





AIC Seminar: Proceedings No. 26  
ISSN 0813-7005

# **ARMED ROBBERY**

**Proceedings of a Seminar**

**Held 22-24 March 1988**

**Edited by**

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**Australian Institute of Criminology  
Canberra, ACT**

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Published and printed by the Australian Institute of Criminology,  
10-18 Colbee Court, Phillip, A.C.T.  
Australia, 2606. April 1989.

Publications resulting from seminars held by the Australian Institute of Criminology are issued in the series AIC Seminar. Proceedings. This replaces the former series Report on Training Project and Proceedings - Training Project.

The National Library of Australia catalogues this work as follows:

Armed robbery.

ISBN 0 642 14015 4.

1. Robbery - Australia - Congresses.
2. Robbery - Australia - Prevention - Congresses. I. Challinger, Dennis.  
II. Australian Institute of Criminology.  
(Series : AIC Seminar. Proceedings; no. 26).

364.1'552'0994

## CONTENTS

<b>OVERVIEW</b> Dennis Challinger	1
<b>OPENING ADDRESS</b> Duncan Chappell	9
<b>ARMED ROBBERY OVERSEAS: HIGHLIGHTS OF A CANADIAN STUDY</b> Thomas Gabor	13
<b>BANK ROBBERY IN AUSTRALIA</b> John Marsden	25
<b>100 CONVICTED ARMED ROBBERS IN MELBOURNE: MYTHS AND REALITY</b> Andros Kapardis	37
<b>ARMED ROBBERS - A DETECTIVE'S VIEW</b> Brendon Cole	49
<b>KEEPING ONE STEP AHEAD</b> Barry Weston	55
<b>PREVENTING ROBBERY</b> Thomas Gabor	59
<b>DID YOU READ ABOUT....? THE PUBLIC AND ROBBERY</b> Geoff Griffiths	71
<b>FEWER GUNS, FEWER ROBBERIES?</b> Len Hingley	77
<b>ROBBERS AT COURT</b> Ivan Potas	83

<b>THE SENTENCING PROCESS - SOME NOTES ON VICTIM INVOLVEMENT</b> Ray Whitrod	93
<b>PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF BANK HOLD-UPS</b> Marsha Leeman-Conley and Julie Crabtree	101
<b>ROBBERY, RESPONSES AND THE FUTURE</b> Bill MacRae	111
<b>LIST OF PARTICIPANTS</b>	119

## OVERVIEW

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Considering its contribution to the volume of crimes reported to Australian police, robbery attracts a disproportionate amount of public attention. This is mostly because the media usually ensure that robbery incidents are well broadcast with their elements of drama and violence.

To that extent, little has changed since the Australian Institute of Criminology held its last seminar on this topic in 1977. However, there have been some important changes since then, most notably growing public appreciation that a robbery, especially an armed robbery, can be damaging to the victim, and increasing appreciation by big business that vulnerable premises and staff need more secure protection. Those changes were reflected by speakers at the seminar, although the first presentations focussed on the phenomenon of robbery as reflected by official records of it.

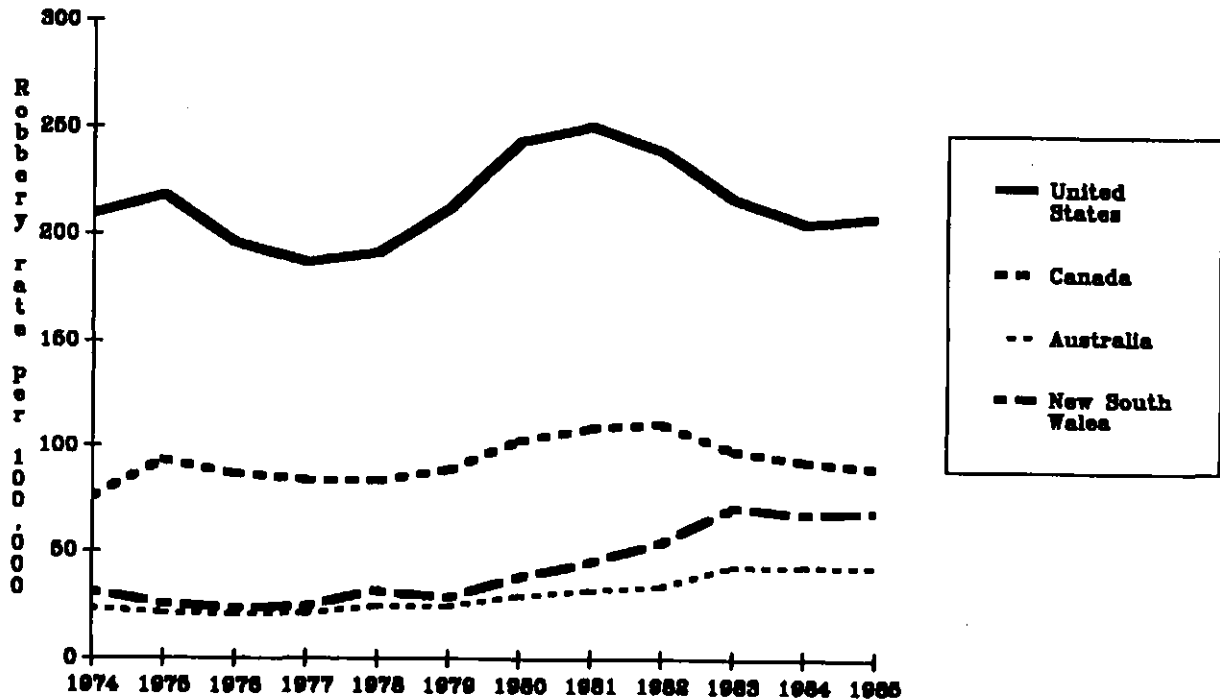
In his opening address to the seminar, Professor Duncan Chappell drew attention to the increases in robberies reported to the police over the last few years, and to the increase in bank robberies in particular. Notwithstanding the increased rates of offending, Australia still has fairly modest robbery rates when compared with those in other countries like the United States of America and Canada, and this is clearly shown in Figure 1. The situation in that last country was the subject of a presentation by Dr Thomas Gabor from Ottawa who described his comprehensive research into robbery. That included not only use of official statistics and police, court and prison files, but also interviews with victims, imprisoned offenders, and armed robbers who had apparently abandoned offending.

Dr Gabor emphasised the importance of seeing robbery in its social context, pointing out how factors such as demographic changes, the use of hard drugs and minority groups can all contribute to robbery. He then went on to describe how opportunity reduction and tougher penalties had led to a decrease in robberies in Montreal, in Quebec State, the site of his research.

Interestingly, that State has consistently had armed robbery rates more than twice the national rate - a situation not at all dissimilar from the Australian situation where New South Wales has consistently recorded many more robberies over the years. (Also apparent from Figure 1.)

Dr Gabor's research provided further findings about robbery that appeared to parallel the situation in Australia - as reflected in the recent

Figure 1  
TRENDS IN ARMED ROBBERY  
1974-85



Sources: Gabor, T., Baril M., Elie, D., LeBlanc, M. & Normandeau, A. 1987, *Armed Robbery: Cops, Robbers and Victims*, Charles C. Thomas, Springfield, Table 9, p. 24; Mukherjee, S.K., Walker, J.R., Psaila, T., Scandia, A., and Dagger, D., *The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra, Table 4, p. 15.

research report from the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research which analysed robbery incidents, and discussed the detection, prosecution and sentencing of offenders as well as describing their characteristics.

The Director of the Bureau, Dr Jeff Sutton, discussed this report in an oral presentation which has not been reproduced in these proceedings. The research was based primarily on a randomly selected sample of 537 offences of 'robbery' or 'demand money with menaces' reported to New South Wales police in 1983. That sample split 50:50 between robberies of commercial targets and personal and residential robberies, introducing for consideration the fact that not all robberies conform to the media's stereotypical bank robbery. Indeed, only 9 per cent of the sample comprised bank robberies, however banks were still the most frequently robbed commercial target.

The preponderance of robberies in banks has caused the banking industry to devote considerable resources to tackling that problem recently. Dr John Marsden from the Australian Bankers' Association outlined to the seminar the sorts of issues and approaches being considered by bankers. In particular, he introduced statistics from the ABA's database on armed attacks to which all banks provide information whether or not police are called to the incident.

Most Australians would probably not expect there to be bank robberies of which police have no knowledge, but the ABA database indicates this is not so. A recent case provides further exceptional evidence. In that, a man confessed to a bank robbery committed in 1978 but the police had no record of it. Eventually they reconstructed the crime through the bank's internal files (and the man was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment).

An important issue that emerges from this is the extent to which robberies from victims other than banks are also unreported, and therefore not included in analyses like those described by Dr Sutton. Notwithstanding that, the ABA database generates findings similar to those in the New South Wales Bureau's study. For instance, the ABA statistics indicate that lone offenders predominate and most attacks produce only modest gains for offenders.

In addition, Dr Marsden discussed preliminary analyses of the occurrence of armed attacks on banks with other social factors, including unemployment rates. Such attempts to produce models of the occurrence of robberies were to continue, according to Dr Marsden, in conjunction with the introduction of a formal strategy to reduce the incidence of armed robbery in banks.

Further statistical data about robbers emerged from a study of Victorian prisoners sentenced for robbery presented by Dr Andros Kapardis from La Trobe University. The main shortcoming of such a study is, as Dr Kapardis acknowledged, the fact that his sample of robbers could not be seen as representative of all robbers. Indeed, it could be said that the sample is only representative of incompetent and unskilled robbers, who had been not only apprehended but also convicted and imprisoned. They were described generally by Dr Kapardis to be young (under 25 years of age), with histories of property offending and showing little evidence of having planned their robberies.

This sort of description matched that, provided from his experience as a detective, by Chief Inspector Brendon Cole of the Victoria Police. Mr Cole vigorously questioned the popular view of some robbery offenders as folk heroes and categorised robbers as 'good', 'bad', 'stupid' or 'dangerous' by providing case-studies. Another police officer, Detective Senior Sergeant Kingsley Robinson from the South Australia Police, provided an example of the considerable skill and application sometimes needed by police officers to apprehend robbers. He described a particularly lengthy and sophisticated investigation spread over a

number of months but leading to the successful apprehension of a man involved in a number of robberies. Mr Robinson's contribution to the seminar is not reproduced in these proceedings.

Another speaker with great experience relating to robberies was Mr Barry Weston from the ANZ Bank who outlined the history and development of physical security devices to prevent armed robberies from Australian financial institutions. In particular, Mr Weston indicated that photo-surveillance cameras had been very 'successful' during the early 1970s, although at the same time false alarm calls to the police reached 'mammoth proportions'. He suggested that situation was caused by overstressed and sometimes badly designed equipment, poor maintenance and inadequate staff training.

All those factors have been addressed with new generation security equipment, including pop-up screens and bullet-proof glass. Pop-up screens, in particular, had been warmly greeted by bank employees and had attracted more media attention to bank robberies. The instances where bank robbers had been physically trapped by such screens allowed the media to publicise the positive benefits of installing them. The great grandmother who, while banking, was grabbed and threatened by a gunman when the screen popped-up in her local Queensland bank provided publicity of quite a different sort. That lady was most vocal in the media, condemning the screens and calling for their removal. That sort of negative experience, along with the difficulty of transacting confidential financial business with a teller behind a thick bullet-proof glass screen, reflect a commercial disadvantage in that customers may be themselves deterred from using banks equipped with them. That disadvantage of target-hardening was also mentioned by Dr Gabor in his discussion of preventive measures, his second paper to the seminar.

Somewhat alarmingly, Dr Gabor pointed out that research in Canada showed that the number of security measures in a bank was not related to the number of times it was robbed, and that a comparison of convenience stores which had or had not been robbed showed no differences with respect to the security hardware installed in them. More positively, he also referred to an American convenience store chain that had used the services of a convicted armed robber to develop a comprehensive preventive program. It incorporated the principles of surveillance, target-hardening, territoriality and reduction of possible financial gain for the robber.

Dr Gabor also made reference to restricting the availability of guns, a topic also discussed by Dr Marsden and by Mr Len Hingley of the Australian Bank Employees Union. While agreeing that firearm restriction was just one facet of an enormous problem, Mr Hingley pointed out it could be achieved 'immediately and thoroughly'. On an entirely different tack, Mr Hingley raised the issue of rehabilitation of imprisoned robbers, which he suggested could prevent further robberies in the future since at present many convicted robbers appeared to commit further robberies.

These were the 'professional' robbers referred to by Chief Inspector Cole, and generally agreed by other participants to be a recognised problem. One particularly bizarre example is provided by a 32-year-old man sentenced to 4 years for armed robbery in Victoria in 1987. He had committed that armed robbery 8 days after being released from prison for a similar crime, for which he had been sentenced to 6 years prison. And that earlier offence had been committed 3 months after he was released from prison from a 5 year sentence for an armed bank robbery.

That example leads to consideration (or criticism) of sentencing practice, and Mr Ivan Potas from the Australian Institute of Criminology discussed his research into the sentencing of armed robbers in New South Wales between 1978 and 1982. That research indicated that the most common sentence for 'robbery with major assault' was between 5 and 10 years, although 15 per cent of all those convicted for that offence had received non-custodial sentences. Notwithstanding that, Mr Potas suggested it was a misconception that courts were excessively lenient when sentencing robbers.

That particular proposition received some vigorous attention from participants (including Dr Marsden and Mr Hingley) whose opinion was that longer sentences were necessary. Their view has subsequently been effectively endorsed by the South Australian Attorney-General who in mid-1988 strongly encouraged the courts to deal rigorously with convicted robbers. Within a short period of time, the Crown appealed against a sentence of 15 years imposed on a robber and successfully had it increased to 20 years. Then sentences of 21 years (with no set minimum), 24 years (with a minimum of 21 years), and 26 years (with a 21.5 year minimum) were passed on multiple robbers. (Subsequently, the South Australian robbery rate appears to have significantly reduced but it would be hasty to suggest it is a direct response to these rigorous sentences.)

However, even long sentences such as these do not necessarily mean that offenders will be kept in prison for the prescribed length of time. Mr Potas pointed out that the real issue that needed to be addressed was the disparity between the sentence passed and actual time served in prison. Administrative actions, including early release schemes and use of remission, effectively eroded the sentences set by the courts and needed to be addressed if public confidence in the judicial system was to be maintained.

While the consequences of a robbery are often grave for offenders, they are always considerable for the victims. Dr Marsha Leeman-Conley from the Commonwealth Banking Corporation described that bank's 'Hold-Up Support Program' for staff following a discussion of the general people's responses to traumatic events. Most Australian banks and many other financial institutions now provide psychological support and counselling for employees who are involved in hold-ups. That indicates an awareness by employers that direct victims of hold-ups need professional assistance as well as understanding and support from their families and workmates.

Such assistance is to be applauded, but what of victims of personal robberies? All too often they are left to their own resources and in only two States do there currently exist victims organisations that can provide some support. Leading the way is South Australia and Mr Ray Whitrod from the Victims of Crime Service outlined that State's recent Victims of Crime Act which incorporates a declaration of victims rights.

That declaration specifically addresses the victim's need to be involved at appropriate stages of criminal proceedings, in particular to let the court know of the effects of the offence on the victim. Thus the South Australian legislation allows for victim impact statements to be considered by the court and an example of such a statement prepared by Ms Kate Hannaford of the Victims of Crime Service was presented to the seminar. It is important to note that the statement makes no suggestion with respect to sentence. It serves the very important end of acquainting the court in the future with the real, human consequences of the offence, thus requiring the court to think of more than just the offender at time of sentence.

Two other papers to the seminar made suggestions relating to the future. Mr Geoff Griffiths from the ANZ Banking Group outlined some dissatisfaction with past media coverage of robberies and argued for the ABA in particular to take an active role in trying to improve the quality and responsibility of media coverage of crime in general. And the practical problems with physical security in the future were further elaborated by Mr Bill MacRae also of the ANZ Banking Group.

Mr MacRae's personal view was that police were becoming less able to protect private property as a result of cut backs in government funding and increasing calls to false alarms. The rapidly growing private security industry was evidence of that, but that industry in Australia was basically unregulated, uncontrolled by government and employed many unqualified operatives. Large corporations looking to protect their own property were therefore likely to have to develop their own internal security, or police, force.

Not all participants agreed with Mr MacRae's scenario for the future, but that was partly a function of the different organisations that were represented at the seminar. Indeed, such a disparate group made it very difficult to reach unanimity on what needed to be done to deal with armed robbery. Despite that, at the last session of the seminar, participants were asked to consider a seminar statement which addressed a number of important issues.

These issues had been raised during the seminar and while they were certainly not the only important issues, they were all agreed by participants to be of concern.

Some dissatisfaction was expressed during the spirited discussion about these issues, at the lack of time for extended debate and the ill-preparedness of some participants to deal with them. Nevertheless, it is a

fact that majority agreement was reached with respect to all the issues listed hereunder. Those points for which disagreement was greatest are marked with asterisks.

It cannot be assumed that any particular seminar participant (or any particular organisation represented at the seminar) endorsed any or all of the particular issues that follow. Individual participants' views on each issue can only be established by speaking with them personally.

### **Gun control**

The seminar saw the following as minimum proposals:

- (a) Gun owners should be licensed.
- (b) Ammunition should only be sold by approved retailers to licensed gun owners.
- (c)\* Hand guns and automatic weapons should be banned.
- (d)\* The introduction of mandatory additional sentences for offenders using guns should be seriously considered.

### **The media**

- (a) Accurate information should be provided through formal channels to encourage responsible media coverage of robberies.
- (b) Details of amounts of money stolen, identity of individual victims, and robbers' techniques should not be broadcast by the media. Television coverage should not include gratuitous footage of the results of violence, invasive footage of victims of the offence, or provocative footage of piles of money.
- (c) The media should be encouraged to emphasise the trauma suffered by involved parties, and the lack of success of offenders when detected.
- (d) Generally the amount and type of violence portrayed in television programs, videos and movies should be reduced.

### **The justice system**

- (a)\* Efforts to increase the numbers of operational police to combat armed robbery should be continued.
- (b) As many convicted robbers have graduated through the juvenile justice system, continued efforts to improve that system should be made.
- (c) The use of bail for those charged with robbery should be the subject of careful scrutiny.

- (d) Efforts should be made to reduce delays in bringing robbery offenders to trial.
- (e) Rehabilitative programs should be implemented to assist drug-using robbers who wish to overcome their drug habits.

**Physical aspects**

- (a) All attempts to boost the clear-up rate for robbery should be encouraged.
- (b) Employees in robbery-vulnerable industries should receive comprehensive training in the use of physical security equipment and procedures. Management should closely adhere to industry guidelines relating to physical security.
- (c) Making robbery targets less attractive by reducing available amounts of cash, through mechanical and electronic devices, should be continued and publicly advertised.

**Victim services**

- (a) The United Nations Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power should be adopted by **all** state and federal governments.
- (b) Psychological support services should be made available to all armed robbery victims, especially employee-victims, on a voluntary, confidential basis.
- (c) Training and education should be provided for employees in robbery-vulnerable industries to help prepare them to deal with trauma and its attendant psychological problems. Training should also be provided for management staff to help them understand and support employee-victims. (Banks and businesses already offering such support were commended by the seminar.)
- (d) Adequate criminal injury compensation should be provided in all jurisdictions.

\*Issues for which seminar participants' disagreement was greatest.

## OPENING ADDRESS

Duncan Chappell  
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Welcome to this Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) seminar on 'Armed Robbery'. This is in fact the second seminar sponsored by the Institute on this important topic. Its precursor took place more than a decade ago in June 1977 - and each participant in today's seminar has been provided with a copy of the report which emerged from that gathering, entitled *Armed Robbery in Australia: Research Information, and Preventive Considerations* (1978).

In a foreword to that report David Biles, now the Deputy Director of this Institute, wrote

... by any objective standard the incidence of armed robbery in Australia has shown spectacular increase (sic) in the past five years.

Compared with other crimes such as breaking and entering and larceny in all its forms, the numerical incidence of armed robbery is comparatively trivial; and compared with white collar and corporate crime, armed robbery is not particularly financially ruinous to the nation. Yet armed robbery is widely perceived as totally abhorrent in a civilised community. It is understandable that it should be so, as the personal threat of death or injury motivated by monetary gain is doubly offensive (AIC 1978, p. i).

Regrettably, David Biles's description of armed robbery in Australia in 1977 remains equally applicable to this crime in 1988. For despite agreement among the participants at the earlier seminar on a number of recommendations for action to 'reduce the armed robbery problem in Australia', the incidence of this serious crime has continued to increase rather than diminish.

National uniform crime statistics relating to armed robbery have only been available since January 1985. These statistics show that over a two and a half year period (January 1985 - June 1987) the rate of armed robbery per 100,000 of the Australian population rose from 9.5 offences to 12.3 offences - or increased by about 30 per cent. During this period New South Wales consistently had the highest levels of armed robbery on a per capita basis, followed by Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland. Much lower rates of armed robbery were reported in the Northern Territory and ACT while, quite amazingly, Tasmania did not report a single occurrence of this crime throughout the period under review. This enviable situation may change, of course, if

Tasmania remains the only jurisdiction in the country which fails to implement uniform gun control laws flowing from the meeting in Canberra on 18 March 1988 of the Australian Police Ministers' Council.

These general statistics tend to shield from view some even more disturbing trends. For example, as the Australian Bankers' Association reports in their paper to this seminar, 'The ABA database on armed attacks shows a sharp increase in armed attacks in 1987' (Marsden 1988), and this Institute pointed out in *Trends and Issues* No. 10, *Firearms and violence in Australia* (1988), the number of bank robberies in Queensland has risen from 8 in 1980 to 45 in 1987.

Trends like these are by no means limited to Australia and a visiting expert on armed robbery, Dr Thomas Gabor, from the University of Ottawa in Canada, will speak about international developments in this field of crime.

To return to the 1977 seminar report, six of its nineteen recommendations concern methods of reducing armed robbery, each of which is couched in quite general terms. Summarised, they are:

First, the 1977 seminar recommended that greater use be made of current (1977) security systems, especially in relation to high risk areas and premises. It is doubtful whether there is much information about the extent to which this recommendation has been implemented nationally although some small businesses, following assertive leadership taken in this area by the North American based 7-Eleven chain of stores, have taken extensive measures to prevent armed robbery.

The second 1977 recommendation related to the use of security professionals in designing new buildings, or renovating old ones. Environmental design features have now become an accepted part of building programs in many parts of the world but their full impact in Australia has not, to my knowledge, been examined in any detail.

The third recommendation also related to environmental design, calling for a research and evaluation program to identify effective security measures against armed robbery. Major victim groups, like bankers, have introduced some measures and the result will be outlined during the course of this seminar.

The fourth recommendation called for the establishment of a 'national protective security library' which would gather and disseminate current information about methods of preventing armed robbery and other crimes. This recommendation has been implemented, at least indirectly, by the continuing growth in the protective security holdings of this Institute's J.V. Barry Memorial Library here in Canberra. In addition, the library's staff produce CINCH, the Australian Criminology Database, available publicly on-line through the AUSINET service. CINCH contains references to Australian information on all aspects of criminology. As part of a more concerted and intensive focus on crime prevention throughout its multi-faceted activities, the Institute is

publishing a new series of crime prevention booklets. The series, aimed at the general population, will further expand the information available to business groups and citizens at large about ways of minimising the risk of becoming a victim of crimes like armed robbery.

The fifth recommendation in 1977 related to the need to encourage more informed and responsible reporting on armed robbery by the media. This recommendation has also been taken up, in broader scope, by this Institute which has recently completed a research study of the way in which the media in this country reports crime. The study, conducted by Drs Peter Grabosky and Paul Wilson, is entitled *Justice and Journalism*, and is to be published by Pluto Press in 1989. It is a book which will attract widespread interest and attention.

The final recommendation made in 1977 addressed the need to educate 'individuals and organisations ... in robbery prevention methods generally'. It is not known whether or not this recommendation has been put into effect in Australia. Certainly, the general statistics already mentioned suggest that such education has been either deficient or ineffective, as has been the overall combined impact of the other recommendations. What went wrong? What can we do, more than a decade later, to remedy a worsening situation in regard to armed robbery? These are but two of many key questions which will be addressed by the distinguished group of experts on armed robbery gathered here today.

The first expert is Dr Thomas Gabor from the Department of Criminology at the University of Ottawa in Canada. Dr Gabor has a PhD in Sociology from Ohio State University. He is the senior author of a book entitled *Armed Robbery: Cops, Robbers and Victims*, published in 1987 by Charles C. Thomas in Springfield, Illinois. He is also the sole author of a book published by the University of Toronto Press in 1986 titled *The Prediction of Criminal Behaviour*. Let me say a special welcome to him en Français; - Bienvenue à Canberra, bienvenue à l'Institut de Criminologie, mes salutations à nos collègues d'Ottawa.

Dr Gabor may not predict what will happen to the behaviour of armed robbers in Australia in the future, but he is certainly going to tell us about what happened to the behaviour of armed robbers in the city of Montreal in la belle province of Quebec where he and colleagues from the University of Montreal conducted the research on which his book is based. The robbers all moved to British Columbia n'est-ce pas?!! Ladies and gentlemen, may I present Dr Thomas Gabor.

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## **ARMED ROBBERY OVERSEAS: HIGHLIGHTS OF A CANADIAN STUDY**

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### **THE NATURE OF ARMED ROBBERIES**

There are a number of aspects of armed robbery which are worthy of consideration:

- . trends over the last twenty-five to thirty years;
- . the nature and dynamics of the crime;
- . the motives and perspectives of offenders;
- . the role and reactions of victims; and
- . response of the police and judiciary to robbery incidents.

A comprehensive five-year study was conducted under the auspices of the International Center of Comparative Criminology in Montreal. The findings are summarised in a volume entitled, *Armed Robbery: Cops, Robbers and Victims* (Gabor et al. 1987). The data were drawn primarily from the two major urban centres in the Canadian province of Quebec - Montreal and Quebec City. The extent of funding poured into this study reflects the concern of the Quebec government about the armed robbery problem in that province. In fact, just as this project was getting underway, a provincial task force on armed robbery was completing its final report.

Compared to other Canadian regions the robbery problem in Quebec, which is primarily populated by French Canadians, is serious. Despite overall rates of violence being substantially lower than national rates, its armed robbery rates have been consistently more than twice the national rate. Montreal, Quebec's largest city, has an armed robbery rate that is more than five times that of the rest of Canada. Socioeconomic factors have contributed to the disproportionate involvement in armed robbery of groups like the French Canadians and black Americans, and this matter is discussed later in this paper. Although this is a sensitive issue, facing it is essential in any attempt to solve the problem.

