, etc. After the motor registration this was a major source of police dissatisfaction. They simply disliked all the paper work and as one officer put it

it takes up most of your time and it's one thing they never teach you to do at the academy

Service-Welfare Work

As found in other research⁴, much of what the police do can be labelled service or welfare work. This is contrary to the image put to the public that the police are crime fighters. This is now a topical issue in police research, which Manning⁵ states is overemphasised. Nevertheless, the police do provide a unique service in that they have the image of helping those in trouble and are available at times when most other services are shut. Consequently they are called upon by large numbers in the community for help or advice on a wide variety of issues. The police also encourage this response because it supports their image of a peace keeping force. Some examples are given in the following cases, but we should stress that welfare-service work is often very much in the minds of the officers when dealing with other matters. This was obvious by the requests for advice on non police matters that came to them while handling motor registration.

Case 8:

A young man from Walcha was hitchhiking at night after visiting people in Gunnedah. He was stopped by the police in Uralla and questioned about his behaviour. After establishing his identity, the Uralla police radioed the Walcha police and said they were willing to drive the young man halfway to Walcha (combining the task with a patrol) if the Walcha police were willing to meet them halfway and take the young person back to Walcha. The Walcha officer agreed (it was a bitterly cold late autumn night) and he was dropped off at his home in Walcha.

4. Avery, 1981.

5. Manning, 1977.

Case 9:

A long distance telephone call to the police requested that the police deliver the news about a death in the family of a woman who lived on the aboriginal reserve who did not have a telephone. The officer drove out to the reserve and delivered the message.

Case 10:

A woman stopped by the station and asked if she could park her car in front of the station and leave the keys with the police. She worked for a car dealer in Moree and the person who was coming to pick up the car was an employee of a car dealer in Port Macquarie. The police officer agreed and the person collected the vehicle several hours later.

Case 11:

A woman after coming into the station to check on some matter concerned with vehicle registration was asked about how things were. She mentioned how she was still owed some money by a person in Walcha who seemed to have enough money to buy a new car, house, etc. It was obvious the officer knew about the situation, as he later told the researcher that she did not have much money, the family needed the money that was owed and the person who owed the debt was being irresponsible. He suggested taking legal action, but she was unwilling to do this and so he said that he could not approach the person officially. However, while stressing the unofficial nature of his offer, he said if she liked he might have a quiet word to him when off duty and not in uniform. She seemed pleased with that offer. It was suspected that she actually came into the station to seek that form of help, but would not ask openly for it. The officer later said, that though he had no authority, he felt that these kinds of problems can best be handled unofficially in the initial stage.

These examples highlight both the service side of police work and the goal of order maintenance. While there are many examples of pure service work, these requests for help either directly relate to reproducing a form of order that the community seeks or allows members of the community to appreciate, thereby encouraging respect for the police and their role in the community. The young hitchhiker was clearly introduced to the good side of policing, while the woman with the debt came away with the understanding that the police were

aware of the problems in seeking payment from others in a small community. At the same time the woman was also given a clear understanding of the official limits to the police officer's role.

Order Maintenance

Order maintenance is a loose but vital function of policing. The strategies and practices vary and often shade into the service welfare role of the police as indicated above. More obvious examples of order maintenance strategies and practices of the police included: establishing and running a Blue Light Disco for young people in the town, regular patrols of the hotels at night (particularly at weekends), liaison with the schools, etc. It was recognised by the police and our respondents that young people in Walcha did not have too many activities to occupy themselves, unless they were keen on sport. Concern was expressed about the possibility of drug use among the young and so a supervised disco was seen as one answer to the perceived problem. The police officers saw their role in the Blue Light Disco as one of encouraging respect for the police, getting to know the young people better and having a crime prevention function. Nevertheless, from the parents side it was seen as a service to the community and this is how the Walcha News promoted the disco, ably encouraged by police publicity.

Order maintenance took place in a variety of other ways. Individuals were frequently given advice over the phone on crime prevention and the media were informed of matters that concerned the local police. Visits were made to the local schools, sometimes school classes

visited the station, and the police saw these activities as important in establishing respect for the law at an early age. At the time of the research neighbourhood watch was receiving considerable publicity in New South Wales. The officers saw this movement toward neighbourhood watch as indicative of the difference between urban and rural policing and doubted that it might be necessary in Walcha. They felt they were the neighbourhood watch. They considered that they got great support from the public and there was no need to formalise the situation. The police officers constantly referred to the 'good' qualities of Walcha that needed to be preserved and they perceived these order maintenance activities to aid that process.

The threat of drug use among the young in Walcha was frequently used as justification for their approach to order maintenance. There was no evidence that drugs were a problem. We were told that in the past a few people had been picked up with some marihuana, though generally the police and the public saw it more as a potential problem. It was primarily seen as a problem that came from outside and so any attempt to prevent it was seen as preserving the community. Thus actions framed within the drug problem particularly legitimated the officer's response to order maintenance in the eyes of the community. There was a problem with this approach, as it was necessary to use the potential drug problem as a legitimating tool, while at the same time not creating fear that the drug problem had come to Walcha.

Here we see the significant difference between concern and fear of crime being used to give the police officer credibility in the pursuit of order maintenance. While one of the obvious objectives of order maintenance is the alleviation of fear of crime, concern about crime is significant in gaining support for police action. It is a delicate balance that needs to be achieved and the police in Walcha sought this through their approach to the drug problem. Drug use was seen as the end of the road. There was considerable support for the police to police young people who might be perceived to be misbehaving or likely to be led into drug use. The concern about drugs was not simply that some people might take them, but that the urban crime problem might move into the district. Order maintenance that sought to retain the status quo was, therefore, strongly supported.

It is important to note the flow of direction which this order maintenance took place. Earlier it was stated that the community had a considerable influence on the style of policing that took place and this was also the case with order maintenance. Nevertheless, the main thrust came from the police officers as it was clearly in their control. They sought help from the community, but as they controlled the flow of information and were seen as the experts, order maintenance was very much their approach to the problem. The community's role was seen as one of support, not one of influencing the basic thrust of police activities. This is an important distinction to make because it is easy to gain the impression, which the police did not discourage, that the community simply got the policing it sought. Community policing in Walcha was a form of

policing that was influenced by the community, not policing that the community consciously sought to administer and control.

Indicative of this was the police officer's general approach to community participation. All officers took an active part in the community and they had an extremely positive approach to the district. At the same time they were aware that they were the police and they acknowledged that they had to be circumspect in how they behaved in the community. The reason for this is that they might have to take action that would be very difficult if they got too friendly with the locals. This was illustrated in the way they handled the few cases of law enforcement they confronted, as these highlighted the conflicting objectives between order maintenance and law enforcement.

Law Enforcement

Case 6 was the only experience the researchers had with the formal procedures and tasks resulting from an arrest, while case 7 detailed the morning after experience of an arrest. Despite this limited experience we perceived that law enforcement had a pivotal position in the police officer's view of his role. Law enforcement, in terms of crime occurring or being reported and the subsequent tasks of investigating, processing and prosecuting, constituted a minor part of the officers' day to day activities. It was nevertheless perceived by them to be of central importance to their role. Law enforcement was seen not only as the end process of policing, but was also perceived as the definitive aspect of the officers role.

Despite its importance it was seen as a last resort. Good policing from their perspective did not necessarily require formal law enforcement and the police studiously avoided such action where possible. The following case is illustrative of this.

Case 12:

One day while out on patrol the officer noticed a traffic patrol car parked on the side of the road. He stopped, chatted and generally discussed the traffic/road situation in the district. The Walcha police officer then mentioned that they were having some trouble with a young driver in the district who was driving too fast and that the young driver was not taking notice of their advice. He asked the traffic patrol officer if he would look out for the driver and book him if need be, as he felt that the situation was getting out of hand. He felt that it would be better coming from an officer outside the community and the traffic officer agreed. Later the officer said that it was handy to work in this way, as it did not upset the balance but got the desired result. The traffic officer also mentioned how he too used the local police to spread the word about taking care, asking them to give notice to particular individuals he was not able to catch, etc. In this way they were able to play one against the other to achieve the desired effect. The Walcha officer said that if the person was caught by the traffic officer he would then use that as evidence as to why the person should have heeded his advice. In this way it would lead to order maintenance without involving the officer in a formal arrest.