Montreal, at least in the past, may well have been a world leader in the incidence of bank robbery. There have been years in which close to 1,000 banks were robbed - an average of about four per working day. It was not unusual for seven or eight bank robberies to occur on Thursdays

and Fridays. In the peak years of the 1970s, a typical branch was robbed once a year and some were victimised as often as six or seven times per year. Heavy artillery, such as submachine guns and sawn-off shotguns, had been used routinely. Some measures have been effective in diminishing this grave problem in Montreal and these are detailed later in this paper.

Trends in robbery in North America reveal that from 1962 to 1980, there was a four-fold increase in the per capita robbery rate in both Canada and the United States. There has been some decline in both countries since the early 1980s, but it is unlikely that the decline will continue to the level prevailing in the 1960s.

What led to the rather dramatic upsurge in robbery over the past twenty-five years? The trends in other crimes over the same years show that the increases in robbery did not occur in a social vacuum. In both Canada and the United States, other violent crimes have increased at about the same pace and the official rates of various property crimes have also risen, although not quite so dramatically (Brantingham 1984). Many explanations for the overall increases in crime are therefore probably applicable to armed robbery as well.

Sir Leon Radzinowicz of Cambridge University and Joan King (1977) have argued that increases in crime over the last few decades have been virtually world-wide. They allude to the effects of societal changes such as increasing urbanisation and modernisation. These changes can disrupt family and community life, lessen the controls that keep the young from engaging in crime, raise people's material expectations, and provide environments with greater criminal temptations and opportunities. The extent to which robbery today is an urban crime can be appreciated through a glimpse at the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Uniform Crime Reports (1985). There is a positive, linear relationship between the size of American cities and their robbery rates. As an example, cities of over one million people collectively have the highest rates, cities between a quarter of a million and a million people have the next highest rates, and this pattern continues through to the smallest cities and rural communities which have the lowest rates (Federal Bureau of Investigation 1985).

Another factor that has undoubtedly accounted for the general increases in crime, including robbery, is demographic change. The low birth rates during the depression and war years yielded a relatively small number of teenagers and young adults in the population during the 1950s. Beginning in 1946, there was a very sharp upturn in births in what has been called the 'baby boom'. The baby boom continued into the 1950s and resulted in a flooding of the population by young people in the 1960s and 1970s. Some demographers consider that this accounts for a substantial proportion of the increases in crime during the 1960s and 1970s; as well, they see the reversal of this trend as responsible for the stabilisation and even slight decline of crime in the 1980s (Sagi & Wellford 1968).

Another factor contributing to increases in robbery and other crimes in North America has been the more pervasive use of hard drugs over the last twenty-five years. Those interviewing addicted offenders have been struck by an extent of criminal activity that is mindboggling. Some addicts have confessed to committing thousands of predatory street crimes, such as muggings, in the span of a single year (Ball 1981).

Still another development that might account for the increases in robbery has been the changing social situation of groups particularly susceptible to this crime. In Canada, the French Canadian minority is significantly overrepresented in armed robbery. Although Quebec has only a quarter of Canada's population, 60 per cent of all armed robberies in Canada take place in this province. The black minority in the United States is likewise overrepresented in robbery, as well as in other major crime categories: blacks constitute about 67 per cent of all robbery suspects even though they form only 12 per cent of the United States population.

The overrepresentation of French Canadians and black Americans in armed robbery statistics can be understood in terms of their historic role in North American society. Many analogies can be drawn between the two groups: both were going through considerable upheaval during the 1960s; both have faced political oppression and exclusion from the economic elite; both have faced the humiliations accorded to those considered inferior in status; both have, in this century, experienced large-scale migrations from repressive and parochial rural communities to large, competitive urban centres.

In the 1960s the quiet revolution was going on in Quebec and the civil rights movement was in full gear in the United States. These movements allowed their members to become socially mobile to an extent they had never experienced and to penetrate the spheres of business, education, and the professions as never before. Many social and economic barriers were being removed, engendering the widespread belief that the time for French Canadians and black Americans had finally come. A large, unyielding underclass, however, has remained within both groups - an underclass that increasingly appears unable to extricate itself from the bottom of the social ladder. In many American urban ghettos, the unemployment rates of black youth are at 40 to 50 per cent. Drugs are widespread, educational opportunities poor, and a feeling of hopelessness is prevalent. The situation is almost as bad amongst lower class youth in French Canada.

These young people lack access to opportunities to make a living in a law-abiding way. They reside in areas where access to professional, organised criminal activity is limited. The disorganised slum in American cities leaves the ghetto youth with few criminal alternatives other than crude robberies that demand only primitive skills to execute and require no collaborators or contacts to unload stolen merchandise. Because of its simplicity, armed robbery is an ideal crime for individual unskilled persons who need cash quickly.

Is armed robbery a crudely executed crime? The 'Hollywood' image of robbery is one in which professional criminals plan their robberies to the last detail. Earlier investigators focused on the organisation of professional gangs. More recent studies suggest that the typical robber is anything but professional. Present-day robbers are portrayed as individuals who possess little sophistication in their methods, do little planning in preparation for their offences, and even commit crimes under the influence of drugs or alcohol. Today's robbers take little professional pride in their work and are unconcerned about the consequences of their actions.

In this five-year study police files on 1266 cases of armed robbery in Montreal and Quebec were examined and the evidence supported this view. The targets in Quebec were usually convenience stores and other small businesses. By far the most common type of weapon was a firearm of some sort. The age of suspects, as indicated by victims and witnesses, was usually under twenty-two years. No disguises were worn in three-quarters of the incidents studied. Almost two-thirds of the robberies brought the offender(s) less than \$500, the most typical amount stolen was \$100 and even these very modest profits often had to be shared. In over 85 per cent of incidents there were either one or two offenders. Finally, the most frequent means of escape was on foot, without the aid of a motor vehicle.

#### **The level of violence in armed robberies**

Robbery is ordinarily classified as a violent crime. It is usually defined legally as the use of force or threat of force to secure the property of another. The actual deployment of weapons, whether this means the discharging of firearms, pistol-whipping, or other blatant acts of intimidation with weapons, occurred in only about 8 per cent of the 1266 incidents examined. If jostling, punching, and the tying up of victims is also included, then about 30 per cent of the robberies involved physical force. Only 3 per cent of the cases caused injuries requiring medical care and only about 1.5 per cent of the incidents resulted in hospitalisation or death: those in this last category were more likely to be suspects than victims.

Violence is not merely a function of the offender's inclinations; the level of violence is also dependent on the reactions of victims and bystanders. Robberies are fluid, dynamic events in which understanding the interaction of all the parties is vital to make sense of the outcome. It has been found that the resistance of victims to the demands of the perpetrators, or the attempt of victims or other bystanders to otherwise obstruct them, increased the likelihood that violence would occur.

The robberies varied in their sophistication, violence, and profits, according to the nature of the target. Bank robberies tended to be the most sophisticated in terms of the weapons, escape vehicles, and disguises used. They also tended to yield the greatest profits and involved the least violence. At the other end of the spectrum were the convenience store and service station robberies as well as those targeting individuals

(muggings). These tended to be the least sophisticated, involved the crudest weapons, and provided modest profits.

It is paradoxical that robberies committed with inferior weapons, such as muggings where knives are used, have the highest incidence of violence. The use of crude weapons makes resistance by the victim more likely as they do not afford the perpetrator the same power as firearms. Bank robberies and muggings were found to be opposite types in terms of sophistication, violence, and profits, as well as in terms of the seriousness with which they were viewed by the police and prosecutors. The interests of the banks seem to take precedence over the welfare of those unfortunate enough to be mugged.

### **The offenders**

Interviews were held with thirty-nine convicted armed robbers, all but one of whom were serving sentences in the Montreal area. Some of these men had a large number of armed robbery convictions and others had only a few. Most were under thirty years of age, had no more than a secondary school education, and came from a blue-collar background. Many of them showed a high degree of residential mobility as adults. Their self-reported criminality was far in excess of that indicated by their files. Almost all the subjects mentioned that they had pauses in their criminal activities varying from several weeks to several years. They tended to attribute these periods of inactivity to the fact that they were working and were not seeing their friends as regularly.

The manner in which targets for armed robbery were selected was quite varied. Target selection could be based on chance, a tip from a reliable source, the individual's familiarity with a target, the amount of money thought to be there, and the availability of a good escape route. The amount of money was an important factor, but a number of subjects mentioned that the minimisation of risks was a principal goal. As a few indicated, a great deal of money would do them little good in prison. Finally, a few of the robbers did demonstrate a code of ethics in that they eliminated certain targets from consideration; namely, very small businesses in which the owners themselves were struggling to make a living.

Close to half the subjects either did no planning whatsoever or at most undertook about an hour of preparation. Some, however, did tend to prepare for their offences over several days or weeks. These preparations could consist of identifying a site, observing the target, obtaining arms and disguises, determining the roles of each participant, and planning the 'get-away'. The major emphasis seemed to be on the selection and surveillance of the site, and the escape.

At the other extreme were events in which offenders decided spontaneously to commit a robbery: efforts were restricted by the particular time and place, and were limited by the weapons and disguises they had at hand. Most of the robbers indicated that, just prior to the offence, they would observe the target for a few minutes to ensure there

were no police in the area and only a limited number of passers-by. Where two offenders were committing a commercial armed robbery, one usually collected the cash and the other controlled people at the scene. The driver of the 'get-away' vehicle does not generally have the same status as those executing the crime. The crime is usually concluded within one minute. Despite the heavy weapons sometimes used in Montreal robberies, the bulk of the subjects implied that one of the greatest fears was the possibility they would have to resort to violence.

There were three principal reactions following the robbery. Some experience feelings of relief, euphoria, and satisfaction. Others are nervous and ruminate about the mistakes they may have made. The more experienced tend to go home and relax. There are those who take additional precautions following the offence. As one subject related: 'I get rid of my clothes, take a shower, and go see my parole officer to create an alibi.' (Gabor et al. 1987, p. 62).

### **Motives**

What are some of the major motives mentioned by the subjects? Many indicated that armed robbery constitutes the fastest and most direct way of getting money. Burglary and fraud were seen as more complicated and less lucrative. The younger robbers particularly liked the thrills, status, and feelings of power afforded by the crime. The following statement supports this point:

When I have a gun in my hands nothing can stop me. It makes me feel important and strong. With a revolver you're somebody... (Gabor et al. 1987, p. 63).

Some of the factors which triggered the robberies were unemployment, the need to obtain drugs or other recreational needs, suggestions made by criminal associates, and exceptional circumstances such as provocation by an employer. The younger offenders were more likely to spend their profits purchasing drugs and alcohol, going to clubs, and taking trips, while those with more experience often used the money acquired from robberies to pay debts and take care of daily expenses.

Most of the subjects began their careers in crime committing burglaries, auto thefts, and drug trafficking before advancing to armed robbery although there were a few who began their criminal careers with armed robbery. The careers of the subjects ranged from a few weeks to many years, but persistent armed robbery cannot be understood by simply looking at the original motives.

After the initial success, the offender gains confidence and is encouraged by the ease with which money is obtained and by his ability to evade capture. Some mentioned that robbing becomes an entire lifestyle and that they are driven to commit the crime. Others believe that robbery simply becomes their profession; they develop a set of skills, so why change?

One good reason for changing is the stiff sentences meted out for robbery in Canada. Several respondents indicated that rather than developing an immunity to prison as they age, the fear of incarceration exercised a progressively greater deterrent effect after they had already served several sentences. They had tired of institutional life and knew that each successive sentence would be longer, whereas in their younger years they were less concerned about punishment.

Some leave armed robbery and take up other offences which carry lighter sentences and involve fewer dangers. They become disillusioned with armed robbery because the profits are not as great as they had imagined. A unique aspect of the armed robbery study was an examination of the factors prompting people to abandon a criminal career. A sample of seventeen armed robbers who had clean records for at least five years at liberty revealed that both negative and positive factors could contribute to the decision to leave a life of crime.

On the negative side, these men pointed to the problems and disappointments of a criminal lifestyle: problems with associates in dividing up booty; difficulties with rival gangs; the dangers of being informed on; the constant worry of eluding police; and the pain of incarceration. On the positive side, some indicated that educational and vocational skills learned in prison helped extricate them from a life of crime. Volunteers such as prison chaplains and groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous were also helpful. Finally, the development of stable intimate relationships helped some of them find fulfilment and steered them away from the influence of their former associates. There were four distinct types within the sample of thirty-nine robbers:

1. the chronic offender, who has a career of long duration, commits many other offences, is poorly prepared, and gains moderate amounts from his crime;
2. the professional, who has a long career and commits other offences, but is better prepared and makes larger profits;
3. the intensive type who has a very short career in which he commits poorly planned robberies in quick succession and his gains are very modest; and
4. the occasional offender, who also has a fairly short career in armed robbery, commits only a small number of robberies relative to other crimes and his planning tends to be perfunctory with minimal profits.

## **VICTIMS**

Interviews with the owners or employees of 182 small businesses in Montreal which had been robbed over a specified two-year period supported findings derived from police files and interviews with robbers. The victims reported that robbers usually worked alone or in pairs, were

quite young, tended to use firearms, rarely wore disguises, and emerged from the crime with modest profits. Victims confirmed that physical force is rarely used and in about half the incidents there were not even explicit threats.

A distinction is drawn between threats at two points: those issued at the outset of the robbery and those occurring at any other time during the incident. Direct threats were made at the outset of the robbery in 40 per cent of the cases. By far the most common first reaction of victims was immediate compliance with the wishes of the perpetrator(s), followed by shock and numbness. A refusal to obey the offender(s) was rare, especially when initial threats were issued.

There was some consistency in offenders' behaviour throughout an incident. If offenders made threats at the outset they were far more likely to continue to threaten as the incident progressed than if no initial threat was made. A refusal on the part of the victim to co-operate also increased the likelihood of threats during the event. In a quarter of the cases resistance occurred at some point during the robbery. Resistance is defined as a wholehearted attempt, by verbal, physical, or other means, to foil the crime.

Victims also showed remarkable consistency in their behaviour. Those who refused to obey the perpetrators at the outset resisted fully in all cases, whereas those acquiescing in the beginning rarely resisted. The offender's threats did have some effect as the probability of resistance increased, although the causal order is unclear: did threats tend to lead to resistance or resistance to threats?

Resistance was rarely based on sound logic; that is, a rational calculation of the odds on the part of the victim. Employees were more likely to resist than owners. In deciding whether or not to resist, victims did not take into account either the number of offenders or the number of witnesses, and even the type of weapon used had limited impact on their behaviour. What seemed to be most influential were the victim's feelings of anger, the presence of threats, and their prior experiences with robbery. Resistance was effective in that robbers were almost four times as likely to fail to leave the scene with some money in hand, although it did increase the likelihood of victim injuries sustained by a factor of ten.

Armed robbery may leave its victim with residual physical and emotional disorders, as well as personal difficulties. Two-thirds of the subjects experienced one or more of the following physical complaints after a robbery: chronic nervousness, insomnia, nightmares, headaches, loss or gain of appetite. Over 90 per cent of the respondents stated that the event shook them up emotionally. The most frequent complaints were a growing fear of hold-ups, a general distrust of others, greater aggressiveness on their part, moodiness, and depression. These emotional disorders tended to last longer than the physical complaints and both were more likely to occur when the victim had resisted. Almost a quarter of the respondents also mentioned that the experience with robbery

engendered a change in their lifestyle, led them to seek a different job, or produced other personal problems.

## **RESPONSE OF THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM**

In Canada, the penalties are stiff: robbery is punishable by life imprisonment. About 90 per cent of those convicted for robbery receive a prison sentence; therefore, the probability of a stiff response by the courts is quite high. The potential of these sentences to deter is to some extent dependent on the likelihood of achieving a conviction in a given case.

In Quebec, as in most of North America, the solution rate for robbery is about 20 per cent. Solution usually means that charges are laid against one suspect (not all) in a reported incident. Victimization surveys in both Canada and the United States indicate that only about half of all robberies are ever brought to the attention of the police (Solicitor General 1983). Therefore half never get a chance to be solved, thereby reducing the solution rate to 10 per cent. Consequently the chances of conviction for a typical robbery are substantially less than one in ten.

Only about one third of those captured are arrested on the day of the offence. For the 1266 cases examined, when arrests were made they occurred on average twenty-six days after the incident. As robbers usually succeed in leaving the scene with some cash and often use their booty to achieve short-term goals (e.g. buy drugs), then even some of those who were eventually caught may have already achieved a measure of success. Applying a very tight definition of failure - robberies in which perpetrators are caught and convicted without achieving even short-term goals - then the failure rate is extremely minuscule; maybe one in twenty or one in thirty. Psychological research on punishment reveals that if it is uncertain and preceded by a more immediate and tangible reinforcer (such as drugs), then the person is more likely to respond to this reinforcer than to the punishment (Watson & Tharp 1981). This principle applies to human beings in general, but particularly to the often impulsive people who commit robberies. The capacity to combat armed robbery through the punishments imposed by the criminal justice system therefore may be seriously limited.

Although the solution of cases is partly a function of good police and prosecutorial work, research indicates that this work is greatly enhanced by the public's assistance and co-operation. For example, in Montreal and Quebec City, the police respond to the scene of a typical armed robbery less than three minutes after receiving a call. The problem is that it takes almost twice as long for victims or witnesses to place the call after the incident than it does for the police to respond. People often call their spouses or employers before telephoning the police. Shortening the time that elapses between the incident and the arrival of the police requires victims and witnesses to call police first and quickly.

The Hollywood image of detective work, whereby highly intelligent sleuths slowly unearth and analyse clues until suspects are identified and located, is a distortion of the truth. People are either arrested in connection with another crime, denounced by other suspects, or captured through information furnished by victims or witnesses. Indeed, the more detailed the descriptions of the suspects given by victims and/or bystanders, the more likely it is that a case is solved.

The adversarial system of justice lends itself to certain practices. There was considerable evidence of plea-bargaining, and only eight of 515 defendants were tried in front of judge and jury. Over 80 per cent of the sample received a prison term and the average term was two and a half years.

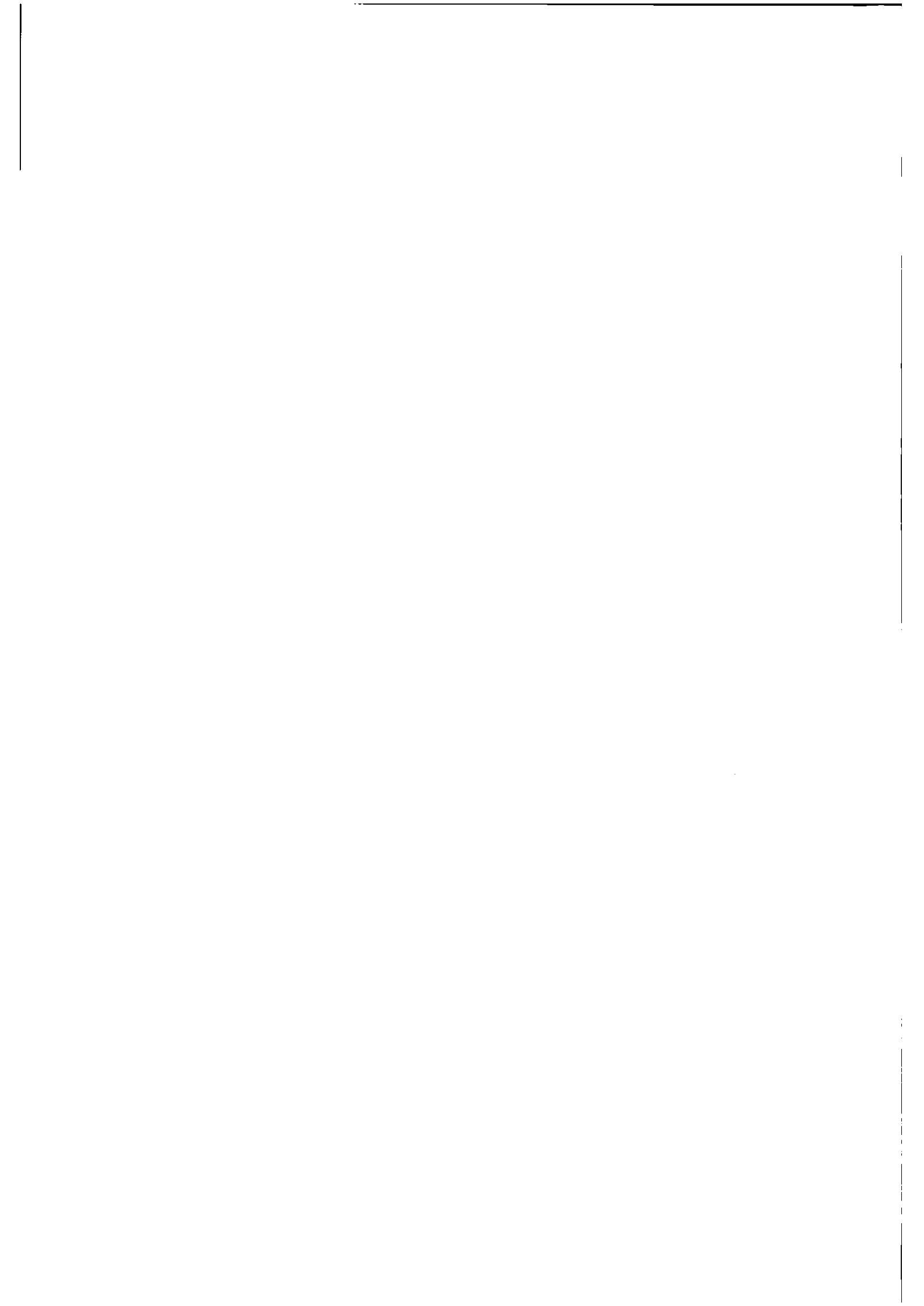
Bank robbers were more likely to be apprehended than those robbing other targets. They were likely to have more charges laid against them, to be detained before trial, and to receive longer prison sentences. Much of this differential treatment was due to the formation of the Montreal Police Bank Robbery Squad. This squad, in conjunction with a special prosecutorial unit, may have been partly responsible for the 50 per cent reduction in the number of bank robberies in the Montreal area over the past ten years.

The Bank Robbery Squad consists of experienced detectives who investigate bank robbery cases only. A special prosecutorial unit has focused on case preparation, attempting to lay the most serious charges possible in bank robbery cases. Both units have superior resources to those available in the investigation and prosecution of other crimes. They have succeeded in increasing the prison sentences received by bank robbers by about two years. Furthermore, solution rates have shot up to about 80 per cent.

At the same time, many banks in Montreal have expanded their security measures. They have added cameras, made physical design changes and reduced the accessible cash at their branches. The Canadian Banker's Association also introduced a reward program. The combination of opportunity reduction and tougher penalties has achieved its intended effect, although a number of gangs of armed robbers may have migrated to western Canada where more bank robberies have been occurring. This issue needs to be considered when discussing prevention. Is a focused program worthwhile if it merely forces offenders to alter their methods or to undertake their activities in a more hospitable environment? In other words, to what degree, can crime be suppressed?

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## **BANK ROBBERY IN AUSTRALIA**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In 1987 Australian banks were robbed more than 500 times. It was therefore a particularly bad year averaging two attacks each working day. Compared with the previous year, bank robberies increased by around 70 per cent in the calendar year 1987.

The Australian banking industry through the Australian Bankers' Association (ABA) has adopted a co-operative and increasingly comprehensive approach to address the problem of armed robbery.

This paper describes:

- . the structure of the banking industry in Australia;
- . the recent profile of bank robbery; and
- . the industry's approach to reduce the level and costs of bank robberies.

### **THE AUSTRALIAN BANKING INDUSTRY**

Australian banks comprise four groups:

- . the four major nationally-operating banks - Westpac, Commonwealth, ANZ and National Australia Bank - with large branch networks in city and country regions;
- . the State banks, with large branch networks in both city and country regions, generally confined within one State (although some State banks have established corporate and treasury operations in other States);
- . the new banks with varying degrees of foreign ownership, which have set up operations in Australia in recent years. These banks include those with retail networks in several States, while others specialise in wholesale banking and operate from one or two branches in several State capitals;
- . banks which have evolved from a building society base - in many cases these have quite sizeable branch networks in one or two

States. However, since they have not previously been banks, they did not initially meet existing standards for branch security.

By international standards, Australian banks have a huge number of branches.

With their extensive national networks and more than 4,000 of the industry's total six and a half thousand branches between them, the four major banks account for the greatest number of robberies. Consequently, the individual majors have significant internal security departments - even though Australian banks do not follow the American practice of having their own police/security force.

In contrast, many of the newer banks do not have a branch structure. Consequently, they present fewer targets or opportunities for robbery. (The incidence of attacks on Australian banks is around ten attacks per 100 branches per annum).

Table 1

NUMBER OF BRANCHES FOR EACH  
\$ BILLION WORTH OF DEPOSITS, 1987

	No. of branches
Australian Banks	29
Bank of America	8
Bank of Montreal	13
Societe General	12

Australian banks have at least double the number of branches per unit of money that the major banks overseas have. Consequently, Australian banks offer more than twice the number of targets per dollar of cash. In Australia the problem of robbery is not confined to a small number of branches where screens and other target-hardening measures can be installed cheaply and quickly. There are simply too many branches to do that.

**The Australian Bankers' Association**

Membership of the ABA includes twenty-eight of the thirty-five banks operating in Australia and represents 96 per cent or more of all bank assets; and a higher proportion of the branches.

Within the ABA structure there is:

- (a) the Security Operations Committee (SOC), which provides a forum for interchange of ideas and experience between banks, as well as for the co-operative pursuit of matters of common concern;
- (b) the Security Taskforce which was established in late 1987 to provide a more direct channel on security and fraud matters to the top management of member banks.

In addition, the ABA participates with police and the two banking unions (the ABEU and the CBOA) in the Standing Committee of Bank Security.

Reflecting the increase in the already high priority that Australian banks attach to reducing armed robbery, the Taskforce has approved the funding for the Bank Armed Robbery Reduction Strategy (BARRS) program - a comprehensive program aimed at reducing the trauma and direct costs of armed attacks on banks in Australia.

### **Armed attack reports**

Individual reports are prepared by member banks on each attack and they are forwarded to the ABA for inclusion in a database. The database is now extensive since it began in the 1970s. Data for recent years is computer readable.

The ABA defines an armed attack as any incident where an offender threatens and demands money. This is not the same as 'armed robbery', as defined by the police. For instance, the armed attack database includes attempted robbery with menace, that is, where an offender gets away with nothing. Given the arbitrariness of the distinctions that are sometimes made between 'armed robbery' and 'robbery with menace', the ABA believes it is preferable to define armed attacks broadly.