Police work has traditionally been divided into proactive and reactive police work. However, in Walcha it was difficult at times to distinguish between the two, as neither approach resulted very frequently in formal processing. The following cases, some of which were told to us by police officers, illustrates the mingling of reactive and proactive policing. We suspect that these cases were told to us in part to convince us that police did engage in what is commonly called crime work. They thought that the lack of crime work would reflect poorly on their work, while to us the centrality of crime work in their perception of their role and its lack of impact

on day to day policing was what was distinctive about policing Walcha. Case 6 is a clear case of reactive police work, but many attempts at reactive police work arose out of community response combined with police perception of their specific tasks in the community.

Case 13:

The police in Walcha were particularly concerned about illegal spotlight shooting. They informed the media of their concern, they regularly spent part of their night patrols on some lonely stretch of road hoping to observe evidence of spotlight shooting and were anxious to receive reports of such activity. On one occasion they did receive a complaint and immediately went to the property concerned. They talked to the complainant and then went out to discover the shooters' point of entry. The point of entry was found, the tracks of the shooters' vehicle were found and the offenders were spotted on a ridge across a small valley. The lack of a four wheel drive police vehicle meant that the shooters could not be followed and so the officer went and waited at a point on the main road where it was thought the shooters would pass. After a very long wait it was apparent that they had used another exit and the officer returned to town in the early hours of the morning. While this was clearly reactive policing, in that it was a response to the complaint, the general offence was one that was brought to community attention through proactive policing.

The following is a case recounted to us many times and illustrated the compactness of the community and the thrill the police had in having a 'real' crime which they solved by using the community's resources.

Case 14:

A number of break ins occurred a few years ago. It was evident that it was an outsider as they had received a tip off who might be involved, but they could not catch the person. (It was a long involved story about an offender apprehended in Tamworth who named a particular individual because he was having an affair with his wife.) The police decided after three or four break ins that the situation

warranted some definite action. Their patrolling was not successful. They employed a novel approach in that they arranged with the hospital authorities for an officer(s) to observe the town from the hospital. The hospital was on a hill and gave a commanding view of the town of Walcha. The officer observing from the hospital was in radio contact with police stationed around the town (outside police were called in to help) and reported any car or movement in the early hours of the morning. This was aided by having the street lights remain on during the operation. The operation was successful and the offender was apprehended.

Case 15:

Another case involved a report from the local school that a young student, who had previously been involved with the police, was selling something suspicious in the school yard. One of the local school children had, with a number of mates, played truant from school and broken into a house rented by a worker who was only visiting Walcha for a short period. In the process of stealing a few odds and ends they came across a bag of marihuana. It was not clear that they actually knew it was marihuana, or loose tobacco (the police never really addressed that question and were puzzled that one of use raised it as a possibility), but they sold it anyway to their friends at school. It was immediately treated with great suspicion. The police were genuinely worried about whether there was a drug dealer in town when it was learnt that it was marihuana. On questioning the school child the whole story came out. The victim of the break in, who naturally did not report the victimisation, had a surprise visit from the police.

While these cases appear to be reactive policing, they also contain elements of proactive policing, particularly in the case of spotlight shooting. Though the police wanted to find the offenders in cases 14 and 15, the objective seemed to be one of getting the individuals out of the community and not the promotion of their crime fighting role.

Proactive crime work was more directly linked to order maintenance. This was attempted through patrolling and information gathering. Frequently these two tasks were performed simultaneously. As previously noted, there were some areas that were singled out for

patrolling, particularly at night, such as hotels, closed businesses and some rural areas where spotlight shooters might go. The hotels were a particularly important focus for night patrols and proactive policing. They illustrated how police presence and information gathering had both order maintenance and law enforcement functions.

Typically, patrolling the hotels involved showing a police presence outside the building, either by driving past the hotel slowly or occasionally parking outside for a brief period. The police felt that this type of patrolling was useful for at least two reasons. First, they felt that their presence acted as a deterrent against rowdy or disorderly behaviour. Second, they felt that this form of patrolling gave them information on which hotel had the most drinkers, who was inside based on the cars outside and whether it was likely that there would be trouble or individuals driving with over the prescribed level of alcohol. The clubs were also included in this patrolling, but it was evident that if trouble arose the police expected the hotels to be the source of trouble. This was largely related to the police perception of the type of drinker in the hotels and clubs. The hotel was seen as having a high proportion of young drinkers and few females as clientele, while the clubs were seen to attract more married couples.

In general there was little trouble and so this form of patrolling was clearly oriented to order maintenance and not law enforcement. Occasionally, the patrol would stop and move inside the hotel. This action was taken if the hotelier was slow in closing, if there was

an unexpected clientele or if the police had informal reports of some trouble the previous night or weekend.

The proactive function of patrolling during daylight hours was somewhat different. Instead of focussing on selected areas, patrolling took on a more general pattern through the town and surrounding district. Even filling the patrol car with petrol, or collecting the mail, provided an opportunity to talk, ask questions and seek community response.

The one area where reactive and proactive policing merged continuously was in the policing of the aboriginal reserve. The police frequently got calls to come out to the reserve to solve domestic and public problems and they saw the reserve as a potential source of police work and trouble. Consequently, they invariably passed the reserve when out on patrol, though generally avoided stopping unless they had a complaint to follow up. When on the reserve they seem to consider proactive and reactive policing as one and the same and consequently they did not confine their policing to the complaint received. Case 7 is indicative of the negative consequences such as approach can have in the policing of the order maintenance.

Police Attitudes

The police generally had a positive outlook on their community and their work. Their community and their work has been purposively used, as it indicates a possessiveness that seemed to underlie

policing in Walcha. It was not that they were there to police the community as such, but that they arranged the policing to suit their concept of the community and how they felt the community should be in terms of order maintenance. Naturally this bore a close resemblance to what was the status quo in the community, but it would be a mistake to see them as one and the same. They perceived Walcha as a low crime area and the community members as generally supportive of the police. Nevertheless, they were aware that community members wanted to restrict the police in some areas. However, the police felt that there was support for the maintenance of order centred around norms of sobriety, protection of property and person and respect for authority. The community, as our findings illustrate, was a stable one and community members perceived urban patterns of behaviour as a threat to the stability of the community. Policing which fitted this pattern was seen as necessary and in need of support. the police framed their policing within a general framework that supported the community's perception of order, without having to compromise on their autonomy. An ideal policing situation for the police, which clearly contributed to their positive perception of the community and their work.

All the officers had served in other locales where crime was perceived to be much more serious than in Walcha, consequently they did not perceive crime in Walcha to be a problem. Like our respondents, they did feel that the situation could deteriorate and were particularly concerned about the youth in the town and the potential drug problem. There was a feeling that the community might not always be able to protect itself and it was their job to

try and prevent the developments that were taking place elsewhere from coming to Walcha. They saw vandalism, unruly behaviour, lack of respect for the police and drug use as signals of this happening. Therefore order maintenance was directed at the control of such developments. They felt that community members were generous in their support of the community, that it was a good place to raise a family and that the policing of Walcha should be aimed at supporting these characteristics of the community.

It was apparent that their concern about the drug problem was seen in terms of these characteristics of the community. In one sense the drug problem was seen as beyond the control of the police. As one officer replied somewhat despondently when asked if Walcha had a drug problem " I don't know of many towns that don't these days". The police saw their role as one of making the community aware of the potential problem and helping the community to retain those values and the characteristics that they saw as an insulator against drug use. The Blue Light Disco was but one example of this approach. The police were continuously highlighting the need to provide services for youth in a controlled environment. Order maintenance, not crime control, was seen as the solution.

Finally, police attitudes were clearly influenced by their perception that rural police work was significantly different to urban policing. It was not only the obvious difference in the level of crime that was noted (though our victimisation results suggest a reasonably high level of unrecorded crime), but the community response to the police and the role of the police that was seen as

having the major impact on policing. Personal relationships and the importance of community support were seen as vital to policing. It was not possible to retreat to other police for support for the work they were doing as they were the total police force. This meant that one needed experience in living in a rural community so as to obtain that degree of tact and sensitivity that they felt was so important to policing in a small community.