### **Recent trends in attacks**

The ABA database on armed attacks shows:

- a sharp increase in armed attacks in 1987 (Figure 1). A small part of this rise is due to the increased number of banking groups and branches in Australia. However, the same trend is evident on a constant sample basis.
- across the States, New South Wales accounts for 55 per cent of all attacks. Victoria is a poor second with a mere 23 per cent. These two major States matter most.
- across the banking groups, incidence of armed attacks varies systematically.

While the sharp upsurge in the number of attacks in 1983 affected all banks, the reduction in 1984 was limited to one particular banking group. This bank has maintained a low incidence of robberies (measured as the number of robberies per 100 branches). It has subsequently and successfully resisted the increasing trend of robberies in good years and bad. Did it achieve this because it got rid of all its old branches and put in new branches? Or did it hire more armed guards, or put in more

security screens than its banking competitors? These are questions for further research.

The improved performance in the following year (1985) was also quite uneven being due almost entirely to the reduction in attacks on the branches of two other banking groups.

Figure 1

### AUSTRALIAN BANK HOLD-UPS



Source: Australian Bankers' Association  
Armed Attack Statistics

#### A comment on cameras

The ABA database on armed attacks also provides insights into how banks and their staff respond to the security situation and how effectively they use security equipment.

The ABA Armed Attack database reveals that in 1987 cameras were activated about 90 per cent of the time and photographs were usable about 80 per cent of the time. (Whether the photographs prove good enough to identify and convict the offender is another question which has not been seriously investigated.)

The success with which cameras are activated is a matter of staff training and responsibility at staff level; the quality of photographs

depends on technology, placement and maintenance. Alarms are activated with about the same frequency as cameras. Certainly, neither is 100 per cent.

The above comments relate to 1987 only. There was something special about that year. It was a record year for armed attacks but the peak of robberies was not spread evenly over the whole year. The peak was very early in the year, basically the March quarter. The numbers of robberies declined as the year progressed.

The significance of the timing of this peak is that the data over the last few years shows that the frequency with which cameras were activated rose and fell in direct (but lagged) response to the number of robberies. For instance, 1983, was a bad year for bank robberies and the peak for robberies was relatively late in the year; so 1984 was a good year for camera usage. It was a good year for obtaining photographs, and a good year for alarms being used efficiently.

A year later (1985), the pressure was off, the number of attacks on banks had fallen further and security performance had dropped back; alarms were not activated as consistently and cameras were not being checked so frequently. In other words, there was an oscillation in the use of cameras, in the use of alarms and the success of photographs. It appears there is scope for banks to encourage security contractors, and bank staff to use security equipment more effectively at all times.

## **MODUS OPERANDI**

### **Time of attack**

In the peak years of 1983 and 1987, Friday was the peak day for such incidents to occur. The most common period of the day for an armed attack was between 2 p.m. and 4 p.m. The business lunch period of noon to 2 p.m. is generally avoided.

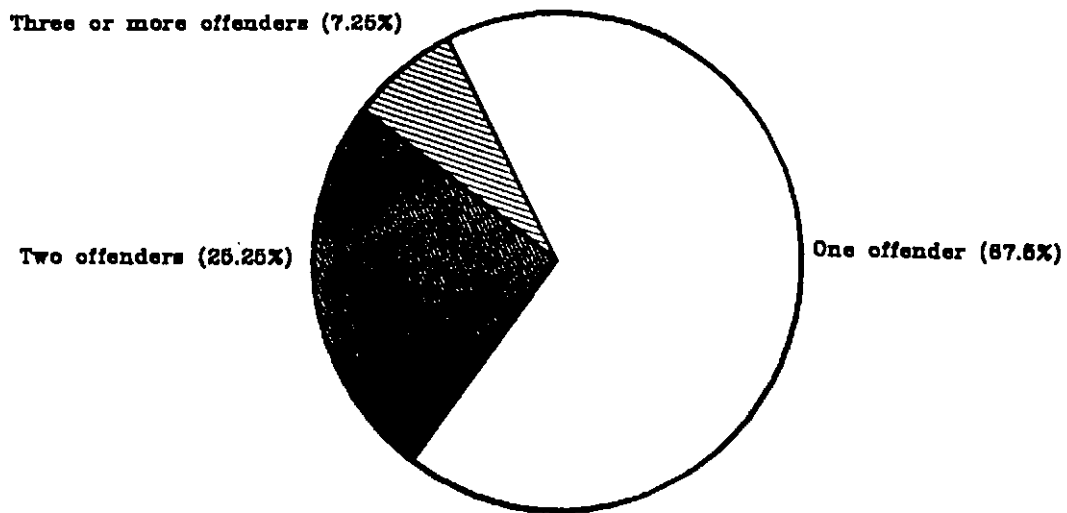
### **Offenders**

Armed attacks involving single offenders predominate (Figure 2) and the vast majority of such attacks result in losses of under \$10,000 (Figure 3). While a single offender robbery causes trauma for staff and customers as does a gang of offenders, it results in a much lower level of monetary losses to the banks.

### **Weapons used**

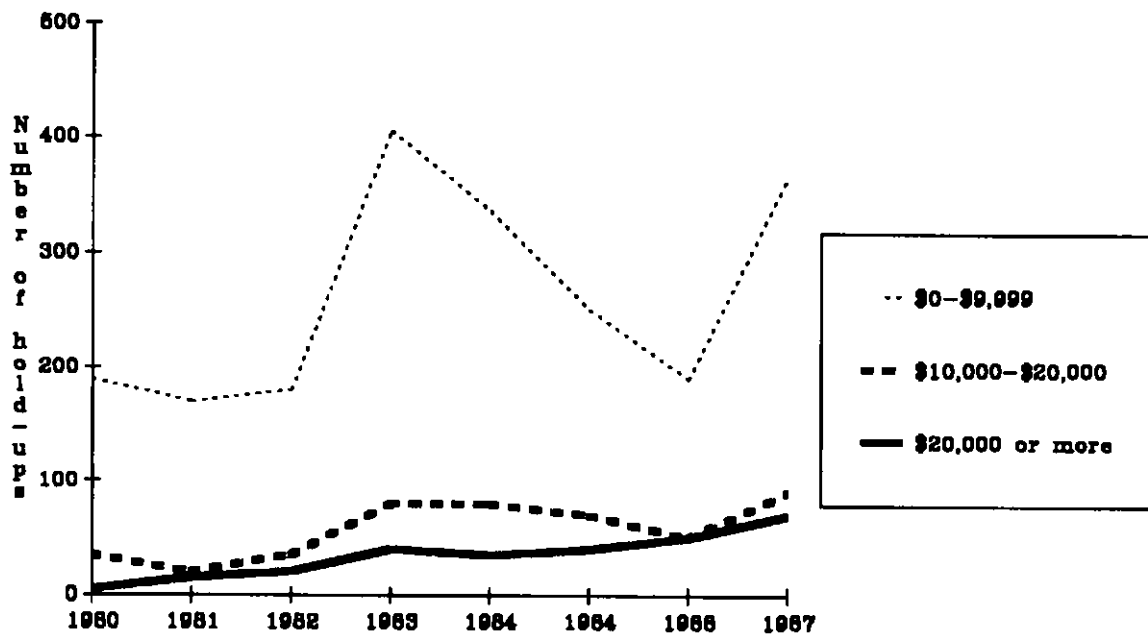
Firearms are the predominant weapons used in the armed attacks. In recent years long guns (rifles and shotguns) have been more commonly used than pistols - a reversal of the situation between 1982 and 1985 (Figure 4).

Figure 2  
 NUMBER OF OFFENDERS PER ARMED HOLD-UP  
 AUSTRALIA: 1987



Source: Australian Bankers' Association  
 Armed Attack Statistics

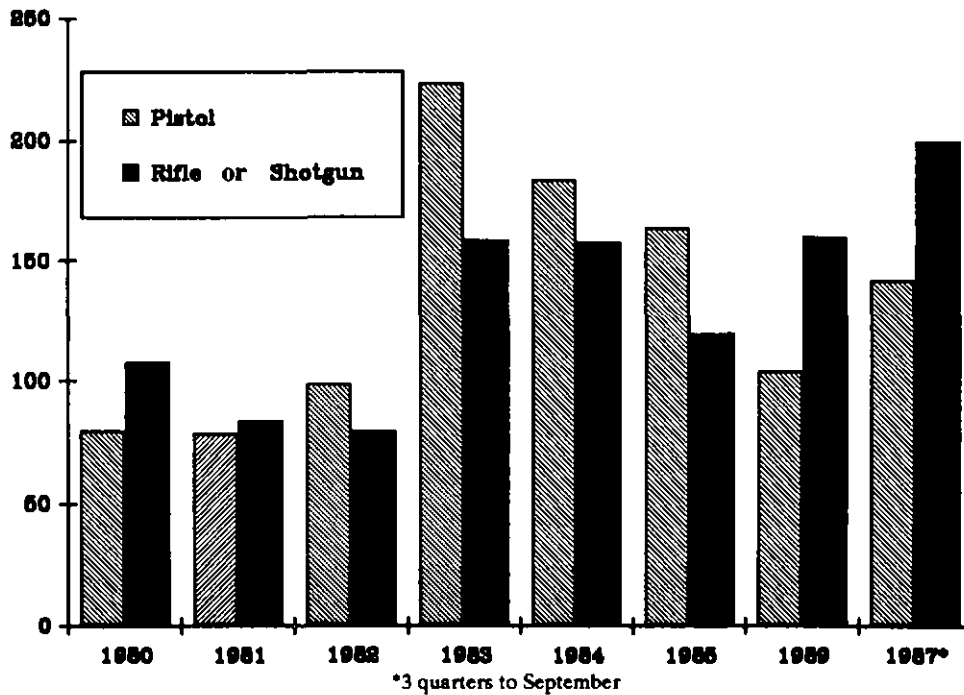
Figure 3  
 AMOUNT STOLEN: AUSTRALIA 1980-87



Source: Australian Bankers' Association  
 Armed Attack Statistics

Figure 4

### WEAPONS USED IN BANK ROBBERIES



Source: Australian Bankers' Association' Armed Attack Statistics

#### Location

There is a trend away from suburban attacks to country and inner city branches, towards robberies in city centres and in the country. The dominant number of armed attacks are still in the suburbs but the proportions have fallen from about 70 per cent to about 60 per cent in the last year.

In general, the incidence of robbery has been low in the country but it appears to be rising. The reasons for this are not known.

- . Is it due to target-hardening in suburban regions?
- . Has the installation of more pop-up screens in suburban branches made the country more attractive?
- . Is it still true that banks in, say, Tennant Creek are safer because the offender has nowhere to escape to?

#### Comment

Changing bank practices are likely to affect the pattern of robberies. For instance, following the 1987 second-tier wage negotiations, almost all welfare payments and wage and salary payments by government and large

employers will be made electronically through the direct entry system to customer accounts institutions. Virtually all these new payments are made fortnightly on Thursdays. Consequently, the peak loading of retail banking activity will become more extreme on Thursdays and Fridays. With greater customer activity, such changes imply that movements and holdings of cash on Wednesday afternoons and Thursday mornings are likely to be larger.

## **DETERMINANTS OF BANK ROBBERY**

The substantial cycle in the number of armed attacks on Australian banks in recent years is not satisfactorily explained. Suggested explanations are that:

1. there has been a cycle in the street price of heroin;
2. offenders in the peak year 1983 were in prison in 1984-86 but were released in 1987 to return to their trade;
3. demographic factors including the maturing of the baby boom led to the cycle;
4. economic factors such as changes in the level of unemployment, especially amongst young males, affect the willingness and need for offenders to commit robbery;
5. there has been a cycle in displacement to and from banks as banks have hardened their branches; the TABs in each state have hardened their shops; and so on.

Disentangling the role of these and other factors is beyond the scope of this preliminary paper. However, some initial observations can be made.

### **Heroin prices**

Information obtained from the NSW Police suggests that there has been little variation in the street price of heroin in Sydney during the 1980s. The price of \$300 a shot has been stable although the steady decline in the size and quality of the shot implied a rise in price. However, inflation offsets this. On balance, the real price appears little changed over the 1980s. Consequently, changes in the street price of heroin are, at most, a third order factor explaining the cycle in attacks.

### **Recycling of offenders**

This is a more compelling explanation. It is supported by anecdotes and reinforced by the four-year period between the 1983 and 1987 peaks - a period which coincides with the perception of three to four year terms generally awarded to armed robbery offenders. Questions unanswered by this explanation include: why was 1983 a peak? There must also be

doubts about the precise length of sentences awarded and served. Nonetheless, this explanation cannot be dismissed.

### **Demographic factors**

Armed robbery is dominated by males under 30 years. Beyond that age they tend to move on (Gabor et al. 1987). Consequently, armed robbery rates and other crime rates are influenced by the proportion of under 30 year-old males in the total population. This factor is important in explaining the trend growth of armed robbery and attacks on banks but does not satisfactorily explain the sharp cycle.

### **Economic factors**

The Australian economy experienced two recessions between 1980 and 1988, in 1982-83 and in 1986-87.

Although the downturn in 1982-83 was more severe, the downturn in 1986-87 was associated with a sustained squeeze on household disposable income. On a per capita basis, household disposable income fell by around 3 per cent in 1986-87. The economy bottomed in the June quarter 1983 and in June 1986. The fact that the 1987 peak occurred at the beginning of the year whereas the 1983 peak was later in the year appears to be consistent with the timing of the respective troughs.

Certainly, preliminary analysis comparing the number of armed attacks with unemployment rates is suggestive (Figure 5).

When the number of armed robberies is smoothed (using a three-quarter moving average) there is a close relationship between these two variables.

### **Displacement to and fro**

The suggested link between the economy and the level of armed attacks on banks must be examined in the context of the level of armed robbery generally. Analysis to date has not looked at this issue. If the economic explanation is important in explaining the rate of attacks on banks then it should also be the major factor explaining cyclical movements in the rate of armed robbery generally. These are items for the future agenda.

This very preliminary analysis does not take account of how the number of bank robberies compares with the total number of armed robberies. And it cannot take into account the current wave of target-hardening in which building societies, TABs, etc., have recently engaged.

A comprehensive model would need to build on all factors. It needs to look at the benefit/cost trade-off facing the criminal when robbing different institutions. The relevant cost to the robber is going to influence his choice as to where he goes. Development of such a model is an analytical question the ABA will pursue as one of several research projects in this area.

Figure 5

HOLD-UPS AND ECONOMIC CLIMATE: NSW



Sources: Australian Bankers' Association Armed Attack Statistics; Australian Bureau of Statistics Labor Force Data

**THE COST OF BANK ROBBERIES**

Bank robberies involve three distinct costs:

- . direct monetary losses;
- . cost of physical security device;
- . cost of trauma to customers, staff and the bank.

Physical security costs a great deal of money. Over the last three years around \$200 million has been spent by Australian banks on security including devices such as pop-up and fixed security screens. Installation of these devices costs up to \$100,000 in an average branch.

Apart from costs involved with physical security hardware, there are less easily quantifiable costs of trauma and distress to staff and to customers. Australian banks now spend increasing amounts on training staff and on psychological services for victims of trauma. Decreased productivity can also result from an armed attack with a resulting cost to employers. The impact on staff morale following an armed attack can be extreme and banks are most aware of ensuring the welfare of their staff.

The higher priority attached to reducing bank robbery compared to fraud, despite the higher dollar cost of fraud, indicates the concern to minimise trauma.

### **BANK ARMED ROBBERY REDUCTION STRATEGY (BARRS)**

Two factors suggest that a comprehensive set of strategies against armed robbery can succeed:

- . the Canadian experience where the robbery rate in Montreal dropped 40 per cent following a broad range of initiatives - a big drop which has been sustained;
- . systematic differences in the incidence of attacks among Australian banks suggests that they can learn from one another.

The objective of BARRS is to reduce the trend level of armed attacks on banks by 25 per cent or more on a sustained basis.

At the same time, the ABA wishes to preserve and maintain the existing low death, injury and trauma rates to reduce staff and customer anxiety; and give them a much higher degree of comfort.

The basic elements of BARRS include:

- . **a review of bail, sentencing and parole policy and practice to reduce the number of attacks committed by habitual offenders**

Too many bank robberies appear to be committed while the offender is on parole or bail.

The Bank Employees Union (ABEU) has correctly argued for tougher sentencing but it is hard to discuss sentencing in isolation. In the absence of other policy changes, there is not enough room in jails to increase prison terms for all offenders.

However, a sentencing policy that is more selective and based less on deterrence and more on incapacitation may be quite effective. Such a policy would remove the repeat and multiple offenders who do the most damage.

- . **a tightening of gun control policy across the Australian states to reduce gun availability and gun familiarity across the population**

The ABA has been active in the gun debate and talked to individual State governments and the press.

- . **a better understanding of offender behaviour and perspectives to develop effective preventative measures and an effective BARRS strategy generally**

- . The offender population appears to be non-homogeneous with marked differences in behaviour between, say, single offender attacks and gang attacks. A small number of offenders account for a high number of attacks.

- . **a security census of all 6000 bank branches in Australia**

- . **a review of cash-handling and cash levels in branches**

Cash-handling is possibly a little looser in Australia than it is in North America. Tighter controls and greater use of specialised 'commercial' tellers for large value deposits and withdrawals could reduce losses substantially and discourage potential robbers.

- . **a review of reward and information payment schemes**

These appear to be working reasonably well.

- . **the role of the media**

The treatment of armed robbery by the media is often too sensationalist and not helpful. There is the possibility of the media playing a more useful role in the future.

- . **the development and distribution of a robbery prevention kit for small business (especially small shopkeepers) to minimise the displacement effects of the BARRS strategy**

Displacement is a reality despite devoting more resources to reducing armed attacks. The banking industry cannot get rid of the problem completely. The problem will be elsewhere in the community. As an industry, Australian banks do not just want to push the problem off to, say, local newsagencies or pharmacies.

The small business robbery prevention kit is intended to reduce the extent of displacement and when developed will draw on the pioneering work done by the 7-11 stores in North America.

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# ONE HUNDRED CONVICTED ARMED ROBBERS IN MELBOURNE: MYTHS AND REALITY\*

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## INTRODUCTION

It is a cliché among criminologists that the media tend to report atypical crimes in a stereotypical fashion, and armed robbery is a case in point. Crimes against the person in Victoria in 1986-87 comprised only 1.6 per cent of major crimes reported to the police and robberies made up 36 per cent of those crimes against the person (Victoria Police 1987), yet hardly a day goes by without some report in the media of one or more hold-ups. While Hollywood, the media and some researchers (DeBaun 1958, Einstadter 1969, Letkeman 1973) portray armed robbery as 'principally the domain of professionals', characterised by 'meticulous planning' (Gabor et al. 1987, p. 25), a number of studies (Camp 1967, Feeney & Weir 1975, Walsh 1986, Gabor et al. 1987) have shown that the offence often involves a limited amount of planning, if any, and is carried out by offenders many of whom are not as rational as some would have us believe.

## STUDYING ARMED ROBBERS

The methods used to study robbery have included analysing information in official records on offence and/or offender and/or victim characteristics (e.g. Blankenberg & Feest 1977, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1977, Burgoyne 1979, Grabosky 1980) as well as interviews with offenders and/or victims (e.g. Camp 1967, Feeney & Weir 1975, Ball et al. 1978, Taylor 1982, Walsh 1986, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 1987, Gabor et al. 1987). Exclusive reliance on official records or interviews can yield useful but limited data. A combination of different methods is undoubtedly preferable (see Normandeau 1983 for a comprehensive study).

## THE PRESENT STUDY

The research described in this paper had two aims:

1. To collect a large amount of information about armed robberies and convicted armed robbers in Victoria.

\*The study reported in this paper was carried out with the assistance of Nick Antonopoulos and with the help of a research grant from the School of Social Sciences, La Trobe University.

2. To test some of the assumptions underlying the use of individual and general deterrence as a penal aim with armed robbers by focusing on how such offenders think about, plan (if at all), carry out and reflect upon their offending.

A sample of prisoners serving sentences for armed robbery was collected using a list of armed robbers provided by the Correctional Services Division of the Victorian Department of Community Services. A total of 120 prisoners were approached for the purpose of the study, (three refused to take part and seventeen were unavailable, for example, had been moved to another prison, were in court or sick) at the arranged time for the interview. The remaining 100 armed robbers cannot be said to be truly representative of the 267 prisoners convicted of robbery or extortion in Victorian prisons at the time. Even so, at least in terms of age and prior imprisonment, the sample used is representative of the robbery prisoner population at the time. Specifically 72 per cent of the robbers in the sample and in the 1983 prison census (Walker & Biles 1983) were under 20 years of age and 68 per cent and 67 per cent respectively had been previously imprisoned.

Fifty-two per cent of the sample were serving sentences of over eight years, 49 per cent had, at the time of interview, served equal to or less than two years and 66 per cent were due for release within two years from the time of the interview. Sixty-six per cent were aged 25 years or less at the time of the offence, 64 per cent were aged 16 or less when first convicted.

Data collection occurred between September 1981 and June 1981 through two different approaches. Structured interviews occurred during September-December using a questionnaire of 80 questions. Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes and centred on the particular robbery for which an offender had been sentenced. If an offender had been convicted of more than one robbery then he was interviewed concerning the one he remembered best.

Data from prison records (i.e. the classification and criminal records) for those 100 prisoners were collected in 1982 and 1983 and coded on a total of 187 variables (e.g. demographic factors, family background, education, personal characteristics, previous institutional record, prior criminal record, offence characteristic and experience of and attitudes to imprisonment).

## **LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY**

It is acknowledged that the interview data or the data from the official records containing offenders' reports to an interviewing officer might be biased. On the one hand, being asked to recall a past event in detail is subject to the limitations of human memory while, on the other, the social desirability factor (see Eiser 1980) cannot be completely eliminated. Fortunately, with only a few exceptions, the reliability of the offenders' accounts of their robberies was checked against newspaper accounts,

conveniently contained in the prison classification files, and was found to be high.

Undoubtedly, the greatest limitation was that the sample comprised armed robbers who had been arrested and convicted. Different findings might have emerged if a representative sample of armed robbers in general had been studied but that would be an almost impossible task. Even so, given the size of the present sample and the method used, and bearing in mind that no single study can hope to ask and answer all the required questions, it is hoped that the study reported will contribute to an understanding of armed robbery.

## **FINDINGS**

### **General background of convicted armed robbers in Victoria**

In the present study, 66 per cent of the offenders were aged 25 or less at the time of the offence compared to 70 per cent of all robbery offenders proceeded against by the Victoria Police in 1985-86. This is in accord with overseas research. The United States Department of Justice (1985) reports that 65 per cent of all robbery arrestees were under 25 years of age and Gabor et al. (1987) report that 86.6 per cent of the suspects in their Canadian study were aged 25 or less.

Twenty-nine per cent came from broken families and an almost equal proportion of the sample (28 per cent) were themselves separated/divorced, while 18 per cent were married and 31 per cent had children. Slightly over one-third (35 per cent) had five or more siblings but one-fifth had no contact with their family. The vast majority (78 per cent) had left school at or before the age of 15 with 91 per cent dropping out of school by 16. As might be expected, therefore, like most of their fathers, 75 per cent possessed no employment skills with one-third having worked only as labourers; half could neither read nor write English well, by their own admission. One-fifth were of ethnic background (i.e. immigrants not from the United Kingdom, Canada, Ireland or New Zealand) most of whom came to Australia in their teens.

Over half (54 per cent) reported having taken illegal drugs, 39 per cent had injected such drugs and 30 per cent reported a serious alcohol problem. About one-third (34 per cent) had had a very serious accident and 38 per cent had had hepatitis.

Eighty per cent and 51 per cent of the Victorian armed robbers had tattoos and body-marks respectively while 30 per cent had both. This compares well with Walsh's research (1986) in England which reports that most of 69 robbers were tattooed on at least hands and arms.

In the present study 14 per cent reported having consulted a psychiatrist comparing well with Gunn and Gristwood (1976) who reported a high prevalence of early family problems or mental illness in a group of convicted English robbers.

### **Past interaction with the criminal justice system**

The sample had had extensive involvement with the criminal justice system. More specifically, two-thirds were aged 16 or less when first convicted of a criminal offence, 20 per cent had been wards of state, 72 per cent had been incarcerated after their first conviction and 62 per cent were reconvicted within a year after their first conviction, 71 per cent had been to Youth Training Centres, 59 per cent had served a prison sentence before, 38 per cent had been to prison interstate while 42 per cent had been to prison more than twice before.

The 100 offenders had been convicted of 1,822 crimes, with 31 per cent having eleven to twenty convictions, 21 per cent twenty-one to forty and 10 per cent over forty convictions. Their recidivism is largely explained by the fact that most of them graduated to armed robbery from burglary (*see also* Walsh 1986) and the 20 per cent who had a serious drug problem tend to be criminally very active (Ball et al. 1981). This confirms similar findings reported by Burgoyne (1979) and, more recently, by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1987).

Given their frequency of incarceration and lengthy criminal careers, it comes as no surprise to find that 58 per cent had in fact escaped from custodial institutions, 27 per cent had enemies in prison and needed to be protected from them and two-thirds had been in custody awaiting trial. It is worth noting here that 79 per cent of those who had been bailed had not absconded (58 per cent of those in custody awaiting trial were on remand for up to six months).

### **Committing armed robberies**

When the offenders were asked who had encouraged them to commit the offence for which they had been convicted, 29 per cent of them mentioned friends and 3.5 per cent blamed media reports for their crime. Further, it was found that 45 per cent of the offenders' families were 'disappointed/shocked/could not believe it', 9 per cent had been disowned by their parents as a result of committing the crime and in only 3 per cent did the family approve.

These last findings differ from those of Walsh (1986) who found that 41 per cent of his sample of English robbers had learnt about robbery through relatives and friends and 5.8 per cent through contacts made in the criminal justice system. Walsh also found that 43 per cent had been drawn into their last robbery through a relative or close friend and, finally, that 28 per cent had been influenced by television, films or video.

It was found that the average armed robber has learned that large amounts of money can and are rapidly obtained, they expect such high 'rewards' and very quickly spend the lot, always complaining that what they netted was not quite enough. This is in accord with Walsh (1986) who further states 'There is no conception of working and saving and gradually gathering enough to be able to afford a coveted object' (Walsh

1986, pp. 156-7). So, why do they rob? In accordance with Feeney and Weir (1975), Burgoyne (1979) and NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics Research (1987), the majority (65 per cent) in the present study gave money as the motive.