However, the police perceived limitations placed on them by their formal role as police officers in the community. They stressed the need to become involved in community affairs, though they felt that they should not get too close as this would restrict their law enforcement role. Though infrequently displayed, the police did see law enforcement as pivotal to their role as police office. It was this part of their role which set them apart from the rest of the community. The police then became part of the community but not in the community as such. They participated in community affairs but declined positions that might place them in conflict with their police role. They were friendly, but not too friendly, and their wives were continuously reminded that their husbands were police officers in a variety of ways. The wives frequently acted as informal police aides and both husband and wife were reminded that they were not permanent members of the community through the knowledge that promotion and/or transfer was always a possibility.

The police then played a significant role in community affairs and yet were set apart from the community. They were in a position of marginality and this is reflected in how the community contributes

indirectly to the order maintenance carried out by the police, rather than having a direct and formal input into community policing.

Community Attitudes Toward The Police

Nearly one fifth of our sample (19.4%) met the police very often/often, which indicates a reasonably high level of police citizen interaction. Observations of police citizen interaction indicated that it was cordial and friendly. It was apparent that there was a general understanding that police-community relations was a reciprocal process and that both sides welcomed the opportunity for talk. Each side obviously had different objectives, though for the majority informal policing practices were beneficial. The police were seen as a resource to be used in the community and not simply a law enforcement agency. Similarly, the police recognised that law enforcement constituted a minor part of their day to day routine.

Conflict, when it arose, particularly with the Aborigines, was in the different perspective each side had on law enforcement. The police saw it as the bottom line, one they were reluctant to engage in but crucial in their mind to their other tasks. The community while recognising the necessity for law enforcement, appeared to appreciate its lack of prominence as they felt it was reflective of their type of community. Law enforcement was evident of problems in the community and, consequently the less they were reminded of this police role the better. It is not that they did not want the police to enforce the law, but as our analysis of victimisation indicated

they were reluctant to report such incidences to the police. They appeared to prefer to consider the problem as not serious.

Though this would suggest a discrepancy between the police and community members on the role of the police, an overwhelming majority of our respondents (91.1%, 94.6% if don't knows are excluded) rated the local police as very good or good. One could hardly expect a higher response from a random sample of community members anywhere in Australia. Only two respondents rated them poor or very poor.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the unique characteristics of policing in Walcha. We reviewed the daily routines of policing in Walcha, examined the major roles of the police in the community and assessed community attitudes toward the police and policing. The outcome of this analysis is to highlight the distinctive nature of rural policing in one locale in New South Wales. Despite the organisation and training of police outside the community, and the mobility of police personnel, it was evident that the police in Walcha were influenced in their day to day routines by the community they served.

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CHAPTER 9 CONCLUSION

This chapter will briefly consider the theoretical, policy and practical lessons to be drawn from this study of 191 respondents in Walcha New South Wales and policing practices in the district.

Theoretical Implications

We have presented a very detailed, if not exhaustive, review of the literature on rural crime. From that review we conclude that

- (1) there has been little research on rural crime here or overseas.
- (2) the research that has taken place has generally replicated urban research.
- (3) the replication of urban research or the borrowing of criminological theory based on urban research has meant that the distinctive nature of rural locales has been ignored.
- (4) there are a number of myths about rural areas, particularly the arcadian perspective that has worked against studying rural crime and criminal justice issues.
- (5) public opinion research in particular has been atheoretical and derived from concerns developed from urban crime situations.
- (6) these developments have led to the imposition of urban based crime control programmes, such as neighbourhood watch, centralised policing strategies and practices, even the imparting of official news on crime, in an uncritical manner to rural locales.

To redress these developments we have sought to place the focus of the research on locale and community. Given the nature of this report we stated, but did not develop, this position. The point is that much of the research on public opinion notes the differences between areas and neighbourhoods, many of the questions which seek to test fear of crime, such as walking alone at night, imply that

locale is significant, while in terms of analysis it is given scant attention or relegated to a dependent variable.

We argue that research must explore the structuration¹ of public opinion and other criminological issues. By this we simply mean that we must seek to understand how social relations are structured across locales and time in terms of existing conditions. Our research has shown, particularly the findings on victimisation and policing practices that community conditions play an important part in how respondents located crime in their everyday experiences. What they meant by fear and concern about crime, what they felt to be the crime problem, how they perceived the police, etc., could only be properly understood in terms of the community we outlined in chapter 3. This is not to suggest that the world outside of Walcha did not intrude, it clearly did, but as we tried to point out that intrusion was mediated by conditions in Walcha.

We suggest that this study has highlighted the importance of locale in the analysis of criminological issues and that it forms a theoretical base for an area of research that has been up to now largely atheoretical. We hope to develop this further through research in other communities. This has already begun as one of the researchers has completed fieldwork in a rural English village and with a rural police force. Such an approach has both public policy and practical implications. We now turn to these issues in terms of

1. Giddens, 1984.

the findings of our research that focussed on locale as the central theoretical base of the study.

Public Policy

We intend to point out the most obvious implications of the research results for public policy on criminal justice issues and not review the whole issue of public policy. The most general conclusion we can come to from this research is that as locale is clearly a significant independent variable, strategies and practices in the criminal justice field must take this into account. This means that policies and programmes must be sensitive to the variations between locales and have an in built flexibility if they are to succeed. A number of examples of where this might take place are highlighted by our research findings.

(a) Policing

Since the fieldwork for this research was completed, the N.S.W. Police Force has begun to implement a more regionalised organisational structure and develop a form of community policing for the whole state. As part of that plan it is intended to get more police out and about in the community and one method used to achieve this was the removal of motor registration and licensing tasks from the police. Though the police in Walcha looked forward to this change at the time of the research, we felt that it would be detrimental to the existing close liaison between the police and the community. An assessment of the effect of this policy decision would

require a comparative study at a later date. Nevertheless, our study has shown that the motor registry on Tuesday and Thursday provided the police with extensive and valuable contact with the community. While the policy might be supported in the overall context of the state, in terms of specific locales, particularly those small locales that have very close police-community ties, it will, we predict, be a policy that will negate the goal of community policing.

(b) Crime Prevention

Another development in New South Wales in recent years has been the development of neighbourhood watch. Initially, this was tried in urban locales and due to the phenomenal response from residents in the various locales it is now being implemented around the state. The schemes are based in the first instance on experiences in urban locales which the literature and video presentations reflect. The presumption is made (not stated explicitly) that fear and concern about crime is essentially the same across locales, even if it's extent varies.

This is clearly not the case as illustrated by our findings. While it is possible to attain ratings of fear and concern to show how locales compare and differ, the qualitative differences are masked by such public opinion research. To simply ignore these differences, or have crude differentiations on the basis of urban-rural; inner city-suburbia; rural town-rural non town (though we have not found any detailed research that presents results even by this simple classification) will possibly lead to misinformation being

promulgated in particular locales. Unfortunately it may have the effect of increasing fear and concern about criminal justice issues that don't exist in the locale. It may also lead to target hardening and preventive behaviours that restrict interaction which could have a detrimental effect on communalism. A policy that led to that would surely be counterproductive.

This is not to suggest that neighbourhood watch schemes should not be implemented. The issue is one of implementing a scheme designed to reduce crime, give residents information about the official crime situation in their locale, etc., so that it achieves its aims. Our results indicate, and the police confirmed this, that there is a de facto neighbourhood watch in Walcha designed to cover the problems they experience. One example is theft from mailboxes. This is significant in the Walcha district as the postwoman also delivers groceries and other supplies. Some respondents indicated that they now inform the postwoman if they are away, ask her to leave valuables with a neighbour and they make an effort to clear their mail boxes quickly.

If the concept of neighbourhood watch is to succeed then it must be adapted to the locale. With a centralised police force this does create some difficulties, though it can be overcome by decentralising the development of neighbourhood watch to small locales, not simply on a regional basis. We do know that there is an awareness that locale is significant and there is a move to create rural watch, but such a development must be based on something more specific than a crude urban-rural dichotomy. The rural crime problem

differs by district. It is apparent, though our official classification of crime tends to hide the fact, that the nature and extent of crime, simply on the basis of opportunity, will differ from grazing country to wheat growing regions to dairy farms.