Armed robberies in the present study were distributed across a wide range of settings with banks accounting for 30 per cent, TABs 13 per cent, residences 7 per cent, take-away food stores 7 per cent, retail stores 5 per cent, taxis 5 per cent, payrolls, building societies, hotels and petrol stations 4 per cent each and pharmacies 2 per cent. The sample therefore contained a disproportionate number of bank robbers. Nearly 84 per cent of the robbers stole cash and 5 per cent drugs. 'Lucrative' targets (i.e. banks, TABs, building societies, payrolls) were significantly more likely to be raided by sole offenders and by pairs of offenders than by gangs (i.e. groups of three or more) who raided 'less lucrative' targets (e.g. milk bars, service stations, etc.). As would have been expected those 'hitting' 'lucrative' targets were significantly more likely to get more than \$1,000. A post office was thought to be the easiest target to 'hit' (27 per cent), followed by a businessman with money on the way to the bank (13 per cent), a corner shop (11 per cent) and a TAB (8 per cent). The vast majority (93 per cent) considered armed robbery an easy crime to commit when security is lax and getting away is easy.

While Walsh (1986, p. 108) found that 'The typical way for all robbers to choose their victim on their last offence was by knowledge, acquired through employment, residence-watching or gossip', Gabor et al. (1987, p. 57) state that 'often the selection of a target is based purely on chance', and 'At other times ... on information or tip'. In this study 7 per cent of the armed robberies were perpetrated on the spur of the moment and, in 17.2 per cent less than five minutes passed between the idea to commit the offence and actually doing it. An hour passed in 11.5 per cent of cases, six hours in 10.3 per cent, twenty-four hours in 17.2 per cent, three days in 23 per cent, one week in 11.5 per cent and, finally, over a week in 9.3 per cent. In other words, 46 per cent of the robberies were committed within six hours, and 63 per cent within twenty-four hours.

Given the high proportion of robberies committed within a short period of time, it comes as no surprise to find that in 23 per cent there was no planning. Observations were made in 30 per cent of the cases and the more offenders involved the more likely it was that observations would be made. Another offence (e.g. stealing a car to be used in the get-away) was committed as part of the preparation of the robbery in 24 per cent of the cases. Approximately one-in-five (19 per cent), had a lawyer in mind and members of gangs were more likely than others to have selected a lawyer; while 17 per cent had made provisions for bail before committing the offence, (pairs of offenders were more likely than others to have done so). Interestingly enough, no relationship could be found between an offender's making observations and/or committing another offence and/or having a lawyer in mind and/or making provisions for bail, suggesting the presence of only 20 per cent who were 'professional robbers' among those studied (*see also* Conklin 1972, pp. 63-8). Despite the fact that the majority of offenders had done very little or no planning

at all, 54 per cent of them, especially loners and pairs, considered that the planning for the offence was adequate. Lack of planning was also found by Feeney and Weir (1975) in over half of the armed robbers they interviewed.

The present study found 4 per cent of the offences involved 'unarmed threat'. Of the cases in which weapons were used, one weapon was used in 54.3 per cent, two in 36 per cent, three in 7.6 per cent and more than three weapons were used in 2.1 per cent of the cases. Firearms were used in 66 per cent of the robberies studied and shots were fired in 26 per cent of those incidents. While the majority of pairs (84 per cent) and gangs of three or more (80 per cent) used firearms, less of the loners (73 per cent) did so. Whether shots were fired, however, was related to whether or not a gang of three or more was involved (in 42 per cent of such cases); loners were the least likely (17 per cent) to use their firearms. Burgoyne (1979) found less instances of shots being fired but this is to be expected given the differences in the cases used by Burgoyne and in the present study. It is probably related to the greater use of firearms in robberies in Victoria in recent years as well as perhaps to robbery offenders' greater readiness to fire their weapons to intimidate the victim and/or to make good the threat and/or to ensure their escape. Given the current debate on the availability of guns, it is worth noting that 41 per cent of the offenders bought the firearms used in the robberies on the black market while 23 per cent borrowed them, 17 per cent stole them and 19 per cent of the sample had a shooter's licence.

In 82 per cent of the robberies in the present study the victims sustained no physical injury, 3 per cent suffered bruising or other minor injury, 8 per cent had injuries that required medical attention, 4 per cent cuts/gashes/stabs and 2 per cent fractures. A victim was four times more likely to be injured if a gang of three was involved rather than a lone offender - a not-so-surprising finding given the tendency for gangs to operate after hours and not to attack 'lucrative' targets and, in the case of gangs of three, to be more likely than others to have been drinking prior to committing the robbery, to use firearms and to fire them. Gangs seem to opt for targets (e.g. small shop) where victims are more likely to resist because they are ordered to part with their own money rather than that of employers, and given the presence of both alcohol and loaded firearms and, perhaps, a felt need by some gang members 'to gain a reputation for courage and violence', as Conklin (1972) put it, the finding that a victim is most likely to be injured if a gang of three is involved, is to be expected.

Burgoyne's (1979) Victorian study found that 80 per cent of victims had no recorded physical injury, while about 7 per cent had recorded serious injuries involving hospitalisation or permanent damage. He found a higher level of recidivism where there was some degree of physical injury to the victim. More specifically, those who had physically injured their victim were more likely to be convicted of violent offences following release.

Physical injury is, of course, only part of the story. In his South Australian research Grabosky notes 'whilst it may be reassuring to

observe that the majority of all robbery incidents (approximately 75 per cent) involve no physical injury to the victim, it should nevertheless be noted that victims of robbery, even if uninjured in a physical sense, may suffer psychological after-effects as a result of the victimization' (1980, p. 33).

Loners and pairs were more likely than others to think about getting arrested and about getting convicted when planning the offence but gangs of three or more were more likely than others to have considered their chances of getting caught as high. While loners or gangs of three were more likely than others to expect to go straight for less than six months when released from prison, it was pairs of offenders more than others who expected to commit armed robbery again when released from prison. Loners and pairs were significantly more likely than others to consider their sentence harsh and, perhaps not surprisingly, gangs of three or more were more prepared than others to commit armed robbery again even if the risk of arrest and conviction were greater than last time. Interestingly enough, those who expected to commit the same offence again even if the risks were greater tended to have been involved in robberies in which the victim was injured.

Less than half (46.5 per cent) of the robbers thought about their chances of being arrested when planning the offence and 64 per cent of those thought their chances were high. Forty per cent thought about getting convicted and, of those who did, the majority (88 per cent) nevertheless thought that they would be acquitted. The latter finding is of interest in view of the fact that Supreme and County Court statistics reveal that 98 per cent of those appearing at the Supreme Court in 1978 and 90 per cent in 1979 charged with robbery and blackmail were convicted, while for the County Court the corresponding figures were 85 per cent in 1978 and 89 per cent in 1979. The high conviction rate is partly explained by the high percentage of robbery offenders who plead guilty - 48 per cent in the present study.

### **Alcohol**

The present study found that 43 per cent of the offenders had been drinking prior to committing the offence. This finding is not surprising in view of the fact that 30 per cent of them admitted to having alcohol problems, 19 per cent to having lost a job because of their alcohol problem, 36 per cent had been involved in fights while drunk and 30 per cent had been convicted of drink driving.

Sole offenders were less likely than those with one or more accomplices to have been drinking prior to the offence, offenders aged 18-20 were more likely than older ones to have been drinking prior to the offence and those who did their own planning were significantly less likely to have been drinking prior to the offence than those who did no planning or relied on others doing it.

Burgoyne (1979, pp. 60-6) reported that 45 per cent of his robbers were reported to have been under the influence of alcohol at the time of

their offence. He also found that a greater proportion of those who used alcohol at the time of the offence were more likely to have further convictions within five years of release than those who did not (69 per cent and 52 per cent respectively).

### **Drugs**

The present study found that 12 per cent of the offenders admitted to having been under the influence of drugs at the time of the offence. This finding is not so surprising as 54 per cent of the sample admitted having taken illegal drugs, 6 per cent had lost a job because of their drug addiction, 20 per cent acknowledged having a drug problem, 16 per cent had been arrested for a drug offence and 5.5 per cent had received treatment for drugs.

Further support for the increasing involvement of drugs in robberies is to be found in the 1986 *Annual Report* of the Victoria Police which shows a considerable increase over the year in robberies at service stations (+103 per cent) and shops (+59 per cent). 'These offences are being committed late at night, or in the early hours of the morning mostly by drug users' (Victoria Police 1986, pp. 32-3). As might be expected, the present study also found that if the motive for the armed robbery was to obtain drugs, the offence was more likely to be committed within six hours of the offender conceiving the idea.

### **How offenders felt prior to, during and after the robbery**

As far as the present study is concerned, the stereotype of the armed robber as a cool operator is invalid because half of them were nervous/scared/worried about the way to 'hit' their target but in accordance with their London counterparts described by Ball et al. (1978), only 20 per cent actually felt so during the commission of the offence. As expected, a significant proportion (45.5 per cent) felt 'high/happy' when getting away from the scene of the crime. Famous American bank robber Willie Sutton wrote in his autobiography 'I was more alive while I was inside a bank robbing it, than at any other time in my life' (Ball et al. 1978, p. 183).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The study reported in this paper was an attempt to increase our knowledge of armed robbery, regarding both offence and offender characteristics and their interaction. Without ignoring the limitations of the method employed, the study found a significant involvement of both alcohol and drugs, that the time period between deciding to and actually carrying out the robbery is related to the offender's motive, the number of offenders involved and degree of planning. Banks were the most frequent target for this sample of imprisoned robbers, and gangs of over 3 offenders tend to 'hit' 'less lucrative' targets. As expected, cash is the type of property most commonly stolen, with 42 per cent of the offenders concerned stealing less than \$3,000.

Over half (57 per cent) of the robberies were committed during office hours while Saturdays and Sundays were 'unpopular'. Loners, pairs and gangs of offenders, each comprised approximately one-third of the sample. Sole offenders were more likely than others to have done their own planning and not to have been drinking prior to the offence. A victim was four times less likely to be injured by a robber acting alone than by a gang of three who were more likely than others to have been drinking just before the offence.

Considering his sentence harsh did not seem to be related to whether or not an offender expected to commit armed robbery again but was related to whether or not he expected to go straight upon release. Given the nature of the sample, only 20 'professional' robbers were identified by the study. A significant 46 per cent of the robberies were committed within six hours. When justifying a relatively long term of imprisonment in the name of deterrence, judges might like to note that 53.5 per cent of the robbers did not think about their chances of getting arrested when planning the offence, 53 per cent did not consider sentences harsh enough to deter them from committing armed robbery again, while two-thirds would commit armed robbery again even if they knew there would be a greater chance than last time of their getting caught and convicted. Interestingly, robbers seemed to have an unrealistic belief that, if tried for robbery, they would be acquitted.

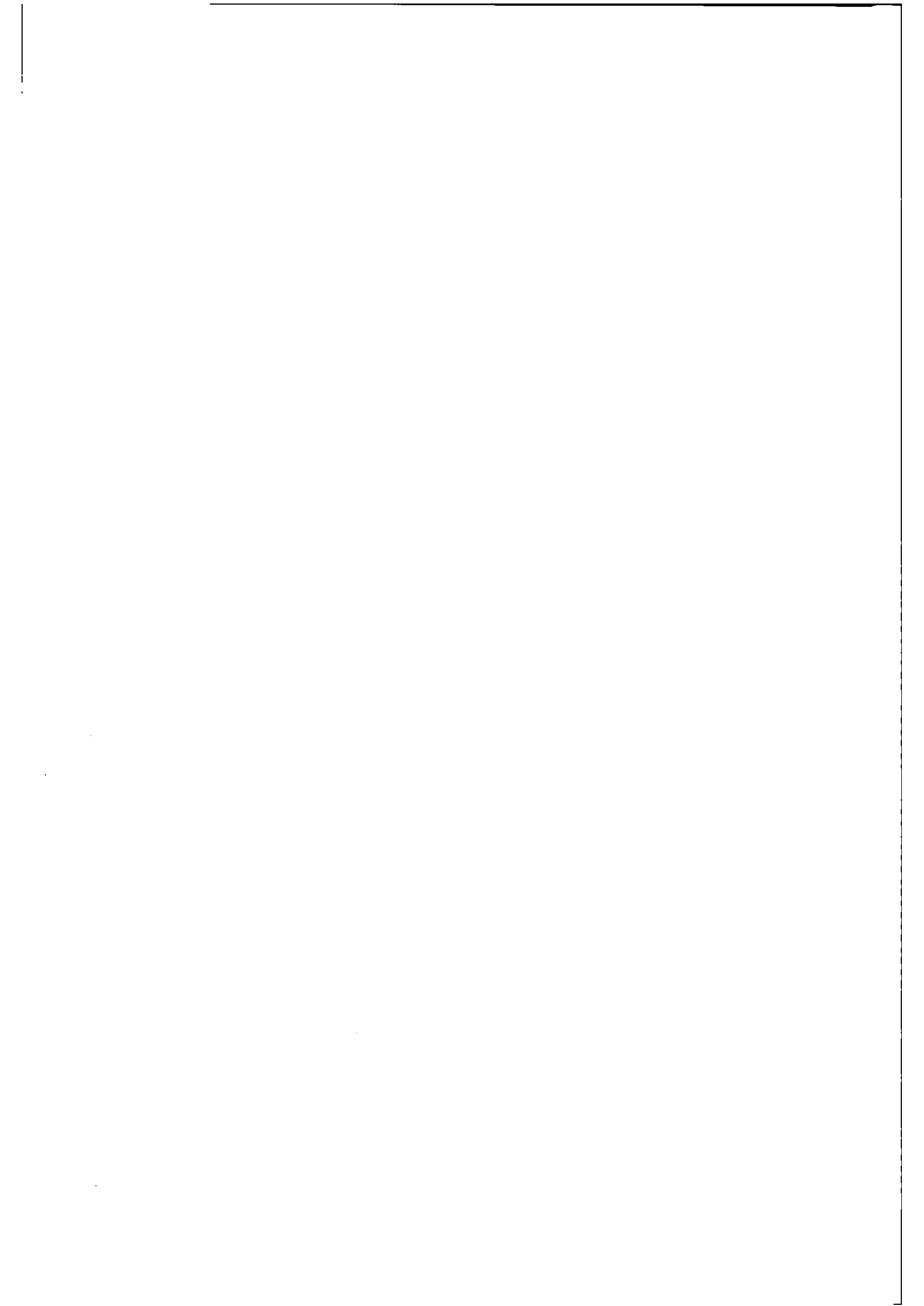
It seems, then, that the imprisoned armed robbers studied do not fit the public stereotype of the meticulous planner and cool operator. The data suggest an increasing use of firearms (especially shotguns) and, possibly also, an increasing readiness to use them. It was comforting to find that in 81.5 per cent of the robberies examined the victims sustained no physical injury.

In conclusion, the imprisoned armed robbers in Victoria are a heterogenous population whose robberies, in the main, appear to be clumsy and low-yield exploits - a far-cry from the public stereotype of armed robbers - and among whom trust in each other would seem to be a rare commodity. Given such offenders' criminal careers, it would seem that dealing effectively with juvenile delinquency as well as with the problem of alcohol and drugs, rather than just harsher penalties, would be one way to reduce, or at least to contain, armed robbery rates. Harsher penalties on recidivist and/or violent armed robbers could well deter a few but would certainly keep offenders out of circulation for a significant period of time. Such long sentences would also serve the purpose of denunciation and show society's strong disapproval of such acts.

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## **ARMED ROBBERS - A DETECTIVE'S VIEW**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Armed robbery is not a new phenomenon. History reveals that some famous, or perhaps more appropriately infamous, persons were merely armed robbers. For example, Robin Hood - if he ever lived - used a gang armed with bows, arrows, swords and cudgels to remove money and valuables from their rightful owners. There are further illustrations of the romanticising of robbers, such as Dick Turpin, or Ned Kelly. The reality is that these three were all robbers and all were caught.

### **ARMED ROBBERY IN VICTORIA**

In Victoria, armed robbery began to be of major concern in about 1969-70, when it was noticed that the incidence of armed robbery using firearms was increasing and armed robbers, often disguised, were becoming difficult to identify and apprehend. The Victoria Police adopted various strategies to combat the problem. In May 1971 the Armed Robbery Squad was established and in its first year of operation, 159 offences were recorded. The strength of the Squad has been steadily increased from thirteen to thirty personnel and now comprises one detective inspector, two detective senior sergeants, seven detective sergeants and twenty men. This increase has been necessitated due to two major factors: firstly, the general increase in armed robbery offences; and secondly, the need for professional expertise in the gaining of evidence to put before the court.

The increases in armed robbery are startling as the following figures show:

Table 1  
Armed Robberies in Victoria  
1976-87

Year	No. of Armed Robberies
1976	248
1977	432
1978	473
1979	543
1980	607
1981	558
1982	575
1983-84	769
1984-85	666
1985-86	713
1986-87	824

Table 2  
Number of Armed Robberies by Category in Victoria  
A comparison: 1985-86, 1986-87, 1987-88

	1985-86	1986-87	1987-88
Banks	67	129	86
Payrolls	22	24	8
TABs	10	30	17
Credit Societies	43	42	33
Chemists	45	32	21
Shops	137	161	162
Milk Bars	75	50	54
Service Station	137	114	95
Post Office	4	7	5
Dwelling	50	46	36
Hotel/Motel	18	25	31
Street	84	95	83
Others	24	69	45
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>713</b>	<b>824</b>	<b>676</b>

During the period 1985-1986 to 1986-1987 there has been an overall increase of 15.6 per cent in armed robberies. The major differences have been a significant increase in robberies of banks and TABs, but a decrease in service station and milk bar robberies. The trend for drug users to turn from the small business premises to banks and TABs was borne out by explanations of arrested persons.

In 1985-86 the money and stolen property from all armed robberies amounted to \$4,877,504. This of course does not include the cost to the community in providing help for victims, the investigation expenses, and the court and legal costs. For example, there were 326 victims requesting crimes compensation in 1986-87.

Shots were fired in twenty of the armed robberies and severe violence was used in another nineteen instances. The 1987-88 statistics show a dramatic decrease (18 per cent overall) in many areas of armed robbery. The explanations offered by detectives are that many targets have been 'hardened', and many armed robbers are currently in jail.

## **TYPES OF ARMED ROBBER**

What type of person commits armed robbery? From a detective's point of view robbers are more commonly thought of as the good, the bad, the stupid or the dangerous.

The research of convicted armed robbers conducted by Dr Kapardis is most relevant, but police have the advantage of being able to follow the progress of the armed robber, speak with him and on occasions, covertly observe him for periods of time. Examples of these types of robber follow.

Some of these matters are still under inquiry or have not yet reached conclusion at trial, and so cases are referred to by codename.

### **Profile A - The Good**

During a period of thirteen months an offender codenamed 'The Easterner' committed a number of armed robberies in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. From security photographs and witnesses' descriptions it was apparent that this man progressed from being 'fairly nervous' to 'overly confident'. For example, in one of his first robberies he was hesitant and lacked forceful aggression, but some months later at Christmas he was so confident, that on leaving the premises after relieving it of cash, he wished the staff and customers 'Merry Christmas'.

A small breakthrough after twelve months resulted in surveillance being mounted on a suspect. He lived in a flat in a quiet suburban area, did not work, and possessed an expensive but old-model imported motor car. He was a keen punter and played cards, losing heavily when gambling. When visited by police he was calm and appeared open and friendly. A few days after the police contact 'The Easterner' struck again.

A rapid raid by police followed which resulted in this person being apprehended. When arrested, the proceeds of the last armed robbery were found, together with the working tools used.

The suspect was charged with eighteen counts of armed robbery on banks - the largest number of this type of offence any single person has committed or been charged with in Victoria. This man was from a middle-class background, and was married with two children but separated from his wife. He was living in a de facto relationship with his new family and did not assist in any meaningful way with maintenance of either family. His associates in crime had been recruited to steal the getaway car for some robberies. He paid his associates small amounts for their activities, ranging from \$500 to \$1,000. His planning was erratic: on a payroll robbery he was seen using his own car for surveillance on three days, and when queried about his presence he gave a logical explanation and was not seen there again, even though the payroll was the subject of armed robbery the next week.

He had come under the notice of police previously for bankcard fraud and had been jailed for three months. He had lived at various addresses which were within a few miles of the premises attacked and knew the area. He had been a customer at a number of the banks he raided and had used these legitimate occasions to assess the defences of the bank.

When going to commit the offence, he sometimes walked down fairly busy streets fully hooded and openly carrying his sawn-off shotgun with apparent impunity. Another habit was to leave the bank walking to his vehicle before driving off. On one occasion he was with an accomplice and correctly parked the car by reversing into a car park. Both he and the accomplice had balaclavas on but rolled to the top of the head to look like beanies. When two policemen were observed entering the target bank, he merely waited until they left and a few minutes later carried out the robbery. The total takings by this offender were approximately \$600,000, most of which appears to have been lost gambling.

It is difficult to detect this type of criminal: his family-man background, low profile, and the fact that he was a polite neighbour and non-associate of criminals did not make him an obvious suspect.

### Profile B - The Bad

The youngest person to be charged with armed robbery in Victoria was 10 years old. One evening, he walked into a milk bar in the western suburbs of Melbourne and threatened the proprietor with a knife whilst demanding money. He had no disguise, no plan and was known to live locally: he was apprehended almost at once.

The oldest man to be charged with armed robbery was a 61-year-old, code-named 'Grandpa Harry'. He started his career in the late 1960s and was fairly successful for a time. After nine years in prison, he commenced a spree of robberies in which banks and credit societies were

the targets. His method of operation was without guile, and he was readily identified. He would enter the target without disguise except for his collar turned up. He was polite, but his trade mark was the size of his handgun, a very large .44 magnum revolver, and he used his own car. When apprehended he was charged with robbery of six banks and two credit agencies. He blamed his return to armed robbery on feeling insecure in the community. After a long sojourn in prison, his friends were either dead or not contactable and the world around him had changed dramatically. He had become institutionalised and needed the security of the disciplined, organised society which can be found in gaol.

#### Profile C - The Stupid

Ray was a 30-year-old man, married with no children. His wife tried to keep him under control but both were inclined to drink somewhat more than was good for them. A series of armed robberies took place around the Port Melbourne area in 1983 on TAB premises. Ray was arrested and as he was armed with a toy pistol, he was charged only with robbery. His earnings were minimal and were used to bet at another TAB. His method was simple: after a few drinks at a pub he would pick up a tip on the horses, go to a TAB and hold it up, and then go directly to another TAB and invest the money on the 'tip'. In 1984 after receiving a bond for his previous escapades Ray was captured following two further attacks using a real pistol.

#### Profile D - The Dangerous

A two-man team called Darren and George commenced a series of armed robberies on banks in the northern suburbs of Melbourne. George always carried a sawn-off shotgun and Darren a .22 fully automatic rifle with a fifty shot banana magazine. Each attack was violent and noisy, with a spray of shots being fired over the heads of victims. The likelihood of serious injury or even death was becoming a very real possibility, which caused grave concern to police. The suspects were identified and an operation mounted to arrest them took place in an outer Melbourne suburb. The interception took place at a smart motel, following an attempt by each offender to exchange shots with the police, and arrests were made only after each offender had been shot. Darren complimented police on their expertise at arrest and showed no remorse for his exploits: indeed, he boasted that when he returned to society he would get better and expressed the desire to become famous as a feared armed robber. Detectives believe his threats. His co-offender tried a running gun battle with police but later claimed he would only use his weapon when there was a possibility of apprehension. These young men came from hard-working, honest backgrounds and did not have a background of criminal involvement.

There are other persons in the dangerous category such as a female who, during an attempted robbery, fired a shotgun at the proprietor of her target. At that time she was on bail for attempted murder. Another case involved a male person who held up a credit union

in Coburg and after being handed the money shot the proprietor in the chest, saying that he may have been able to identify him.

## **CONCLUSION**

Armed robbery is a high impact, high profile crime, and in the criminal sub-culture, armed robbers are considered elite. It may be possible to predict what can happen when various persons are involved in armed robbery; but it is difficult to predict who will be the robber as they can be many types. Most armed robbers have only one thing in common, and that is the aim of obtaining significant amounts of money in a very short period of time. Terror from the threat of violence is the weapon of the armed robber and when firearms are produced, a potentially fatal situation develops. When the armed robber feels threatened or his escape appears to be cut off, then bodily injury to victims may be the outcome. In order to reduce armed robbery a number of matters need to be addressed: these include target-hardening; realistic sentencing; responsible reporting by the media; and sensible laws to govern the conduct of police investigators.

## **KEEPING ONE STEP AHEAD**

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Armed robbery became a factor in the life of Australian financial institutions during the late 1960s. The incident which triggered awareness of the danger of armed robbery was the killing of Margaret Pavarno at the Mont Albert branch of the Victorian TAB. An assessment of physical and technical preparedness caused many to believe that there were serious short-comings in Australia's ability to face the future. The use, and not the threat of weapons, was something that many executives in financial institutions were unprepared for, and many did not respond to this phenomenon adequately. To their credit, the Victorian TAB immediately took up the challenge and embarked upon a program of armed robbery protection which is still active today.

The growth of armed robbery appeared to be a direct result of whatever breakdown was occurring in social structures world-wide. Prior to the 1960s, it took a reasonably skilled criminal with the right equipment and a very good knowledge of his subject, to enter a financial institution, defeat the alarm system and open the physical container, whether it be a safe or a vault, without destroying the contents.

Suddenly, however, society was faced with the emergence of a crime which required little skill other than the acquisition of a weapon and the ability to terrify a group of law-abiding people, most of whom had never been menaced to such a degree before and whose reactions were unpredictable.

An analysis of operational aspects reveals that following limited planning, armed robbery comprises the following four elements:

1. the bandit's need to declare his intent;
2. the bandit's need to achieve and maintain control of those within the financial institution (obviously by menace);
3. the bandit's need to obtain the money; and
4. the bandit's need to make good his escape.

Historically, the alarm systems in financial institutions usually consisted of vault and/or safe alarms with very few systems specifically designed to be used in the case of armed robbery. There was an urgent need to research the problem and to install equipment and procedures to deter and detect the bandit and hopefully at the same time, to protect staff.

The United States had experienced similar problems, and in some respects had found ways and means around them. Investigation carried out in the United States together with advice received from many law enforcement agencies, equipment suppliers and banks, led the ANZ Banking Group to introduce into Australia photo surveillance systems triggered by the latest armed robbery activation systems.

In 1969 photo surveillance cameras started to be installed in financial institutions including TABs. For the first time branch alarm systems were upgraded to incorporate the day/night method of operation. Staff were trained in procedures and it was emphasised that the design of all activation devices had to minimise any possible retaliation by the criminal.

During the period 1969-75 thousands of financial institution branches in this country received varying upgrades in their armed robbery security. The success of the photo surveillance camera became an established fact. Without the emotion engendered in a hold-up victim, photo surveillance coldly spelled out to the trained observer a clinical description of an offender. The photograph overcame the problem of variance in descriptions provided by witnesses and it provided all the state police departments with a photograph of an offender which could be used immediately to launch an investigation.