In the Walcha district for example spotlight shooting was a problem in the winter months and it requires a quite different form of watch than the theft of expensive farm machinery such as headers. Trespassing may be a problem in one area, because of the nature of the countryside, while in the others it may occur but not be a problem. We were struck by our respondents' response to problems they experienced which could loosely be termed offences of public order as being quite specific to their immediate locale and neighbours. Consequently a watch by whatever name you give it must address these problems. We know from accounts of neighbourhood watch schemes in urban areas, even if they have not affected the crime rate or reduced fear and concern (we don't wish to judge the efficacy of the schemes, but are only making a point that shows how neighbourhood watch can have positive results in other areas), have helped to bring neighbours more in contact with each other. In Walcha that does not appear to be necessary and so a watch is clearly to be directed to relevant criminal justice issues if it is to have positive results.

More research is needed into the phenomenon of public opinion in specific locales, we need more accurate assessment of the unofficial and official crime situation and we need to assess what contribution a watch can make to a specific locale. If we fail to do this, a

policy that on the face of it has credibility in the community at large, a policy that should work and a policy that could increase the level of debate on law and order in the community may actually have a negative impact. The lesson to be learned from our study is that the crime problem is not something that is obvious and can be inferred from commonsense/general knowledge, but a problem that makes sense only in the context of the community or locale. Fortunately, our respondents relied more on gossip than the media for specific information on crime in Walcha. How long that will last we don't know, but if locals look to information about crime from outside their community as the basis for action they could cause more problems than they cure.

Practical Implications of the Research

Closely linked to the issue of public policy, the practical consequences of this research are significant. In general terms the research has indicated that the crime problem is specific to locales. It has also indicated that police-community relations are close and any policy that might lead to a reduction in this should be avoided. In more specific terms the research has indicated

- (1) the need for locale based studies.
- (2) the need to direct research toward rural criminal justice issues. This has been neglected and that neglect may lead to developments in criminal justice policy that will positively work against these small rural locales.
- (3) the richness of data that flows from more open ended questioning of respondents. It has highlighted that public opinion research on criminal justice issues is not to be misconstrued as market research.

- (4) the need for a combination of research techniques, in order that a more comprehensive perspective is gained.
- (5) the need to develop techniques for surveying victimisation that account for the 'rural' type of victimisation, such as theft from mail boxes, trespassing and spotlight shooting.

Following on from this

- (6) there is a need to develop target hardening and preventive advice directed precisely at the 'problems' experienced by residents in particular locales. There was some evidence that the police were felt to be powerless, or have no ready solution, to some of the problems experienced. This was not a criticism of the police, but some respondents felt that their problems could not reasonably be expected to be the concern of the police, nevertheless, they were disruptive/disturbing to their lived experiences in the community.
- (7) that respondents did have a particular view of the police. What that view is has hardly been touched upon and if community policing is to be developed then what respondents consider to be the police role, not simply what they think of the police, should be investigated. We would expect that this varies by locale.
- (8) that most of the issues dealt with in this study could have been researched in more depth. This is always a problem with research, what to put in and what to leave out, but our approach has indicated that researching criminal justice issues requires in depth analysis. Because crime is so topical, our mass media is full of it and it does impinge on people's lifestyles, respondents tend to have no difficulty in responding to general questions. This may give a false picture as to the level of consensus/agreement if the research does not seek to locate the issues in terms of the respondent's own experiences.

As a final comment it is worthwhile pointing out that it is hoped that this research is only the start of a programme of research in rural criminal justice issues. A beginning has already been made, with one piece of fieldwork conducted in England which drew heavily from the work carried out for this study of Walcha and the work of Joanna Shapland and Jon Vagg at the Centre for Criminological Research at Oxford University. It is hoped to have that work completed next year, while at the same time develop further research projects. At the moment the issue of rural watch seems to be an

obvious area our study has highlighted as in need of research. It would provide a useful test of our locale thesis, while at the same time making a practical contribution to the issues of crime and community policing in rural locales.

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