Cameras became a fact of life in financial institutions but the communications links for the branch alarm systems needed technical upgrades. The false alarm rate reached mammoth proportions mainly due to the inadequacy of equipment to discriminate between genuine and false signals.

During the early 1970s it became fashionable to blame the Telecom line for any false alarm that couldn't be adequately explained when, in fact, the problem was the inability of the system to cope with the demands being put on it, coupled with badly designed activation, poor maintenance and inadequate staff training.

A number of improved alarm systems which employed various philosophies came into being. The ANZ Group considered that the day of the alarm panel had ceased to exist and that there was an obvious need for a communications system that could transform the information from a single on/off situation to a central station, thereby establishing an information system.

This did not happen overnight and during the 1970s, as armed robberies increased in numbers and in the degree of violence employed, and, as the nature of the criminal carrying out the robberies changed, a number of things had to happen. The alarm reporting systems had to become more expert, and the false alarm rate had to be lowered dramatically from around 92 per cent of calls. Responding to false alarms wastes police man-hours and may result in a number of police vehicles being damaged or lost. In addition, the number of police and police vehicles available to respond seems to be decreasing daily. As violence

increased, as a result of boldness of the criminal or possibly the emergence of the drug-induced criminal into our society, other measures became necessary; measures such as the physical hardening of cash-handling areas.

At one stage in the late 1970s payroll robberies became a significant factor in crime reports. They invariably occurred immediately after a delivery had been made to a factory's payroll office. The factory payroll holding area in most cases was little better than the top drawer in somebody's desk. As commercial organisations started to physically harden their payroll offices, the ability to quickly obtain funds in this manner became less attractive.

In the meantime, the financial institutions were faced with a dilemma. In order to carry out their business activities, it was necessary to have an unimpeded ability to converse with a customer and, in addition, the advent of any physical barrier was objected to on psychological grounds by those concerned with marketing operations.

Pop-up screens and bullet-resistant glass have been installed in many Australian financial institutions but both systems have their limitations. Primarily, the pop-up screen does not stop a bandit jumping the counter before the screens can be triggered. That then becomes a problem as a nervous bandit behind the pop-up screens could well retaliate in panic. Additionally, there has been adverse customer reaction to financial institutions using pop-up screens because, upon activation, the environment into which a customer has entered to do business has dramatically changed, leaving the customer alone with a bandit or bandits.

Fixed bullet-resistant glass screens, on the other hand, are static, presenting an unchanging environment to either a customer or a bandit. The difficulty with glass is that it is only recently that reasonable audio systems have been developed which will allow teller/client relationships to exist with some form of privacy, but they do not yet meet the full approval of the customer.

It is interesting to note that in some areas of the world where the crime rate has caused financial institutions to suffer heavily both in terms of life and assets, legislation has been enacted to make glass screens compulsory. The armed robbery rate went down; however, because of the nature of a financial institution and because of the need for management staff to interview customers, the potential for defeating almost any physical barrier still exists. That is why financial institutions of the world are currently researching all forms of service delivery systems that will enable their staff and their customers to do business in a secure environment.

In commenting on the nature of armed robbery and the armed robber, experts in social matters advise that a major percentage of our armed robberies today are in some way drug-dependent and this is confirmed by police records. Those planning the defence of a financial

institution must be even more careful in applying their logic to the problem, as the logic exhibited by a drug-induced criminal is not always the same as that employed by the planners. The respect accorded human life would appear to be lower than it was twenty years ago. The willingness of the bandit to endanger a customer is now commonplace.

One area that may well prove to be of value in the longer term is in the nature of the electronic systems used to disperse cash because, irrespective of the advent of the cashless society, cash is still going to be a major commodity for some time to come. In the words of a famous American bank robber who, when asked why he robbed banks replied, 'Because that is where the money is'.

Finally, an area related to the armed robbery scene, which is probably best left in the hands of the experts, is the sentencing and imprisonment of armed robbers. Those with a responsibility for determining both the judicial response to crime and, ultimately, the terms and conditions for those imprisoned for armed robbery need to be certain that the armed robber is being specifically deterred from carrying out his crime if, in fact, heavy sentencing does deter armed robbery.

Death as a punishment for armed robbery is harsh by today's enlightened standards but a recent poster in an English newspaper captured the issue. It showed a headline on a paper-seller's stand which said:

**'MURDER GETS 10 YEARS -  
VICTIM GETS LIFE'.**

## **PREVENTING ROBBERY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The prevention of robbery can encompass a wide variety of activities. Whose responsibility is robbery prevention? The community can try to deal with the social, economic, and cultural conditions that lead people to commit robberies. The responsibility of prevention can be delegated to agents of the criminal justice system, whose job it is to apprehend and incapacitate offenders. Social workers, psychologists, and other professionals can intervene in the lives of those at high risk to offend or to reform those already involved in robbery. Alternatively it is possible to be more self-reliant and minimise opportunities for robbery; thereby, hopefully discouraging would-be offenders. Not all opportunity reduction measures can be initiated by individuals although they constitute the most immediate and direct means through which everyone can have an impact on robbery.

Ordinarily, prevention is associated with bringing down the volume of a particular crime. Although reducing the frequency of incidents is certainly a desirable objective, some of the harms associated with robbery can be minimised even without achieving this objective. The principal harms occasioned by robbery are physical injury, psychological distress, financial loss, and fear in the community.

Physical and psychological disorders, as well as injuries, can be minimised by counselling people not to intervene when a robbery is in progress, as such intervention increases the likelihood of all of these harms. Improving psychological services can also aid victims in dealing with the sometimes debilitating effects of the crime. Financial loss can be reduced if people carry only small amounts of money and businesses keep only a minimum of accessible cash in their tills. While the number of robberies may not decrease, their yields may be reduced.

Fear in the community can be reduced without necessarily reducing the volume of robberies. The evidence suggests that fear is not closely linked to the actual level or fluctuations of crime in a community, but is often the result of feelings of vulnerability and powerlessness, or exaggerated media reporting of crime. Community-based crime prevention programs can make people feel less isolated and helpless while public information programs can help counteract the adverse impact of the media.

## PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Where the incidence of robbery is serious and concentrated among certain groups, significant progress cannot be made without addressing the social roots of the problem. Where there is a large underclass unable to enter society's mainstream, where drug use is prevalent, access to organised criminal activity limited, weapons (especially guns) accessible, and violence promoted by cultural conditions, a tradition of robbery may evolve. The almost unlimited number of targets ensures that despite target-hardening, sufficient targets will remain to meet the demand for the crime.

Strategies aiming to suppress robbery through the criminal justice system can, only achieve modest results. In the Canadian Province of Quebec, robbery is a serious problem despite very rapid police response, routine pre-trial detention of suspects, and stiff sentences for the crime. Clearance rates are simply too low to incapacitate more than a small fraction of active offenders at one time. The system is too reliant on the co-operation of victims and witnesses to make substantial inroads on its own. The low clearance rates and the fact that even those captured often have succeeded in meeting their short-term goals undermine the potential deterrent effect of stiff penal sanctions. Furthermore, robbers, including professionals, tend to be polymorphous, committing many crimes other than robbery and, consequently, they may receive lenient treatment for a non-violent crime, only to return to the street and commit robberies. It is only through a retrospective analysis of their criminal careers that the dangers can be assessed.

Treating the offender - assuming that intervention at the individual level can work - can achieve only modest results as only a fraction of active robbers are in custody. In addition, programs that help offenders change their attitudes and impart educational and vocational skills will be of little use if emotional and material support is not forthcoming upon release from an institution. Change on the part of the public is therefore a prerequisite of successful rehabilitative programs.

A popular approach to crime prevention has been the reduction of criminal opportunities. The idea underlying this approach is that it is insufficient merely to focus on the perpetrators of crime, whether this is done through deterrence, incapacitation, or treatment programs. Rather, the assumption is that much criminal activity can best be understood in terms of an interaction between the offender, victim, physical environment, and other circumstances that may be relevant at the time of an offence. It is further assumed that offenders' motives are not constant or uniform; their behaviour may be affected by changes in mood and situational temptations or opportunities (Clarke 1983). Moreover, offenders are seen as active decision-makers in selecting crime targets, taking into account the potential costs and benefits of a particular venture. They are not viewed as merely passive actors. This does not mean that they are rational; only that they tend to take profits and risks into consideration (Clarke 1983). Given these assumptions, it is reasonable to conclude that reducing potential profits and increasing the

risks of detection and the hazards associated with a crime can affect the volume of that offence.

This approach to crime prevention has the advantage of addressing immediate concerns rather than 'root causes', and it can be tailored to a particular crime type and community, as opposed to crime in general and society at large. A multitude of measures can be taken to reduce the opportunities available for robbery: these can range from activities undertaken by potential victims to programs that can be implemented by city planners.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE**

### **Reduction of the monetary incentives of armed robbery**

One important consideration for armed robbers is the potential profit from the crime (Ciale & Leroux 1983). In a recent study (Gabor et al. 1987) a number of robbers spoke of their hope for a big payday. In recent years, businesses, public services, and individuals have taken a number of steps to reduce the circulation of cash and thereby diminish the monetary incentives of armed robbery. Many businesses keep a lower cash flow by making more frequent deposits in banks or vaults. Stores have installed vaults that open only at specified times or can be opened by security personnel only. Exact change policies have been adopted by many transportation systems. Indeed, many people are cautious about the amounts of cash they carry with them. One possible drawback in limiting cash held by potential targets (whether stores or individuals) is that robbers may have to select more targets to meet their needs. More robberies mean more injuries, more trauma, and heightened levels of fear. In addition, robbers may become more aggressive as their efforts bring them negligible rewards. This is the idea behind the suggestion that people carry some cash with them at all times (mugger's money).

### **Increased level of surveillance**

Another measure that can reduce criminal opportunities is to increase the level of surveillance in the vicinity of potential targets. Jane Jacobs (1961), an urban planner, talked of streets 'with eyes' when referring to increasing pedestrian traffic on the street and developing proprietary attitudes on the part of residents toward their neighbourhood. Oscar Newman (1972) suggested that housing projects can be designed so as to enhance the surveillance of the property by residents, thereby providing them with an increased sense of territorial control. Urban and architectural changes, even if they were shown to bear fruit, could be costly and modifying existing buildings and communities can be prohibitively expensive. As far as new structures and neighbourhoods are concerned, security-related and fiscal considerations often clash. In any event, there is no hard evidence in support of Newman's thesis that making space more defensible through manipulations of physical design reduces crime (Clarke 1983).

Increasing street lighting at night may improve surveillance levels. This has been tried in a number of American cities to combat personal crimes; in some instances crime appears to have spilled over into unaffected areas (Tyrpak 1975).

Increasing police patrols may improve surveillance levels. Patrols can keep both the streets and stores under surveillance although they are more likely to have an impact in relation to 'outside' crimes. The evidence suggests that even when patrols are concentrated in high crime areas, the chances of intercepting an offence in progress is very low as there are still too many potential targets relative to the coverage provided by these patrols (Clarke 1983). A study of the Los Angeles Police Department found that a patrol officer could expect to detect a robbery in progress only once every fourteen years. Patrick Murphy, former president of the Police Foundation and former police chief of New York and several other major police departments, refers to preventive patrols as aimless. His view is that its principal purpose is to reassure the citizen that the police department, like the city zoo, exists (Silberman 1978). Citizen patrols and 'block watch' programs, although perhaps reducing levels of fear in a community, have generally met with the same results as police patrols, and the commitment required to keep these programs going is difficult to maintain.

A number of measures to increase surveillance in stores have been suggested in order to prevent commercial robberies. These include making cash registers visible from the street, increasing lighting immediately outside stores, installing cameras and giving those entering the store the feeling that their movements are being monitored. Little is known, as yet, about the effects of these measures on armed robberies. As it involves procedures that are inexpensive and easily implemented - such as removing obstructions from store windows and training employees - increasing interior surveillance has become an attractive approach.

### **Target-hardening**

Another approach to reducing opportunities for robbery is that of target-hardening. This approach involves the use of physical devices and design features to obstruct the perpetrator(s) from successfully gaining access to desired targets. In banks, building higher counters, protecting tellers with unbreakable glass shields, and using vaults with time-release mechanisms are all means of making access to cash more difficult. Employing armed personnel or guards is another way of 'hardening' a bank or other facility. Private citizens, too, can take protective measures to ward off muggers. The use of weapons and chemicals such as mace has become more widespread in recent years.

Target-hardening has proved successful in eliminating or reducing the incidence of certain forms of theft. In England, thefts at public telephone installations have been virtually eliminated through the use of steel coin receptacles (Clarke 1983). One problem with target-hardening devices in stores or banks is that increasing security through the construction of physical obstacles can clash with the objective of profit-

making. A store with many physical obstructions will seem less friendly and consequently may be less attractive to customers; the morale of employees may suffer; and the installation of some of these devices may prove costly. The possibility of displacement is also relevant. Offenders may merely shift their activities to less fortified targets. If many stores adopt effective target-hardening measures, more offenders may choose to attack people rather than banks or stores: in the case of bank robberies, the inaccessibility of tellers may result in the taking of hostages.

### **Lifestyle and activity changes**

Considerable attention has been given in recent years to the connection between lifestyles and the likelihood of being victimised (Cohen & Felson 1979). The importance of the lifestyles factor is demonstrated by the fact that groups most vulnerable physically to attack (for example, women and the elderly) have the lowest victimisation rates (Skogan & Maxfield 1981). This paradox is due to their higher levels of fear and the resulting precautions they show in their lifestyles. Young men, on the other hand, are more likely to be victims of violence because they are more accessible targets (they are more likely to be out after dark and to be unescorted) and because they are more likely to participate in illicit behaviour (for example, drug transactions).

Aside from changes in general lifestyles, specific activities on the part of potential victims may have an impact upon their vulnerability to armed robbery. With respect to commercial robberies, changing routines, such as the times at which cash deposits to the bank are made, can keep offenders off guard. Alert and assertive employees can make a store appear less vulnerable by appearing in control of the premises. For example, clerks can greet all persons entering a store. This type of behaviour can make them appear confident and intimidate potential robbers, as well as make robbers feel conspicuous.

### **The target environs**

Another set of factors that can affect the vulnerability of a target includes its accessibility (the distance between a target and the residences of relevant offenders) the proximity of escape routes, and its hours of operation. Robbers, like many other offenders, have shown a preference for operating in their own or adjacent neighbourhoods, although the distances travelled by robbers to commit their crimes is normally greater than those for other violent offences (Brantingham & Brantingham 1984; Normandeau 1968). Nevertheless, the targets selected by armed robbers tend typically to be within two miles of their homes. The age of most offenders is a relevant variable as juveniles have shown a tendency to be less mobile and more comfortable on their home ground (Baldwin & Bottoms 1976). Also, the crimes of the young are more likely to be opportunistic than well planned (Conklin 1972).

### **Proximity factors**

The proximity of a store or bank to a major thoroughfare may also play a role in its vulnerability to robbery (Brantingham & Brantingham 1975; Duffala 1976). If the business is on or near a major artery of a city, it will be more accessible to robbers residing in other areas. Major routes also facilitate escape from the scene (Ciale & Leroux 1983). These routes not only allow offenders to leave the area of a crime quickly, but provide them with the cover of other traffic (Harries 1980). The proximity of a target to a police station has also been mentioned as a factor influencing its attractiveness (Camp 1967).

One might think that there is very little that can be done about the proximity factors; that stores, major thoroughfares and other features of the physical environment cannot be easily relocated. In fact, there have been several experiments in which attempts have been made to reduce crime through manipulating the physical environment. The most noteworthy of these experiments occurred in Hartford, Connecticut.

In 1976 a program was created to reduce the levels of street robbery and residential burglary, as well as the fear of these crimes, in the Asylum Hill section of Hartford (Fowler & Mangione 1982). This residential neighbourhood had been plagued by a high rate of transiency and street crime. An interdisciplinary team of community planners concluded that the neighbourhood had become nonresidential because a large volume of pedestrian and vehicular traffic passed through each day. The large number of strangers kept residents from asserting control over the area and from establishing important ties. Residents avoided their streets and yards, while offenders could roam with little risk of being recognised. A physical design team proposed that vehicular traffic through the neighbourhood be restricted and most remaining traffic be channelled onto two major streets within the neighbourhood. This was done through creating cul-de-sacs at some critical intersections, narrowing the entrances to some streets, and converting other streets from two to one-way.

Some of these measures were also intended to give definition to the boundaries of the neighbourhood. Some of the cul-de-sacs, for example, were now reserved for the use of residents. Such measures are designed to yield the psychological effects of the 'defensible space' concept. Residents are given a greater sense of control over their area, while outsiders are confronted by symbolic and/or actual boundaries that signal the area as off-limits to them. Physical design changes are also expected to have a spillover effect in terms of the social relations within a community. They can further the interactions of residents and give them an enhanced feeling of control over their community which, in turn, can result in further collective activities that strengthen community bonds. There was evidence that the Hartford Program had an impact on the robbery rate, alleviated residents' intense fear of crime and, in more general terms, effected a change in their mentality from that based on isolation, hopelessness, and mistrust to one of confidence and control over their fate (Fowler & Mangione 1982).

### **Time of robbery**

Time of operation is also important as robberies are not evenly distributed across different hours and days. In Montreal, bank robberies are usually committed on Thursdays or Fridays (Hetu 1983). Being open at night may make a store particularly vulnerable as offenders have fewer targets to choose from, they have the cover of darkness, there is less pedestrian traffic outside the store, and fewer customers inside.

### **Availability of firearms**

Another key factor influencing opportunities for armed robberies is the availability of firearms. Many armed robberies involve handguns and it is likely that some form of firearm is indispensable in at least certain categories of robbery (Gabor et al. 1987). Bank robberies almost always involve guns or simulated guns. It is difficult to imagine an offender with a knife controlling a large number of employees and customers in a bank and eliciting rapid compliance.

Victims are less likely to put up a resistance when firearms are used (Gabor et al. 1987) as guns are more lethal than other weapons (Cook 1983b). Guns may be put to use less frequently than knives and other weapons, possibly resulting in fewer injuries. Reducing access to guns may make larger commercial targets less vulnerable but it may, at the same time, make mugging a more favoured form of robbery. Such a shift in targets is not likely to be welcomed by the general public, as street muggings engender a considerable amount of fear.

## **THE EFFECTS OF SECURITY MEASURES**

When opportunity reduction measures are subjected to scientific scrutiny, they often fall short of their objectives. Two studies carried out during research into armed robbery in Canada confirm this view. One study looking at over one thousand bank robbery cases in 1981-82 found that the number of security measures (alarms, guards, cameras, etc.) was not related to the number of times a bank was robbed (Trudel & LeBlanc 1986). In fact, banks robbed four or more times had the best or next to the best security rating. It may be that security measures are affected by robberies as much as robberies are affected by security levels.

Another study compared the security measures taken in 184 small convenience stores in Montreal which had been robbed over a two-year period with 87 stores that had never been robbed (Poirier 1987). The study revealed that both the victimised and nonvictimised shops had adopted almost an identical amount of security hardware although there was some differences in relation to precautions taken. Nonvictims limited the cash held in the store, made frequent bank deposits, had good lighting, changed routine, and removed obstructions from the store windows somewhat more often than victims; although the differences between the two sets of stores were not great.

Why is it that in these and other instances, security measures have little effect on the choice of target? Firstly, a chance occurrence may intervene. Most robbers spend a few minutes observing the environs of a store before striking (Gabor et al. 1987). If a police patrol is spotted, the offender may decide not to attack what he may have considered to be an attractive target. He may then select another target; perhaps one that is more secure. Another chance circumstance may be that a store that is usually free of customers is, at that moment, swamped with business. Again, this unexpected development might lead them to choose another, perhaps better fortified store.

Another factor detracting from the value of criminal opportunity reduction measures is the assumption that all robbers are rational decision-makers and have unlimited resources, carefully evaluating a wide range of possible targets and then selecting those taking the fewest precautions. In fact, many offenders (especially the young) are not very mobile and therefore their scope of targets is limited. If the targets to which they have access are all fairly secure, they may still demonstrate selectivity by choosing the targets that are least secure. Such targets may thus be vulnerable relative to others in the neighbourhood, although in more global terms they may be well fortified. Offenders may also opt to select targets on the basis of familiarity rather than security considerations.

Further undermining the preventive value of better security is the fact that offenders frequently commit this crime spontaneously. The existing evidence indicates that most armed robberies today involve little planning (Camp 1967; Cook 1983a; Feeney & Weir 1975; Gabor et al. 1987). Often it is a matter of individuals needing money quickly for their sustenance, to obtain drugs, pay off debts and so on. They may even be under the influence of alcohol or drugs when they decide to commit their crimes. For those tending to be spontaneous, their location, the time of the day and day of the week, as well as the presence of weapons, accomplices, and a car may be more important in forming their choices than the vulnerability of their targets.

It may also be that those favouring robbery are more impulsive, less sophisticated, and less intelligent than those favouring other property-oriented crimes (Normandeau & Pinsonneault 1985). Little preparation for an offence not only limits the number of targets an offender can size up, but also the information obtained on each target. Even well-prepared offenders may be unaware of all the security measures a business has undertaken (for example, the presence and activation mechanism of alarm systems). A less prepared robber is not only unaware of these invisible forms of security, but also more visible ones, such as the routines of victims. It may be presumptuous to believe that security measures will prevent robberies if many armed robbers are not even aware of their presence prior to committing their offences.

Notwithstanding these pessimistic remarks, there is evidence from other sources that a systematic program, integrating a number of

opportunity reduction features, can have an impact on armed robbery. For example, in 1976, after considerable losses due to armed robberies in their 7-Eleven convenience stores, Southland Corporation developed a preventive program with the help of a convicted armed robber (Roesch & Winterdyk 1985). The program incorporated the principles of surveillance, target-hardening, territoriality, and profit reduction. Employees were told to look vigilant: they were instructed to keep stores clean, shelves stocked, and to stay active when a store was empty. Such behaviour was intended to signal to would-be robbers the fact that those running the stores were in command. In order to make cash registers visible from outside the stores, all obstructions were removed from store windows. Employees were told to monitor the outside of stores and to take decisive action if suspicious persons were loitering there. Also, employees were asked to greet and establish good eye contact with people entering a store. The robber is thereby placed on stage and intimidated by the possibility of later identification. Employees were instructed to place large bills conspicuously in a drop box or safe so that all could see that there was little to be gained by robbery. Finally, special measures were taken at night: cash was kept to a minimum and there was good illumination around the stores.

The program has achieved initial success in cutting down the number of robberies of 7-Eleven stores. Furthermore, where robberies did occur, losses were reduced. Between 1979 and 1983, losses in the chain's American stores declined from an average \$128 to \$43 per incident.

If measures reducing the vulnerability of certain targets, such as banks in Montreal, or measures reducing robberies in a whole chain, as in the 7-Eleven program are successful, will the expansion of opportunity reduction measures bring about a general reduction in robbery? There are a number of 'ifs' and question marks. First of all, there is the problem of displacement (Gabor 1978). If many commercial targets became more difficult to rob, would armed robbers merely throw their hands in the air and give up their activities or would they seek out other, more vulnerable targets such as individuals? Might target-hardening lead to more hostage-taking and a generally higher level of violence?

The answer to these questions depends on the robbers' degree of commitment. If many have a serious drug problem, one might conjecture that they will commit as many robberies as is necessary to maintain their habits. If there is less money to be gained from each target due to crime prevention and educational programs, they might be forced to victimise more people to meet their goals. On the other hand, those who are less committed to armed robbery may adjust their behaviour in response to fewer opportunities and greater risks. They might discontinue robbing and switch to other crimes, or those persisting in robbery might be more cautious and hence have a lower commission rate. The extent of displacement depends on the characteristics of offenders in a given region.

Another problem with opportunity reduction is the fact that it may clash with other priorities. Designing cities and houses or modifying existing designs for security purposes may be expensive. There is also a danger of developing a fortress mentality whereby shopkeepers and members of the general public take security measures to defend themselves that are so extreme that they detract from the quality of life. A convenience store cashier, for example, can be placed behind an impregnable glass barricade. This may make it impossible to hold up the store, but it would keep the cashier from performing other useful duties. Such a measure would make the store appear very unfriendly and uninviting to customers. It would also hurt the morale of employees and make it difficult for the store to recruit staff. Moreover, it would facilitate other types of crime such as shoplifting or running out of the store with merchandise. The incapacitated cashier would merely look on as these activities were transpiring or as shelves needed to be restocked. Such extreme measures might also increase public fear and lead to demoralisation, as they reflect that crime may be out of control.

Another major impediment to opportunity reduction measures is the problem of public apathy. Shopkeepers are often fatalistic about armed robbery, thinking that there is very little they can do about it. Also, it can be difficult to sustain interest in a prevention program. This has been the experience, for example, with many neighbourhood patrol efforts. People in such programs are volunteering their own time and under the best of circumstances it is difficult to elicit widespread participation. When their efforts do not appear to be having effect, they may get discouraged. When these efforts pay off, complacency may set in as participants feel the problem is under control.

The opportunity reduction approach is nevertheless attractive because it avoids the need for large-scale social reform and can be tailored to a specific type of crime. Its assumptions, such as the offender's knowledge of and responsiveness to various security measures, and the potentially adverse effects of opportunity reduction require further examination. In some cases, the resulting form of criminal activity may be more serious than that which planners originally sought to prevent.

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## **DID YOU READ ABOUT ...? - THE PUBLIC AND ROBBERY\***

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### **BACKGROUND**

People's sense of security and their belief that the criminal justice system is operating effectively depends in large measure on the media. For this reason it is important to ensure that accurate and impartial information about crime is available to the media and thus to the public. If it is not provided the media will portray their own representation of the facts.

The portrayal of violence in the mass media is a difficult problem for society today. Armed robbery is an extremely violent crime and its reporting must be impartial.

Concern has been expressed in various quarters regarding the nature and degree of violence reported in the mass media and the issue is surrounded with some emotion. However, no firm conclusion has been drawn about the possible effects of exposure to violence in the media. A child today sees, or reads about, hundreds or perhaps thousands of specific incidents of violence in the print, broadcast and entertainment media. Does this affect behaviour in childhood or later life?

All over the world people are spending more and more time exposed to the mass media, particularly television and it is tempting to blame this medium for many of society's current ills. Does the large amount of violence portrayed in the media lead to more violent crime and violent behaviour?

Violent fictional films such as the Rambo series have been suggested by some to be responsible for portraying behaviour that can be imitated in crimes such as murder. Does the impact of violence on television, or in the press lead to a copycat effect for bank robberies? The news coverage of the Hoddle Street killings was particularly graphic and prolonged, and after the deaths in Hungerford, England, it was suggested that these killings were triggered by extensive media coverage of the Hoddle Street shootings.

Robbery imitation is no different to the imitation of more violent crimes. If there is some relationship to imitation, what can be done about it, given the need for a free press in a democracy?

\*The articles and views expressed do not represent those of the ANZ Bank.

Are there workable alternatives to censorship? Is there something beyond industry self-regulation, but short of government censorship that would work and be acceptable? Perhaps caution should be exercised in developing new controls until more is known about the effects. However, many citizens do not want to wait and risk possible damage that could flow from the sea of media violence.

This seminar has issued a number of calls for education to improve public understanding. This is a common plea and of course the mass media have a responsibility and the opportunity to enhance public understanding of critical issues such as armed robbery. However, the public must also come to understand the media and what they can and cannot do.

## DISCUSSION

The basic issue concerns the real world and the mass media world. The violence in the real world is reported in the mass media world which portrays a fantasy violence of its own. What is the linkage between these two worlds? Under what conditions do the media change the real world, and influence it with respect to violence (including armed robbery)? The public view of crime is necessarily dependent on the selective attention of news persons to crime and on their own experiences with the criminal justice system. Does the public expect the media to reflect the real world or something better than the real world?

For example, in the case of the Hoddle Street shootings already mentioned, the news coverage assumed some of the characteristics of a fictional film, over-dramatising the tragedy. One television channel scrolled slowly up the screen the list of dead, like a roll call after a military action.

On 10 August 1988, the night after the Hoddle Street shootings, Dr Paul Wilson from this Institute was asked by Terry Willesee in a television interview about the psychology of the person described as the Sniper in these Rambo style-killings. Asked whether Rambo had a lot to answer for, he replied:

If you continually show people films and videos of heroes going around machine gunning down people, it doesn't seem unusual to me if some people go ahead and justify their own inadequacies by committing crimes of that sort.

The portrayal of violence can serve as a stimulus to certain people, setting in motion previously acquired aggressive habits. Stimuli which appear on the screen, in the papers or are provided in the form of a rifle in the home, may encourage someone to act aggressively who otherwise might not have done so.

Crime coverage in the print media also leaves a lot to be desired. On 19 August 1987, in the aftermath of the Clifton Hill killings, the

Melbourne *Herald* published four pages on homicide and capital punishment. It featured three headlines which reflect how the media can represent certain facts inaccurately.

'YEAR OF THE GUN MAKES US ALL RECOIL'

'RISE IN KILLINGS BLAMED ON LACK OF  
DETERRENT'

'58 MURDERS AND 4 MONTHS TO GO'

Dr David Neal of the Victorian Law Reform Commission (1987) commented on the third headline as follows:

The facts of the matter are that the 58 'murders' turn out to be 58 killings, including 4 deaths resulting from lawful force (3 of them by police) and a further 9 at least which appeared to be manslaughter, not murder. Of course, these are not convictions, but cases where murder or manslaughter charges seem applicable. The 46 murder cases to August in 1987, even including the Clifton Hill incident, will mean about the same number of murder cases in 1987 as last year when there were 67 cases. There were 84 in 1979. This was not an exceptional year and by comparison to other States and countries Victoria compares favourably in its murder rate. The Victorian murder rate has been fairly stable for the last 20 years (Neal 1987).

Can it be argued that armed robbers are influenced by the mass media? An article from the *The Mercury* of 8 December 1987 which reported certain Criminal Court Proceedings stated that the attitudes of a man who committed two armed robberies in Launceston in 1987 were influenced by television and video images.

Other articles, such as one entitled 'BANK BANDITS ALL ON PAROLE' which appeared in *The West Australian*, on 4 November 1987, reinforce the perception of the criminal population that the risks involved in criminal behaviour are minimal.

A letter published in *The Herald* on 22 July 1987 entitled 'Hold up report inaccurate beyond belief' was written by a robbery victim who was disappointed that journalists could take the view that armed hold ups are commonplace and of no great concern. The writer expressed disbelief that the facts as reported could stray so sadly from the truth.

It would seem that these articles are not deterring offenders. This raises the question of whether or not journalists are adhering to the Australian Journalists Association Code of Ethics. This is not to suggest that the media is the first or major influence in establishing violent attitudes in life: sociological influences of the family and social sanctions are much more likely to be the first influence. However, an important point to be made is that media portrayal of violence is proportionately

are much more likely to be the first influence. However, an important point to be made is that media portrayal of violence is proportionately greater than the actual amount of violence in society. Since the individual often perceives violence in society through violence in the media, this leads to a cognitive distortion.

There is enormous public concern about the incidence of crime and the operation of the criminal justice system. People's sense of security and their belief that the system is operating effectively depend in large measure on the media. It is essential to ensure that accurate and important information about crime is available to the media and the public, and that standards and guidelines are agreed to by the media, the Australian Bankers' Association, the Australian Banks Employees Union and other agencies.

Why is violence newsworthy? Conflict arising from confrontation between deviant offenders and the agents of control has always attracted public attention. This may be considered newsworthy because it appeals to a number of psychological perversities among the mass audience. Crime is news because it evokes threats to the morality of our society but how that crime is treated in the media can reaffirm that morality. Some crime reporting is no different to other kinds of news reporting. How particular crime stories are selected for special attention is by the same structure of news values which applies to other news areas. However, any crime becomes more important if violence is associated with it, such as armed robbery. It represents a fundamental division in the social order. The use of violence marks the distinction between those who are acceptable members of society and those who are not.

Close rapport among editors, journalists and the police is necessary in order to present these events in a manner which is truthful and not distorted.

## **PROPOSALS**

An on-going media audit needs to be carried out by the Australian Bankers' Association (ABA). Guidelines could be developed with the following in mind:

Does the media:

- . contribute the right amount of violent crime news items? (Is the reporting volume out of character with reality?)
- . make robbery appear attractive and profitable?
- . reflect an unbiased view of crime rates?
- . turn armed robbers into heroes?
- . affect people's tendencies to commit a robbery?

An attempt needs to be made to canvass the quality aspects of armed robbery reporting. The seriousness of the offence alone often accounts for newsworthiness. However, a number of aspects of current reporting need to be considered which can promote undesirable attitudes. These include:

- . Whimsical circumstances, i.e. humorous, ironic, or unusual circumstances are sometimes exaggerated. Examples are items headed

**'BANK WAS TRICKED BY BOY OF TEN'**

**'ROBBER PINCHES DETECTIVE'S CAR'**

- . Sentimental or dramatic circumstances which could be associated with either the victim or the offender, can arouse feelings of either sympathy or outrage in the reader, for example,

**'MOTHER LIED TO PROTECT DAUGHTER'**

**'OFFENDER COULD NOT PAY MEDICAL BILL FOR 3 YEAR OLD SON'**

- . The involvement of a famous or high status person (especially as offender or victim) can be used to sensationalise and distort the incident.

The more events that satisfy the above-mentioned criteria, the more likely they seem to be selected as newsworthy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The mass media may have had some effects on the nature, extent and development of armed robberies. These effects include

- . Reinforcing a predisposition in some sectors of the community to participate in violent crimes.
- . Providing the role model for criminal activity thereby promoting potential, or actual, deviance.
- . Creating a set of culturally identifiable symbols which legitimise action.

Unless there is action Australia-wide to improve crime reporting, little change can be expected. The media is extremely effective in creating opinions on social issues, and this could be turned to advantage. The Australian Bankers' Association needs to be involved in a number of measures:

- . The establishment of a media working party responsible for a thorough review of the mass media's reporting history, and negotiation of an agreement on specific and ethical guidelines.
- . The nomination of an Australian Bankers' Association spokesperson responsible for national conciliation.
- . The establishment of good rapport with the Australian Journalists Association, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal and the police.
- . The possibility of introducing into Australia the publication of photos of robbers, combined with the promise of a healthy reward, which has resulted in a direct drop in armed robberies overseas.
- . The provision of assistance to small business and local communities in tackling their own crime problems via media assistance, management, research, etc.
- . Press and media coverage paid for by the ABA highlighting the role of the media in order to initiate discussion and debate (press response and public).

Longer term strategies aimed at changing the structure of the media industry are difficult to achieve, but a major first step is to harness the interests of the creative and academic communities so that firm action can be implemented.

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## **FEWER GUNS, FEWER ROBBERIES?**

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There is no more appropriate time than 1988 for a review of attitudes and a societal change of heart to violence. 1988 is appropriate because it is the bicentenary of a country settled by convicts and brutal, corrupt soldiers. Australia had its beginnings in a squattocracy which protected and enjoyed its assets through harsh authoritarian measures. The Aborigines, especially Aboriginal women, suffered particularly in this environment.

Colonisation was followed by a period of pioneer toughness with guns required to obtain food and for protection. It was the beginning of the Australian mateship ethos, and for that matter, the beginning of machismo. This national ethos was later capped with the obscenity of the violence of wars, and nowadays children are raised on a visual and auditory diet of violent films which have aggressive and avante-garde sex themes.

Over 200 years, gun ownership and the use of guns have become synonymous with Australian personal independence, security and manliness. In fact it represents the opposite, but as a result of the availability of guns, bank employees are frequently facing armed robbers. Their lives are threatened daily and will continue to be so until Australians achieve that true personal and national maturity, of living in a society that is repulsed by violence and overt aggression. 1988 is an appropriate time for governments to make a determined effort to control firearms. There is considerable resistance to such change, but the images of pioneer spirit and bushman's self-reliance are no longer appropriate for one of the world's most highly urbanised nations, even if they make obvious representative images for a celebration of a nation.

Australians need to support governments, regardless of political persuasion, if they are prepared to alter the violent basis of our society. The right to ownership of a firearm is the first premise to be challenged: ownership must clearly be a privilege, not a right. When young people come to understand this, then they will accept that the resort to violence in any situation is not a right, nor is it even an acceptable alternative.

To achieve the basis of a less violent society - which has widespread implications for the crime rate - control of gun ownership is an important, obvious step but not the only answer. In the longer term, education via media influence, family organisations and government, all have a role to play.

## **BANK ROBBERIES**

Research into armed hold-ups by the New South Wales Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (1977) found that almost 60 per cent of New South Wales bank hold-ups involve a firearm and banks are the prime targets for such robberies. Following the alarmingly high incidence in 1983 of armed hold-ups, the numbers declined for a while but again rose sharply in 1987 and this trend continues in 1988. The ready availability of weapons, especially hand guns and shotguns is a major factor in perpetuating and escalating the incidence of armed robberies during the 1980s.

The Australian Bank Employees Union commissioned several studies into the issue of firearms in crime by Paul Wilson (1983a, 1983b) and the fundamental points of his studies remain valid. There are three basic reasons why there is concern over the number of firearms. The first is the number of serious and fatal accidents caused by firearms, the second is the use of firearms in suicide and the third, which particularly affects bank employees, is the criminal misuse of firearms.

Reducing the number of firearms in the community can reduce the number of fatal accidents, suicides and domestic fatalities. Criminal misuse of firearms appears to be of two major types. The first is the 'casual' type, in which the gun happens to be at hand when a confrontation or altercation develops, and during which self-control snaps and impulse takes over; the second is the 'professional' type, in which the firearm is used as a means to an end.

### **Casual criminal misuse of firearms**

Australian and overseas research reveals that the typical murder or serious assault caused by casual misuse of firearms is unplanned and arises out of a domestic altercation; when the gun is used in such an altercation, it is much more lethal than alternative weapons likely to be available. The level of domestic violence in Australia has always been an unknown quantity, but a recent study argues that domestic violence is far more widespread than estimated.

The survey released by the Office of the Status of Women on 9 March 1988 showed that one in five of the 1504 people interviewed believed that it was acceptable for a man to beat, kick, hit or shove his wife if she did not obey him or keep the house clean. Threatening to use a weapon or using a weapon was believed to be justified by 6 per cent of those interviewed. Domestic violence for many Australians is apparently a viable means of solving domestic problems. It follows that a widespread reduction in firearms available in the community would lead to a reduction in casual firearm assaults and thus lead to a reduction in deaths caused by such assaults.

Professor Richard Harding, now Dean and Professor of Law at the University of Western Australia, in 1978 suggested that:

One part of the problem of the criminal misuse of firearms therefore could be said in broad terms to be partially solvable by legislation whose affect would be to reduce the total number of firearms available in the community.

The availability of a firearm at the time the critical incident is developing, crucially affects the nature and outcome of the confrontation, invariably for the worst. Those who keep guns for protection against strangers or unspecified external threats are more likely to use them against their families or acquaintances. Alternatively, they find that a family member or an acquaintance uses them against themselves. This is true of course, whatever one's motive; but the irony is a nice one if the purported motive for owning a gun at all is to forestall or prevent violence within one's household or social circle. (Harding 1978, p. 272)

The stark fact remains that, gun availability is directly related to gun violence.

#### **Professional criminal misuse of firearms**

Two types of professional criminals use firearms as a tool. The first is the thorough professional who in his major occupation, sets about robbing or stealing or commanding services with the unlawful aid of a gun. These criminals would include bank robbers and other kinds of hold-up robbers, professional burglars, contract 'hit' killers and a variety of other men and women who specialise in particular forms of crime. Although not impossible, legislation designed to restrict acquisition and distribution of firearms is unlikely to check professional criminals in their use of guns. Police, media reports and common experience make a strong case for the reality that criminals who need firearms to support their lifestyles obtain them one way or another, whether they be urban terrorists, skyjackers, bank robbers or other professional criminals.

Any strategy aimed simply at reducing the number of firearms in the community may have little impact on this aspect of criminal misuse. However, with stricter firearm legislation criminals found with firearms in their possession in conflict with the law could be arrested, charged and convicted. Known criminals often cannot be successfully convicted at present.

The second category of professional criminal misuse of firearms belongs to that contradiction in terms known as the 'amateur professional'. Like his professional counterpart this criminal uses a gun to commit a crime. Unlike the true professional the amateur is usually involved in crime as a secondary occupation and/or spontaneously decides to commit a crime rather than to plan it carefully beforehand. This person may or may not at the time of a crime decide to use a gun but if he or she does decide to do so, firearms are easily available, and in some states are even available in a variety store or gun shop.

As research conducted for the Union by Dr Wilson has shown, the decision to use guns can be influenced by the open display of firearms, by their accessibility and the ease of obtaining them. When interviewed in the course of a bank employees survey, Union members expressed the belief that they felt less likely to be shot by experienced professional criminals than by nervous amateurs, first-timers or people of unstable mind, who have purchased firearms easily from supermarkets or other retail outlets. The black market that currently exists in firearms will not be quashed with the introduction of comprehensive firearms legislation. It will probably create an even greater black market. However, it will be harder for amateurs to obtain firearms, it will be of significant assistance to police forces in arresting professional criminals and ABEU members will have a substantially reduced chance of suffering physical injury and mental trauma.

The criminal element will always be able to acquire firearms. But restriction on ownership and possession through comprehensive gun legislation will undoubtedly reduce the number of victims. The union has always believed that reducing the number of firearms available in society will be instrumental in preserving lives. In the past the Union has been trenchantly opposed to the presence of firearms in bank branches. In the old days the branch accountant kept a gun in his desk, the teller kept one under his counter and, until recently, the tendency was to have armed guards inside high risk branches. The Union believes that the presence of firearms only provokes a more violent response in the event of an armed hold-up and is extremely dangerous in confined banking chambers.

As an organisation committed to the protection of its members, the ABEU considers that preventive devices such as ascending screens or bullet-resistant glass are the most viable alternatives for protecting bank workers as well as foiling a robbery. This does not require any retaliatory action involving firearms and does not place any person's life at risk.

At the standing committee on banks' security, the issues frequently discussed include preventive action, increasing the severity of jail sentences for convicted bandits, and increasing the banks' reward scheme for the apprehension of bandits. Rehabilitation of convicted bank robbers is another issue worthy of consideration. This is a contentious matter but it is an associated topic of firearm control and a crucial element in the overall picture of bank robbery, crimes and societal attitudes to violence.

Recently, the ABEU Queensland Branch Secretary visited Boggo Road Prison and spoke to a group of prisoners who had formed a self-help drug group. The group had all been convicted for armed robbery and were self-confessed heroin addicts. Several important points came out of this discussion. The group had placed high priority on the issue of rehabilitation and were extremely critical of the prison system which relied virtually on punishment whilst in prison, the effects of which they alleged led to re-offending. They said that most bank robberies were committed by former inmates of the prison and that many of these

robberies could be prevented by the introduction of pre and post release support and training.

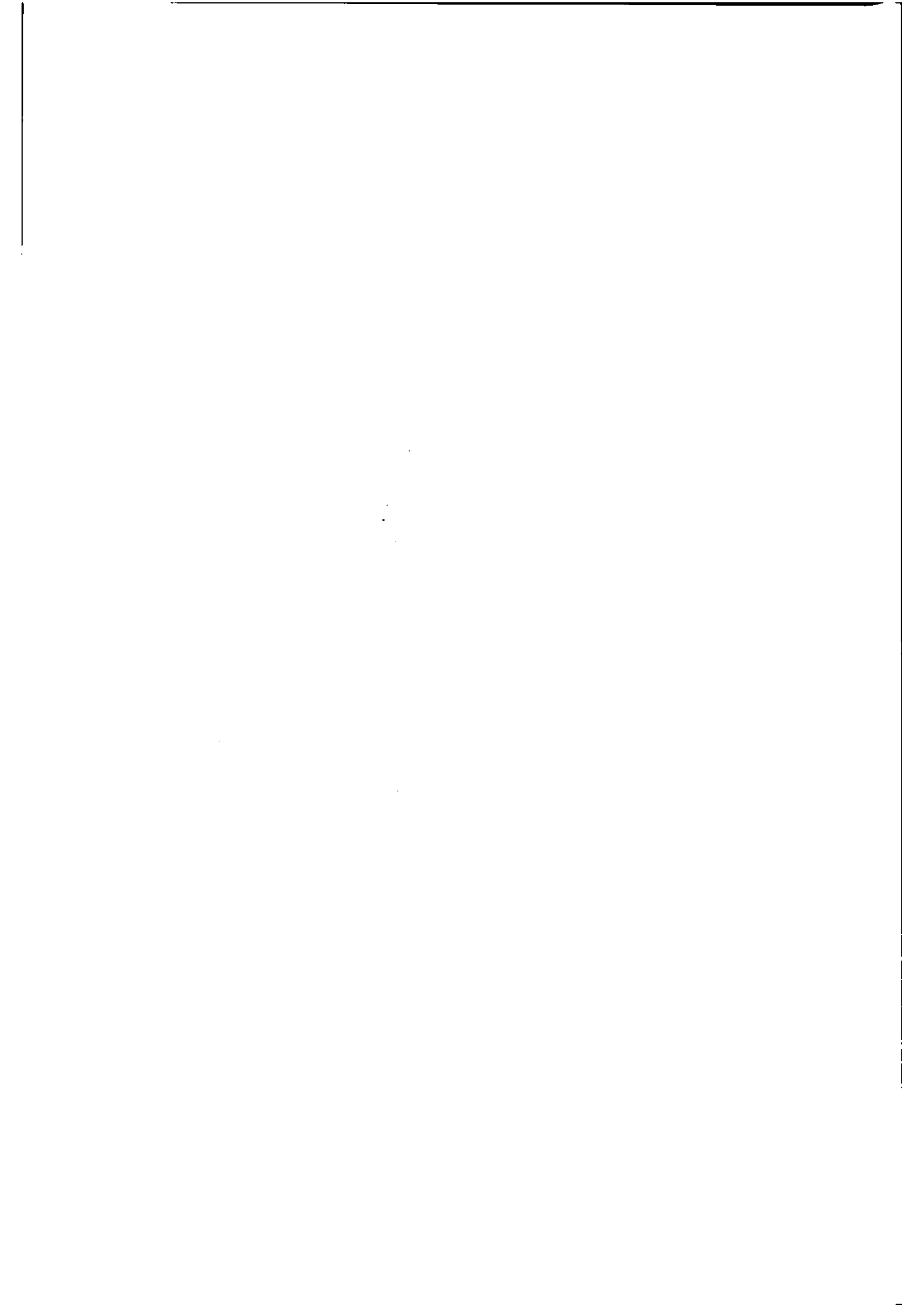
Inmates explained that they left the prison with the equivalent of half of one week's unemployment benefits and were left totally to their own devices. They said that most prisoners upon leaving jail have difficulty in communicating and lack human relations skills, dress-sense, manners and job-finding skills. Drugs played an important part in a choice to commit a crime and it is evident that many inmates leave prison with the same addiction which they had on entry.

Firearm restriction is just one facet of an enormous problem, but it is something that can be controlled immediately and thoroughly. In the wake of the Cain and Unsworth initiatives into gun law reform, the gun lobby has re-emerged. The gun lobby appears to be a loose coalition of manufacturers, dealers, the Sporting Shooters Association and the registered gun clubs, and is not homogeneous. The ABEU denounces their moves and fallacious arguments given in opposition to the proposed legislation. It is a resort to basic macho insecurities of the past.

The Union considers their claims are not based on civil liberties. Registered gun clubs have a valid right to provide input into proposed changes in firearm legislation. They have the legitimacy of the administered sport behind them and need have no fear of stricter gun laws. For men other than recreational shooters the Union supports one of the themes of the anti-nuclear movement, 'it is time to take the toys from the boys'.

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## ROBBERS AT COURT

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### THE SENTENCING OF ROBBERS

One of the great misconceptions relating to the sentencing of robbers is that courts are excessively lenient. Unfortunately the general public, assisted by the media, are often given the impression that the courts are too soft on robbers, that they impose too many non-custodial offences, or alternatively that the sentences are never served. The majority of offenders who are sentenced to substantial terms of imprisonment are released on parole prior to the expiration of their sentences. However, once it is accepted that the sentence pronounced by the court is subject to a complicated array of legal and administrative procedures which incorporates the concept of early conditional release - then a different appreciation of sentences emerges.

The real problem lies in the disparity between the pronounced sentence and the actual period that the prisoner is required to serve. The gap is too great, and is at the core of the problem of sentencing systems. Legislation provides unrealistically long maximum terms for individual offences, the courts attempt to interpret these laws in a meaningful way by imposing nominally long sentences (head sentences), but the application of remission rules, and the opportunity for substantially early release by parole, or some similar administrative device, ultimately ensures a far more realistic and humane approach is taken.

The problem could be substantially eliminated if head sentences were abolished and the non-parole period or 'minimum term' became the actual sentence of the court. This simple and more honest approach to sentencing would probably be unacceptable as society is conditioned to thinking of heavy sentences as being in the order of fifteen years imprisonment for armed robbery, even though the *NSW Crimes Act 1900* calls for twenty or more years as the maximum penalty. In addition, it would be difficult for people, including politicians, to accept a maximum penalty of no more than (say) ten years.

It seems that a Janus-faced system of sentencing will prevail. The courts will continue to declare long sentences (although not as long as some would like) and offenders will continue to be released within a fraction of that time. The media and the public will continue to voice their dissatisfaction with the so-called 'early release' of offenders and confidence in the justice system will be undermined. Fortunately courts in their wisdom will not always follow the whims of politicians, and they recognise the futility of imposing ever increasingly long sentences.

In *Zakaria*, 18 April 1984, an unreported decision of the Victorian Full Supreme Court, Crocket J. referred to the recent increase in that State of the maximum penalty for armed robbery. The maximum penalty for armed robbery had been raised to twenty-five years imprisonment. His Honour said that the statistical evidence available suggested that the courts had refrained from responding, in any perceptible degree, to the statutory invitation to increase penalties. This is because of 'an ingrained curial repugnance to the imposition of a crushing sentence'. To justify the imposition of long sentences there had to be very special circumstances such as where the crime 'arouses deep public revulsion or disgust', or where the offender is shown to be 'a persistent and unrepentant criminal' or where the offender was being dealt with at one time 'for multiple crimes of considerable gravity'.

Fox and Freiberg (1985) note that in recent times fourteen years appears to be the longest sentence imposed for a single offence of armed robbery in Victoria, although on two occasions, the full Court had refused to affirm sentences of imprisonment of fifteen years.

This reluctance to impose long terms has continued, because recent Victorian court statistics show that during 1985, twelve years was the maximum sentence imposed for an armed robbery offence (Attorney-General's Department Victoria 1986). However, Fox and Freiberg also comment that in the case of multiple offences, long sentences, sometimes in excess of twenty years, are imposed. They say:

Sentences at the top of the range (9 to 14 years) are imposed where there are multiple crimes, where the offender can be described as a professional criminal or is addicted to drugs, where a firearm has been used or discharged or where the offence was committed whilst the offender was on parole. Frequently these features appear in combination. (Fox & Freiberg 1985, p. 536).

They also say that sentences in the four to eight years range form the bulk of sentences imposed and while these cases cannot be classified as professional, they share many of the features, although of a less serious form, found in upper range sentencing brackets (Fox & Freiberg 1985). A similar general pattern emerges in New South Wales sentencing decisions, although what appears to count for the top of the range in Victoria is more like the middle range for New South Wales - particularly in the case of the multiple offender.

## **NEW SOUTH WALES HIGHER COURT STATISTICS**

The data in this paper relate to sentencing decisions in New South Wales courts between 1978 and 1982 for two offence categories, robbery with major assault, and robbery with minor assault. The latter category includes unspecified assaults where the gravity of the assault is uncertain or not known. A 'major assault' is defined as any assault involving *the use* of a weapon or committed in company with another person, and any

assault causing, or which might reasonably have caused, serious physical or mental injury.

Figures 1 and 2 show in bar graph form, the average dispositions over the five year period of head sentences and non-parole periods imposed for robbery with minor assault (Figure 1) and robbery with major assault (Figure 2).

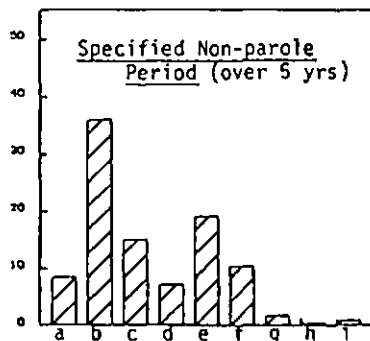
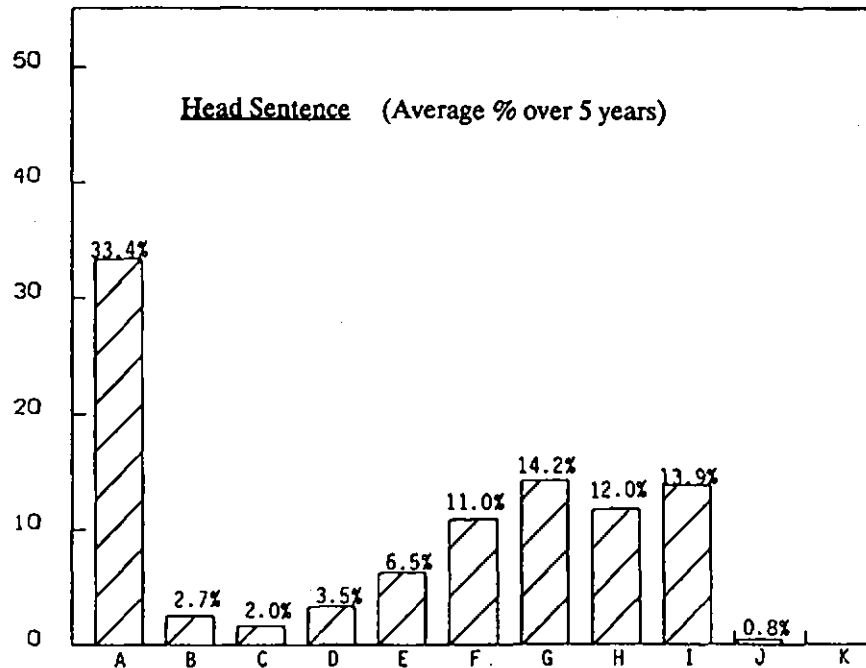
Interpretation of these data needs to be approached with extreme care. It should be noted, for example, that the head sentences which are subject to statistical tabulation relate only to the most serious offence in respect of which each individual offender has been sentenced. This means that where an offender has pleaded guilty or has been found guilty of committing a number of offences, the sentence that is shown in the statistics relates only to the most severe single sentence imposed. This is so irrespective of whether, for example, a term of imprisonment is made to run cumulatively or concurrently with any other sentence. A significant proportion of robbers are sentenced upon more than one charge and the aggregate sentence, howsoever derived, inevitably leads to some distortion in the statistics.

Statistics relating to non-parole periods may be a more reliable guide to what the courts do because these are specified in the form of a single term, regardless of whether the offender has been sentenced to one or more terms of imprisonment. Again data presented must be viewed with caution, because in late 1983 the law applying to probation and parole was altered by the introduction of the *Probation and Parole Act 1983* (NSW). Thereafter it was no longer possible for courts to specify non-parole periods for head sentences of less than three years (although the courts could set non-probation periods). Under the old legislation non-parole periods would not attract remissions. Under the new legislation remissions apply so as to significantly reduce the actual minimum term (the non-parole period) that the prisoner is likely to serve in jail. While the courts quickly declared that it was not permissible to increase sentences in order to compensate for the operations of the remission system (see *O'Brien* [1984] 2 NSWLR 449 at 453), when measured as a proportion of head sentences, minimum terms began creeping upwards. Accordingly the specified non-parole periods of cases dealt with prior to 1984 are likely to understate the current level of specified non-parole periods when measured as a proportion of head sentences.

The data in Figure 2 show that approximately 15 per cent of offenders sentenced for robbery with major assault avoided imprisonment altogether. Predictably, the proportion of offenders who received non-custodial sentences for the less serious category of offences - robbery with minor assault - was considerably higher: approximately one-third. In summary, whereas seven persons out of twenty avoided imprisonment for robbery with minor assault, only three persons out of twenty avoided imprisonment for robbery with major assault.

Figure 1

HIGHER COURT STATISTICS (NSW) 1978-1982  
ROBBERY WITH MINOR ASSAULT



KEY:

Non-Custodial

A - Total placed on bond (with or without probation or fine)

Semi-Custodial

B - Periodic detention

C - Sentenced to Juvenile detention

Imprisonment

D - Under 1 year

E - 1 and under 2 years

F - 2 and under 3 years

G - 3 and under 4 years

H - 4 and under 5 years

I - 5 and under 10 years

J - 10 years or more

K - Life

KEY:

No Non-parole Period Specified

a - Imprisoned

b - Not imprisoned

Non-parole Period Specified

c - 6 months and under 9 months

d - 9 months and under 1 year

e - 1 and under 2 years

f - 2 and under 3 years

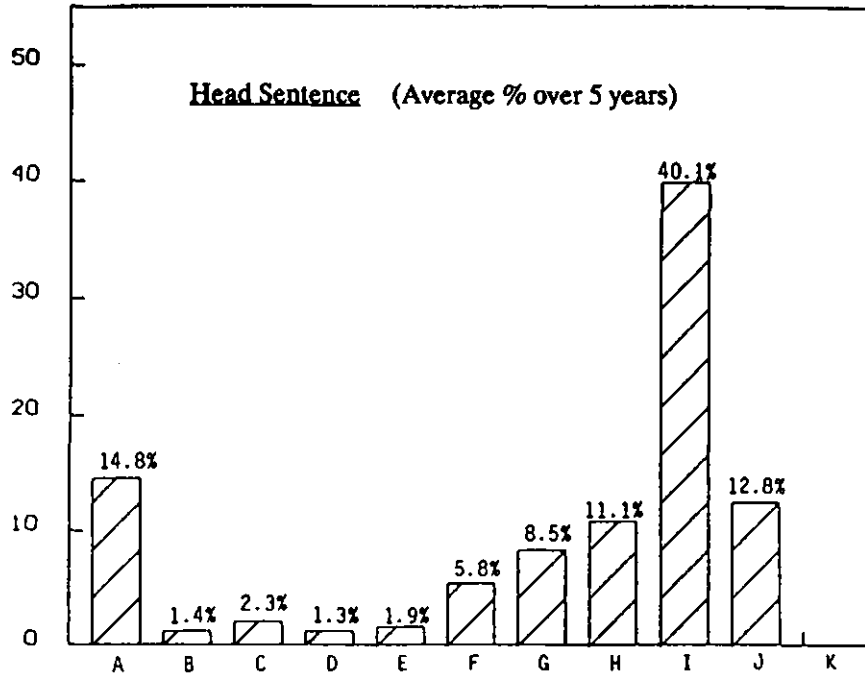
g - 3 and under 4 years

h - 4 and under 5 years

i - 5 years or more

Figure 2

HIGHER COURT STATISTICS (NSW) 1978-1982  
ROBBERY WITH MAJOR ASSAULT



KEY:

Non-Custodial

A - Total placed on bond (with or without probation or fine)

Semi Custodial

B - Periodic detention

C - Juvenile Detention

Imprisonment

D - Under 1 year

E - 1 and under 2 years

F - 2 and under 3 years

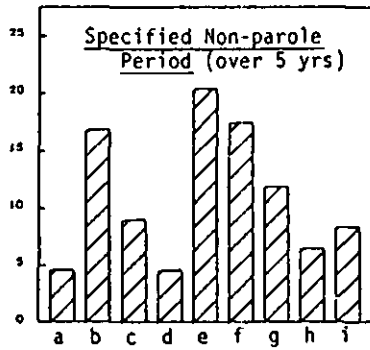
G - 3 and under 4 years

H - 4 and under 5 years

I - 5 and under 10 years

J - 10 years or more

K - Life



KEY:

No Non-parole Period Specified

a - Imprisoned

b - Not imprisoned

Non-parole Period Specified

c - 6 months and under 9 months

d - 9 months and under 1 year

e - 1 and under 2 years

f - 2 and under 3 years

g - 3 and under 4 years

h - 4 and under 5 years

i - 5 years or more

The most common sentence for robbery with major assault was found in the imprisonment range of five to ten years (about 40 per cent of all cases) whereas for robbery with minor assault, the penalties were fairly evenly spread across the two to five year imprisonment ranges. While sentences in excess of ten years were quite unusual for robbery with minor assault offences, robbery with major assault cases did attract a significant proportion of sentences in the category of ten years or more (up to 14.7 per cent of cases). There were no cases of life sentences recorded.

As for non-parole periods, some 50 per cent of robbery with major assault cases attracted terms of between one and four years. Six per cent of cases attracted minimum periods of four but less than five years, and 7 per cent of non-parole periods attracted terms of five years or more. In the case of robbery with minor assault where non-parole periods were specified these tended to be for periods of less than three years.

NSW Higher Court Statistics for 1983 reveal that some 25 per cent of cases were in the one and under two years imprisonment category. A common minimum term was six to nine months, and certainly about 20 per cent of robbery with minor assault cases resulted in specified non-parole periods of less than one year.

Given that non-parole periods may no longer be specified for sentences of less than three years duration, it is likely that courts will substitute non-probation periods for less than half the cases that previously attracted the setting of non-parole periods.

## **PRISON STATISTICS**

The statistics presented thus far have given some indication of the kinds of sentences imposed where robbery is the most serious offence. The national prison census conducted on 30 June 1986 contained in *Australian Prisoners 1986* (Walker & Biles 1987) provides some further statistics which gives an indication of the aggregate sentences imposed on convicted robbers.

### **Aggregate sentencing statistics**

These statistics reveal that convicted robbers make up a substantial proportion of the prison population in New South Wales. No distinction is drawn in the following analysis between robberies with major and minor assault. In round figures about one person in five (or 680 out of 3,611 persons) who was serving a sentence of imprisonment on the evening of 30 June 1986 in New South Wales, was incarcerated for a robbery offence - where robbery is counted as the most serious offence. Nearly one half of those robbers (i.e. 320 out of 680 persons) were serving aggregate sentences of ten years or more, and a significant proportion of long-term prisoners are robbers (45 per cent). Only 13.2 per cent were serving sentences of less than five years.

### **The minimum sentence**

The 1986 prison census includes a calculation of a sentenced prisoner's actual expected sentence. The 'actual expected sentence' is defined as the time elapsed between the date of receipt for the episode of offences, and the earliest date of release, as defined for the particular jurisdiction.

Thus for New South Wales, the 'actual expected sentence' is calculated as follows:

1. if no non-parole period has been set, or if a non-parole period was set but the expiry date (less any applicable remission) has been passed, then the earliest date of release is the expiry date of the aggregate sentence less applicable remission;
2. where a non-parole period or non-probation period has been set, then the earliest date of release is either the expiry date less any applicable remission or the expiry date of the aggregate sentence less applicable remission, whichever is earlier.

Figure 3 reveals that the 'actual expected sentence' for robbers serving sentences in NSW prisons was two to five years in 52.8 per cent of cases, and five to ten years in 15.7 per cent of cases. No direct comparison can be drawn with the earlier sentencing statistics (Figures 1 and 2) as they related to the period 1978-82 while the data in Figure 3 relate to 1986.

### **CASE ANALYSIS**

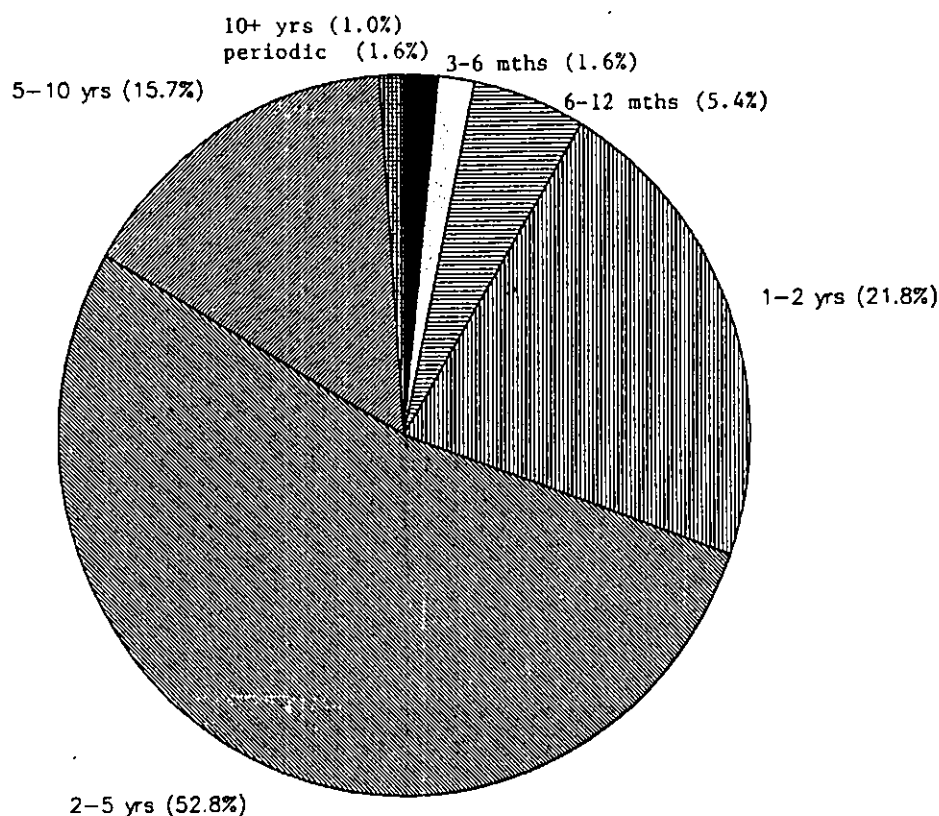
The statistics presented indicate that convicted robbers are sentenced and are expected to serve substantial terms of imprisonment for their offences. An examination of New South Wales Court of Criminal Appeal decisions fails to show that the courts are in any sense lenient towards robbers. The courts consistently consider the gravity of offences to be more important than considerations personal to the offender, and apply the principles enunciated in *Radich* (1954) NZLR 86, and *Rushby* (1977) 1 NSWLR 594, by advocating the imposition of deterrent sentences. On numerous occasions the Court of Criminal Appeal has said:

If a court is weakly merciful, and does not impose a sentence commensurate with the seriousness of the crime, it fails in its duty to see that sentences are such as to operate as a powerful factor to prevent the commission of such crimes. (*Rushby* (1977) 1 NSWLR 598)

Unfortunately the imposition of substantial prison sentences may not always deter offenders. This is seen by the significant number of recidivists who, despite previous jail sentences, do not change their attitudes towards the committing of robbery offences.

Figure 3

ACTUAL EXPECTED SENTENCES FOR PRISONERS SERVING SENTENCES IN NSW PRISONS FOR ROBBERY ON 30 JUNE 1986



Source: Walker, J. & Biles, D. 1987, *Australian Prisoners 1986*, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra

**The totality principle**

When sentencing multiple offenders the courts look at the totality of the criminal behaviour rather than at each offence in isolation, when they decide what aggregate sentences to impose. In particular they recognise the importance of not imposing 'crushing sentences' upon offenders and accordingly they moderate their sentences by the use of concurrent terms. For example, a single armed robbery may attract a sentence of eight years imprisonment. If an offender commits three such offences he will not receive a total of twenty-four years imprisonment, but instead may receive an aggregate sentence of (say) fourteen years penal servitude.

In New South Wales sentences of between fifteen and twenty years are commonly imposed on offenders who commit multiple offences (four or more), and only in very exceptional cases will this upper limit be exceeded. This means that sentences are cheaper by the dozen, and it matters little whether the offender has committed six or twenty-four

armed robberies, the upper limit of 20 years will rarely be exceeded. For example in *Loveday* (unreported 20 November 1980), the Court of Criminal Appeal reduced an aggregate sentence of twenty-five years penal servitude to sixteen years in respect of five armed robberies. In *Goodman* (unreported 4 July 1984), the Court dismissed an appeal against a sentence of sixteen years penal servitude imposed upon the offender in respect of twenty-four armed robberies.

It is of course ridiculous to believe that the threat of longer sentences would deter such offenders. It is submitted that the real deterrent must be the likelihood of their being caught, and it is upon this that criminal justice preventive policies must focus - not on increased punishment.

### **The failure of imprisonment**

Imprisonment is not an inappropriate sanction for violent offenders - particularly those who commit armed robbery - but it is necessary to keep in mind that imprisonment does not rehabilitate offenders. Each time someone is sent to jail there is a distinct prospect that we are manufacturing a more sophisticated criminal and more crime.

Consider for example the case of *Garside* (unreported NSW CCA 2 July 1982), an example of a first offender who committed an amateurish bank robbery and received what may be regarded as a fairly lenient sentence for that kind of offence. The appellant was charged under s. 94 of the Crimes Act (which defines an offence of robbery or assault with intent to rob, or steal from the person) and subsequently sentenced to seven years penal servitude with a non-parole period of three years. He pleaded guilty to threatening a bank teller by placing his hands in his jacket pocket and pretending he had a weapon. He left the bank with \$1,433, but was photographed by the bank's security camera and was eventually apprehended. Street C.J. said:

The circumstance that he took no step to disguise himself is eloquent of what might be described as the amateurish nature of what he embarked upon on this particular day. When apprehended by the police he displayed no hesitation in admitting his guilt and he expressed immediate contrition, an attitude which he maintained thereafter and which was confirmed by his plea of guilty in the District Court. He apparently needed the money to meet some obligations that he had incurred to his sister and to some of his friends.

As this appeal resulted in a penalty which is on the lighter side of sentences for bank robberies, some further details relating to his background and character are instructive. The appellant was aged 24 years at the time of the offence and had not previously been in jail. He possessed only a minor record which the Court regarded as of no relevance to the present offence. Since leaving school he had been employed in a number of different fields and was not an associate of

'undesirable elements'. Further he was said to come from a supportive domestic background which was thought likely to play a part in enabling him to live within the confines of the law as a useful member of society. The Chief Justice also noted that:

There was evidence of the appellant's satisfactory reputation and the investigating police officer confirmed in his evidence that the appellant had been co-operative. In general the tenor of the investigating police officer's evidence was favourable to the appellant on aspects other than those of the actual offence itself.

The Court did give weight to the circumstance that the appellant did not use a weapon, and further that he was charged under s. 94 which carries a significantly shorter maximum penalty than for armed robbery.

For these reasons the Court allowed the appeal and reduced both the head sentence and the non-parole period to five and two years respectively. However, in 1984 the same offender graduates to commit further offences and is given a sentence in the middle range for armed robbery.

Thus in *Garside*, 11 October 1985, the appellant was not discouraged, for shortly after he had been released on licence, it was alleged that at Seaforth on 19 April 1984, being then armed with a pistol, he did assault two tellers employed at the Seaforth branch of the Commonwealth Bank and rob them of \$5,500 in cash. On this occasion his face was covered with a balaclava. He was subsequently tried, convicted and sentenced to eight years penal servitude, dating from 27 March 1984 (the date he was taken into custody) and a non-parole period of three years and nine months from the same date, was specified. The Court found no basis for interfering with this sentence, and dismissed the appeal.

The moral of this story is that those who advocate the greater use of imprisonment for robbers, and indeed for other categories of offenders, must acknowledge that those who experience jail may emerge as a greater threat to law and order than those who do not. Perhaps the sentencing of first offenders, in particular, needs to be modified so as to increase the use of non-custodial sanctions wherever possible.

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## **THE SENTENCING PROCESS - SOME NOTES ON VICTIM INVOLVEMENT**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Worldwide concern about the victims of crime has led the United Nations to produce a *Declaration of Basic Principles of Justice for Victims of Crime and Abuse of Power*, in which victims are defined as:

... a person who, individually or collectively, have suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss ... through acts or omissions that are in violation of criminal laws ... (United Nations 1986).

Australian victims appear to have the following four beliefs:

1. The primary purpose of the criminal justice system is to dispense equal justice, and therefore
2. Victims are entitled to the same rights as their offenders;
3. Victims are those who suffer at the hands of persons who break the law; and
4. Persons who break the law deliberately are wicked, not sick.

In addition, victims oppose that philosophy which asserts punishment should be primarily tailor-made to suit the needs of the criminal; victims welcome the return of the principle that punishment should fit the crime. However, victims should be able to make some input into determination of punishment.

The United Nations Declaration recognises this by stating that the needs of victims should be facilitated by:

allowing the views and concerns of victims to be presented and considered at appropriate stages of the proceedings where their personal interests are affected...

An American report put that concept even more explicitly:

...The victim, in every criminal prosecution, shall have the right to be present and heard at critical stages of judicial proceedings... (U.S. Presidential Task Force on Victims 1982).

## VICTIMS' COURT EXPERIENCE

For many victims the court visit will be their first one. They complain that while they are required to take the oath to tell the truth and the whole truth, they are not given any opportunity to do that by being restricted to answering questions like 'Just answer these questions: yes or no.' Victims compare the ample time given to the offender to describe grounds for leniency, with the prosecutor's brief mention of the harm they have suffered.

However, according to Sumner (1987), the courts do impose punishment having regard to the consequences of the offender's actions, and if some physical or mental characteristic of the victim makes him particularly vulnerable, that is the offender's misfortune. This is not made clear to victims. Many of them merely want to be assured that the judge is indeed fully aware of the harm that they have suffered. Most victims seem to be prepared to leave the degree of punishment to a judge if they are satisfied he or she knows what they have been through.

If there is no requirement for the court to be informed of the effects of the crime on the victim, the court acts on the assumption that the victim is a normal person who has suffered to a normal degree as a result. What is a normal degree? Full details are not always introduced in the trial especially where there is a plea of guilty. Even where the case does go to trial the full extent of the victim's injuries may not be revealed. Why doesn't the court take the small step of reassuring the victim? Victims wonder if the failure to do so comes from apathy, inertia, lack of understanding, or whatever.

## AN AUSTRALIAN RESPONSE

In South Australia, the Attorney-General introduced a *Victims of Crime Bill* on 30 October 1985. Accompanying the bill was a declaration of victims rights approved by cabinet as an instruction to all State departments. Principle number 14 requires courts to have information on the effects of the crime on the victim before they pass sentence.

In particular that requires consideration of injury to the victim. The definition of 'injury' includes mental injury, pregnancy, shock, fear, grief, distress or embarrassment, resulting from the offence. An amendment to the *Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 1978* now requires a pre-sentence report on an offender to be accompanied by particulars of any injury, loss or damage suffered by any person as a result of the offence. Originally these victim impact statements were to be prepared by probation and parole officers, but the Attorney General has now arranged for police and crown prosecutors to ensure the court receives such reports.

There are several arguments against impact statements:

1. They militate against consistency in sentencing. The South Australian approach is that consistency is enhanced by ensuring that full details are known to the court.
2. They would result in lengthening court hearings. The South Australia position is that this may occur but the system of updating information at all stages should minimise any delay.
3. The offender must be able to cross-examine and this will cause further trauma to the victim. The South Australian response is that the trauma can be lessened by keeping the information updated, and by having a third party report on the effects on the victim.
4. According to the Victorian Sentencing Committee, victim impact statements would cause the court to give far too much weight to the effect on the victim and not sufficient weight to the sentencing considerations of rehabilitating the offender. The South Australian Attorney General considered that this was an unduly paternalistic approach - in some cases the assuaging of community outrage may need to take precedence.

#### **A VICTIM IMPACT STATEMENT**

So what might a future Australian victim impact statement look like? The following was compiled for a robbery victim using the South Australian Department of Correctional Services guidelines by South Australia's victimologist when a Probation and Parole Officer.

##### ***The Victim***

*The victim, Mrs Susan Marsh, is a 41-year-old married woman with four sons. Her husband is employed as a project manager at Roxby Downs. For some time, their relationship has not been harmonious. Mrs Marsh is severely deaf as a result of a progressive disease. With two hearing aids, she has hearing accuracy of 95 per cent.*

*Mrs Marsh was prepared to participate in the preparation of a 'mock' victim impact statement. By talking with the probation officer, she felt that somebody in the criminal justice system was hearing of her ordeal for the first time. It became apparent during interviewing that victims' rights, as referred to in the 17 Principles of the Attorney General, are not yet being met in South Australia. Comments upon this position, together with reference to the contacts that were made for the victim, are outlined in the last section of this treatise.*

### The Offence

On Friday 18 April 1986 Mrs Marsh drove into Adelaide to lunch with a friend. As she was parking her car on the fourth floor of a parking station in Hindley Street, a middle-aged man approached when she was still sitting in the car. She thought that he was going to ask her for directions. Mrs Marsh had the key ring around her left thumb.

The man opened the driver's door and began hitting Mrs Marsh around the head. With the first blow, her hearing-aids were dislodged and, from then on, she heard nothing. It appears that the offender may have wanted her car and may have been demanding the keys from her, but she could not hear him. After a few moments, Mrs Marsh slumped forward in her seat and was hit, repeatedly, on the back of her head with a blunt object. The victim's last recollection was of her attacker grabbing her by the collar, pulling her up to face him and punching her in the face three times with a closed fist.

Mrs Marsh believes that another car approached as her assailant ran off. She recalls being in the lift, noticing that her left thumb was partly severed and that blood was streaming from her head. An ambulance was summoned and she was taken to the Royal Adelaide Hospital.

### Victim Impact Statement

General assessment The victim suffered severe physical and psychological injuries as a result of this attack. She also suffered financially and socially: her employment is in jeopardy and some adverse effects will persist.

Financial loss In the attack, Mrs Marsh's Seiko watch, which was valued at \$200, was broken and cannot be repaired. She has been employed for eight years, part-time, by a cosmetic company selling products on commission, and was a director at the time of the assault. Since the attack, her sales have been greatly reduced because of time off work, loss of confidence and memory impairment. About \$1200 of her own money has been spent in attending seminars. She believed that retraining would assist her in her work. Mrs Marsh now considers that the work is beyond her impaired capacity and she may have to resign. Loss of income has been estimated at about \$3500. The victim is not entitled to receive any sickness, unemployment or other benefit.

Compensation Mrs Marsh proposes to make a claim for criminal injuries compensation.

Physical effects The physical consequences of the attack were as follows:

- laceration of the left eye requiring seven sutures;
- swollen face;
- extensive bruising from head to chest;
- lacerations inside and outside the mouth, the resulting scars requiring plastic surgery;

- severe lacerations to the back of the head, requiring extensive suturing;
- the left thumb was partly severed, requiring insertion of a pin;
- the left arm was in plaster cast for some weeks;
- brain damage, resulting in loss of memory and increased hearing impairment.

Mrs Marsh received a blood transfusion and became fearful of contracting A.I.D.S.

Medical treatment Medical treatment has necessitated consultation with the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| a neurologist   | - loss of memory;                       |
| a psychiatrist  | - mental distress;                      |
| a psychologist  | - further counselling;                  |
| an audiologist  | - diminished hearing in left ear;       |
| a plastic surgeon                                     | - cosmetic repair of scars on lips; and |
| the Orthopaedic Clinic at the Royal Adelaide Hospital | - repair of thumb and arm               |

Residual effects of physical injuries Mrs Marsh suffered permanent injuries:

- (a) she has permanent weakness in left hand and arm: Mrs Marsh is predominantly left-handed and now has difficulty, for example, in turning taps on and off and pulling out weeds;
- (b) although she previously suffered from otosclerosis (a disease causing hearing impairment), Mrs Marsh's hearing has deteriorated as a direct result of blows to the head;
- (c) Mrs Marsh has reduced memory capacity.

Psychological effects Initially, Mrs Marsh was fearful of leaving the house. When she travelled in a car, a passenger had to accompany her. She now drives on her own to familiar places, but keeps the car doors locked at all times. Mrs Marsh cannot enter a parking station and does not feel that she will be able to do so for a long while. She considers that she has become more fearful and anxious and has lost trust in mankind. She particularly distrusts unknown men. Mrs Marsh remains terrified that, 'someone will jump on her and start bashing her up'.

Social effects At the time of the attack, Mrs Marsh was contemplating separation from her husband. For some years, their relationship had been unsatisfactory. She now lacks the strength to separate and, because of her condition, feels that she is 'locked into an unhappy marriage'.

Mrs Marsh stated that she has become very dependent on her sons. One son, in particular, has been required to accompany his mother on many occasions when, previously, she would have gone alone. Her children now have to

*perform many duties around the house. The children were most distressed when they first visited their mother in hospital and saw the extent of her facial injuries.*

*Further comments The victim is concerned about possible retaliation by the offender, because of her evidence against him. For many months, she did not feel able to cope with court attendance procedures. Mrs Marsh would like to be notified when the offender is due for release from prison. When asked why, she replied, 'I may move to another State'.*

*Conclusion The attack on Mrs Marsh was vicious, cowardly and entirely unprovoked. Despite impressive effort to overcome the physical, psychological and other effects, her 'scars' are likely to be permanent.*

*After interviewing Mrs Marsh, the following persons were contacted:*

1. *Detective Kelso (Police Department, Armed Hold-Up section)*

*to ascertain whether the offender is pleading guilty or not guilty; Detective Kelso advised that as the victim was the only witness to this attack she would be cross-examined;*

2. *Detective Faggotter (Adelaide C.I.B.) - the detective who initially interviewed Mrs Marsh*

*to ask him to speak to the victim and explain exactly what is happening in her case;*

3. *Sheriff's Office*

*to ask whether or not the victim's name can be suppressed in court so that the offender will not be able to trace her: advice was provided that addresses can be withheld, but not the victim's name, and Mrs Marsh was advised accordingly;*

4. *Volunteer Unit, Department of Correctional Services*

*to explain that the victim is very nervous about attending court: as a 'relaxed victim' is a better witness, a female volunteer with a sound knowledge of court procedures will accompany Mrs Marsh when she is required to attend court;*

5. *Central District Criminal Court, Clerk of Arraignment*

*to ascertain the time of hearing of the victim's claim for compensation; Mrs Marsh was notified of the next date on which her case will be listed;*

6. Victim's solicitor

*to obtain information for the victim, who was unaware of many aspects of her claim, for example, does an award of compensation include medical and legal expenses?*

Comments

*When interviewed for the victim impact statement, Mrs Marsh became agitated and visibly upset at recalling this trauma in her life. Due to the interviewer's social work background, it was possible to provide some immediate counselling and, finally, leave her somewhat relaxed. Police and prosecutors do not have appropriate training to afford such support and have inadequate information about welfare agencies which can provide ongoing assistance. Consequently, the victim could be left feeling very upset.*

*A division needs to be established in the Department of Correctional Services to assist the victims of crime. All of the probation officers who attended the course expressed the view that they would like to work with victims and that they consider such work would provide 'a balance' to concentrating entirely on offenders within the criminal justice system. Such an involvement with victims could also do much to enhance the public image of the Department.*

**FURTHER UNRESOLVED ISSUES**

Some progress has been made in determining the impact of crime, particularly violent crime, on individuals. There are several serious consequences of victimisation, including emotional trauma, physical injury, economic loss, dysfunction in the support group and inconvenience. Emotional trauma is the least evident and least understood effect of crime while it affects direct victims most, others may also suffer.

What about the harm which is caused to commercial organisations? In order to impose a sentence that 'fits the crime', when judges are assessing the seriousness of the victimisations of offenders, they must make a large number of assumptions. How do they assess the seriousness? Do they need an impact statement for injuries and losses suffered by staff within a commercial setting victimised by, say, armed robbery?

As there is lack of knowledge about which counselling techniques work best for which victims, it is not known if the opportunity to make a statement at the proceedings might promote the healing of psychological wounds for some. Do impact statement opportunities increase satisfaction with the criminal justice system?

Victims frequently report feeling distressed, isolated and uninformed and are often uncertain of their rights. The vested interests of the criminal justice system are quite clear and entrenched about theirs.

Management texts speak of the inbuilt inertia of large organisations, especially those in a position of monopoly, and there is no choice but to deal with it.

What happens in the future seems to be in the hands of the victims themselves. Bank staff do at least have their officers' associations, and banks too, if they acknowledge their victim status, could be most influential. The struggle for victims' rights needs the support of all.

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## **PROVIDING ASSISTANCE TO VICTIMS OF BANK HOLD-UPS**

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### **BACKGROUND**

The Commonwealth Banking Corporation first turned its attention to the psychological effects of hold-ups on staff in 1983 when the number of hold-ups rose from forty-five in 1982 to 119 in 1983 - an increase of 160 per cent. Research was undertaken by the Occupational Health Division on the long-term effects of hold-ups and it was found that almost 30 per cent of the staff interviewed experienced post hold-up reactions lasting from a few weeks to several months and the effects were felt on both their home and work life.

As a result of this research, the Bank approved the establishment of a Post Hold-up Assistance Program which encompassed the counselling of those who required assistance in coping with their hold-up experience; education about the hold-up experience for staff, including managers and supervisors; and continued research into the long-term effects of the hold-up experience. The Post Hold-up Support Program has been in operation almost two years and has gradually improved its services to affected employees.

This paper presents a discussion of the reactions of victims of violent crime in general, outlines some specific issues which relate to the hold-up experience and also provides details of the Hold-up Support Program as it operates at present within the Bank.

### **REACTIONS TO TRAUMATIC EVENTS**

Various stages in the reactions to traumatic events have been documented (Figley 1985, 1986). One model describes three overlapping stages.

#### **Period of impact**

Approximately fifteen per cent of people remain calm during the initial period. They retain their awareness, formulate a plan of action and see it through. Approximately seventy per cent of people act stunned and bewildered. These people report a restricted field of attention and they tend to behave in an automatic way and comment on a lack of feeling and emotion. Fifteen per cent of people show inappropriate responses such as hysterical crying and screaming, confusion and paralysing anxiety.

### **Period of recoil**

This stage begins when the initial stresses have stopped and there is a gradual return to awareness and emotional expression. It is also the first phase of the recovery process and requires the victim to deal with a number of distressing emotions including fear, anger, sadness, self-pity and guilt.

Research suggests that someone's perception of the event and its aftermath may influence that person's ability to reorganise and integrate the experience into life.

### **Period of reorganisation**

Reorganisation or recovery is said to occur when the victim assimilates the painful experience into life.

The types of reactions seen after traumatic stress fall into four groups, and vary between individuals depending on a variety of factors. These responses can occur after the shock period and persist for days or weeks.

Emotional reactions Chronic or intermittent changes in one's emotional state include:

- 'flashbacks' or repetitive and intrusive memories of the event and the emotion during the day, causing distress and anxiety;
- 'nightmares' concerning the event itself or similar themes such as death, danger or feeling out of control;
- specific apprehensions or fears concerning recurrence of a similar event, anxiety caused by objects, events or scenes that may remind victims of the event;
- unexplained feelings of panic, anxiety, depression, helplessness, or lowered self-esteem;
- guilt, anger or grief;
- emotional numbness, feelings of estrangement from others, and mood swings.

Physical reactions Changes in bodily responses can occur, for example:

- heightened arousal, hypersensitivity and nervousness;
- insomnia, disturbed or poor quality sleep, appetite disturbances;
- gastrointestinal disturbances such as vomiting, nausea and diarrhoea;

- decreased resistance to disease, and muscle tension problems, such as headache, fatigue and exhaustion.

Cognitive effects Thought processes and mental abilities are often affected in the following ways:

- impaired concentration;
- short-term memory problems;
- impaired perception, decision-making and judgment;
- preoccupied thoughts; and
- loss of confidence.

Behavioural and interpersonal effects Changes commonly observed in behaviour and in relationships with others include:

- restlessness and irritability;
- apathy, boredom and disinterest;
- social withdrawal, lifestyle changes; isolation from family, work-mates and friends;
- difficulties performing routine work tasks;
- abuse of alcohol or prescription drugs, often used to try to 'cope' with anxiety or other unpleasant emotions.

These stress reactions are part of a normal recovery process which enable the person to deal with the experience and gradually integrate it into life. Although each person is unique and is likely to show a variable combination of these reactions, there appear to be common psychological responses across a wide variety of victims.

It has been proposed that victims' psychological distress is largely due to the shattering of basic assumptions held about themselves and their world. (Janoff-Bulman & Freize 1983). Three assumptions that change as a result of victimisation are: the belief in personal invulnerability; the perception of the world as meaningful; and the view of the self as positive. Coping with victimisation is presented as a process that involves rebuilding one's beliefs in a manner which will facilitate healthy, adaptive behaviour.

The assumption of invulnerability Most people tend to go through life with the comforting belief that 'It won't happen to me'. When it does happen to them, this belief is shattered and the person feels overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness and vulnerability. This results in the victim's preoccupation with fear of recurrence of the traumatic event. Until a new belief can be established which takes into account the event that did happen, but also includes a realistic appraisal of the risk of future recurrence, the person feels overly fearful and afraid.

The world is meaningful The assumption of invulnerability partly rests on the basic belief that events are comprehensible, orderly and make sense. It is hard to accept that events can be random and unpredictable so victims often try to make sense out of it. They ask 'Why did this

happen to me?' and often blame themselves rather than accept that the event was random and senseless.

Positive self-perception Victimisation can automatically activate negative self-images since no-one likes to see themselves as helpless or powerless. Victims often feel ashamed of how frightened they were during the experience and are often surprised that they didn't react in the way they always thought they would if placed in that situation. The process of recovery involves the victim asserting their autonomy and regaining their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth.

### **SPECIFIC ISSUES FOR HOLD-UP VICTIMS**

Victims of crime and other types of trauma show similarity in the type of reactions noted, but there are a few issues which relate specifically to the hold-up experience. Hold-ups occur when people are at work going about their normal duties. Just as a woman attacked in her own home is likely to be more distressed than one attacked in an unfamiliar environment, so too the worker who had always felt 'safe' at work is more distressed when this belief is shattered. Bank staff need to relearn who they can trust and where they can feel safe.

A person's self-perceptions as a worker is important. If during a hold-up a teller fails to follow security procedures, the person's self-image is affected and may result in accentuating the negative perceptions described. Similarly, if in the aftermath of the hold-up they begin making errors because they can't concentrate or find themselves wanting to withdraw from customers, these negative perceptions will be further reinforced.

A hold-up can also produce conflict between the organisation and the worker or accentuate any pre-existing difficulties. For instance, staff are routinely trained by the Bank to try to observe the robber, activate security devices, pass over small denominations first, to move slowly, etc. However, these procedures place the individual at greater risk and many staff have difficulty resolving this conflict between their responsibility to the organisation and self-preservation.

Anger at the company is also emerging as a feature of post hold-up reaction, and has been identified as a feature of employee reactions to workplace accidents and disasters. Robbery victims often express a great deal of anger toward the bandit. At times this anger is re-directed towards the organisation. Some realise that anger against the robber is futile and the need to find a harm-producing agent and 'someone to blame' is very powerful. Post hold-up victims need to be treated very carefully by the organisation to avoid re-directing this anger onto the organisation or other staff through ill-timed criticism or apparent indifference to staff distress.

The hierarchical structure of branches places particular stresses on some employees. Managers and supervisors may feel that they have to

remain calm and in control at all times for the sake of their staff and this may hinder expression of their own feelings and delay their own recovery process. Those at the bottom of the ladder need special attention: giving the victim some control over their environment helps them to regain feelings of personal autonomy and overcome feelings of helplessness induced by the hold-up. Within a Bank setting, a person's trauma would increase if they were forced to go back onto the teller counter before they felt able to do so. A gradual return to the counter in the individual's own time ensures a more effective and lasting rehabilitation.

### **Factors influencing the recovery process**

Pre-assault factors For many young staff the hold-up may have been the worst event that has ever happened to them. Older staff may have experienced death of friends or family, car accidents, or other events which have led to the development of effective coping strategies.

If a person has experienced other traumatic events recently or has unresolved experiences from the past, this may reduce their ability to deal with the hold-up successfully and prolong their reaction. Previous hold-ups or other experiences of crime can make the recovery more difficult. It has been found that a recent bereavement makes staff more prone to an adverse reaction to the hold-up experience. This is probably due to the similarity of the feelings aroused by the two events. Some staff with pre-existing emotional problems may find that the hold-up may push them beyond their ability to cope.

Assault factors The degree of violence occurring during the hold-up and degree of personal danger or threat experienced by staff are major factors. A person who says that 'this was the most frightening thing that's ever happened to me, and my life was threatened' will have more problems in recovery than someone who believes that 'a hold-up is a part of my job but they only wanted the money and not to hurt me'. The immediate support received by staff can help to influence and modify these perceptions of the event and put it into a more appropriate context. For instance, we try to teach staff how to keep themselves from going too far with the 'what ifs'. By reminding themselves what did happen (the robber came in, he scared us, he took the money and left) and avoiding letting their minds dwell on what could have happened, they are better able to keep their fears manageable.

Post assault factors Support and understanding from friends, family and work-mates is crucial in helping the victim to deal with the event and their reaction to it. It is important to be able to talk about the experience with someone who understands. Unfortunately, friends and family sometimes do not give the support that is needed. Some try to trivialise the incident or behave in an unsympathetic manner. 'No-one got hurt so what's the matter with you?' Others may say 'Just forget about it, put it out of your mind'. Such comments may further alienate the victim at a time when they need to talk about it. Others may block the victim's recovery by over-reacting and becoming distressed themselves. This can

cause the victim to hide feelings to avoid upsetting everyone, thereby making it difficult or impossible for them to work through the experience.

We try to forewarn staff that it is hard for families to understand and give the support that is needed. It is better to ensure that an understanding and supportive atmosphere is created in the branch among those who went through it together. We encourage staff to return to the branch the next day even if on altered duties or light duties since we find this prevents 'avoidance reactions'. Postponing any transfer or other absences from the branch for two weeks or until the staff member has 'settled' is also advisable. During the branch visits, the psychologists advise staff how they can help one another to recover quickly and ensure that branch managers, accountants and supervisors are aware of their role in fostering this supportive environment in the branch.

The victim's perception of their own reactions and responses to the event are just as important as perceptions of the attack itself. Reassurance that they acted appropriately and that their current experiences are 'normal' is important. A victim who perceives that their anxiety means that they are 'going crazy' will have an additional burden. Staff education and preparation is essential: an employee who knows the types of reactions to expect, and that these present problems will pass in time, will not tend to over-react and intensify the stress.

The police interrogation process, line-ups, or other organisational procedures can sometimes intensify the feelings of victims. Similarly, an appearance at court to witness against the accused bandit can re-activate adverse reactions long after the hold-up.

### **COMMONWEALTH BANK'S HOLD-UP SUPPORT PROGRAM**

One of the reasons that the Bank developed its own hold-up support program was to address some of these issues, and, in addition, it was concerned that employees were not getting sufficient help and assistance from existing community resources.

The research on Bank employees showed that those who visited their local doctor often received inappropriate treatment. General practitioners are not trained in post-traumatic stress reactions and often prescribe sleeping tablets, anti-anxiety medication or other sedatives; give automatic extended periods of sick leave; and do not provide appropriate counselling or support.

The use of sedatives, sleeping tablets (or alcohol) to try to suppress the feelings of anxiety aroused by the event tends to delay the natural recovery process. Extended periods of sick leave removes the victim from the best source of support - their friends and work-mates at the branch who understand what they went through and can share their feelings. It is better for people to return to work the next day (even for a few hours on altered duties) rather than avoid the place where the hold-up occurred. Avoidance is much more likely to lead to the development of a phobic

reaction. Not providing counselling to aid the victim in understanding their reaction usually intensified feelings of being 'sick' or 'weak'.

The present program focuses on three areas - education, counselling and research.

### **Education**

The support received by staff following a hold-up is crucial to their recovery, and therefore the educational program focuses much of its attention on helping staff to understand their own reactions and the reactions of those around them. In addition to a video which is available for viewing in every branch, professional staff present sessions to tellers and supervisors as part of their training. The intention is to help staff confront the possibility that they may be involved in a hold-up and to make them aware of common reactions. Many victims find their anxiety increases when they compare their response to a hold-up with those around them. The question 'What is wrong with me?' is often asked and an awareness of the range of reactions can minimise worry.

Coping techniques, such as the need to express feelings associated with the hold-up by talking or crying, are discussed. Staff are cautioned to avoid about the use of tranquillisers, sleeping tablets or alcohol as well as to avoid defence of denial - 'just forget about it and pretend it didn't happen'. The brochure 'It Doesn't Stop at the Hold-up' is distributed to staff following a hold-up, but it is meant to serve merely as a prompt for information already presented during educational programs and for relatives and friends. The video is made available for staff to take home to show their families if they wish.

### **Counselling**

Counselling post hold-up victims falls into several categories. There is immediate support and care provided by trained staff, either psychologists, occupational health nurses or personnel department staff. This involves attending the branch immediately after the hold-up and personally interviewing each staff member. Part of the debriefing process involves providing the fundamentals of psychological first aid adapted from Singer (1982):

- adopting a sensitive and sympathetic attitude towards the wide variety of reactions that may be encountered;
- making gestures and providing 'tokens' of a simple, practical nature which communicate psychologically that the victims are being cared for;
- encouraging the verbal expression of feeling associated with the experience and giving each person an opportunity to discuss what they personally experienced;
- offering reassurance;

- encouraging victims to participate in simple, useful tasks as soon as possible;
- assessing those in need of further professional counselling or attention and organising such assistance.

Psychologists normally visit the branch again the following morning and follow-up anyone who is having problems or who has been unable to report to work. Some staff may require crisis counselling for three to five sessions individually to assist and support them through their recovery. Long-term counselling is necessary in only a very small number of cases - usually where there are other extenuating factors or problems. The support staff try to work closely with the branch to ensure that staff who feel unable to resume their normal duties immediately are given gradual exposure to the 'threatening' environment.

As an adjunct to the hold-up support program, a witness support program is also now in place. A video entitled 'The Legal Consequences' has been prepared and distributed to each branch. This video acquaints staff with normal court procedures and addresses issues of concern to witnesses. Before the court appearance, each witness is contacted by the occupational health nurse who ensures that they know what to expect and that counselling and other practical assistance is provided beforehand. On the day of the court appearance, the nurse will accompany the witness to court and remain with them for support and assistance throughout the proceedings. This program is important for reducing the likelihood of re-activation of hold-up stress by exposure to the court and the accused.

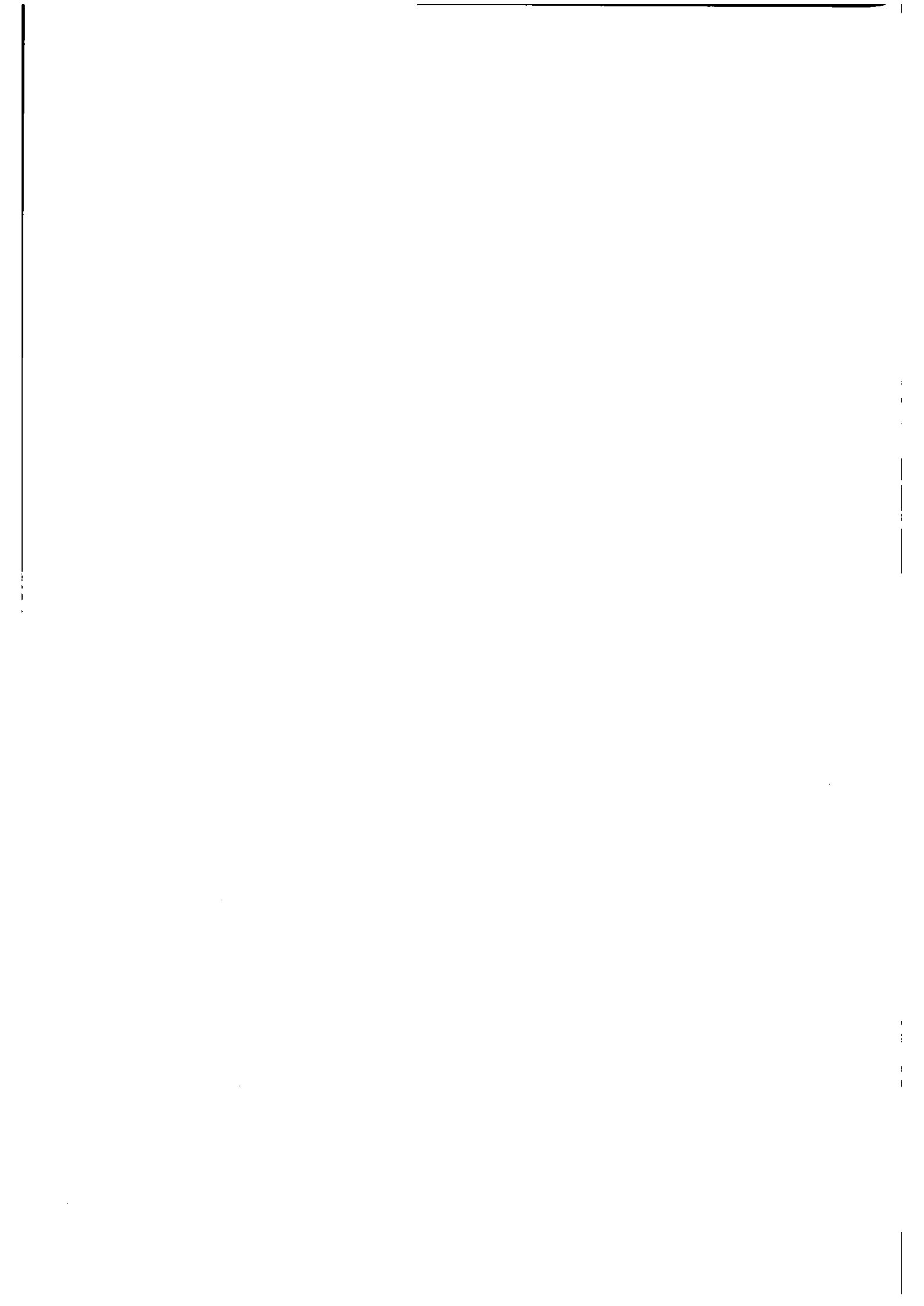
### **Research**

As the available research on the hold-up experience is limited, the Bank is continuing to investigate the types of reactions seen and the most appropriate methods of providing assistance to staff. Publication of Ms Crabtree's current research into this topic will benefit other organisations and their employees. The Bank is also researching the reduction in compensation costs made against the Corporation as a result of the program.

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## **ROBBERY, RESPONSES AND THE FUTURE**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Historically, many of the services required for the maintenance of law and order and the protection of persons and property have been provided by the legally appointed law enforcement agency of the state. However, the increase in major crime coupled with the numbers of false activations of alarm systems has extended police services until the 'thin blue line' is very thin indeed. Compounded with the curtailment of government funding, an enormous gap is developing to the stage where lawlessness is difficult to control. As a result there has been a rapid growth in provision of services by the private security industry to a level where their numbers in Victoria exceed the number of members of the Victoria Police.

Sir Robert Mark, the former Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Force in London stated some time ago that the police in England were no longer capable of protecting private property. This is becoming true in this country and as organisations will be increasingly required to protect their own assets, the security industry will have an increasingly important role to play.

### **GOVERNMENT RESPONSIBILITY AND PRIVATE AGENTS**

The vacuum created by lack of police resources and an increasing crime rate has led to an increase in employment of security personnel and greater use of security equipment. At 30 November 1986, the Registrar of Private Agents for Victoria had 4966 registrations. In addition, there are personnel employed in a security capacity by private organisations who are not required to be licensed, and it is estimated that at the end of 1987 there were at least 17,200 persons not controlled or qualified by legislation working in the private security sector.

The Government has not accepted full responsibility for the protection of persons and property within the State of Victoria. In 1982, the Government established a Working Party to review the operation of the Private Agents Act 1966. This was in response to submissions from the Association of Private Detectives, Institute of Mercantile Agents, and the Victorian Security Institute. The Working Party included members from organisations representing the private security industry, legal profession and relevant government agencies. In 1983, the Report of the Working Party, with its recommendations, was delivered to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

To date, nothing has been done about implementing the recommendations which were supported by the industry and the Police Department. The Government is not upgrading the standard of the industry to a level where a degree of compatibility with the police is achieved although it has clear obligations to ensure public safety. From the point of view of a major banking company, those at risk, in order of priority, are bank staff, clients and response groups.

Crime costs taxpayers heavily but beyond that, it causes incalculable suffering and distress. The fear of sudden attack, the pain of a vicious assault or the impact of a bullet cannot be summarised in hard statistics, but the emotional and physical toll is enormous. Fear alone can affect personality as illustrated by the trauma and associated stress suffered by employees after an armed robbery. The risk can be reduced by target-hardening measures, such as security systems.

## **SECURITY SYSTEMS**

The installation of alarm systems and security services by organisations and citizens is becoming more popular. Organisations are advised that a properly installed system will:

- . deter the offender from attacking the premises;
- . detect the offender if he does attack;
- . ensure that response will be available;
- . protect their staff; and
- . protect their assets, working environment and company records.

The theory that electronics supporting physical barriers acts as a deterrent and detector is the main thrust of security marketing. However, there are problems associated with the installation and use of these systems which are not unique to Australia and are applicable to the whole of the western world. Chief among these is the number of false alarms that occur. The enormous cost of wasted police resources as well as the number of deaths of police which have occurred when an alarm call was treated as 'just another false alarm' highlights the problem.

### **Alarm systems**

The proliferation of alarm installations is due to a number of factors:

- . increase in crime and fear of crime;
- . advice on security by police (Neighbourhood Watch);
- . decision by some insurance companies to require an alarm installed in any residence where the private contents exceed \$50,000;
- . better marketing methods by security companies.

Many alarm systems are connected to central stations which, in effect, are no more than 'collection or information centres'.

Alarm activations throughout the world are approximately 98 per cent false and 2 per cent real. False alarms are due to 50 per cent user error and 50 per cent installer error/equipment unsatisfactory. These figures may fluctuate by as much as 10 per cent depending on whether or not there is an inspecting authority to supervise the alarm installers and whether or not there is a standard of competence. In Australia systems must be installed to Australian Standard 2201 (as a minimum).

The police, public and environment suffer when the number of false activations are viewed against the effectiveness of alarm systems. Alarms have a valuable role to play in protecting persons and property but to retain their credibility they must have the confidence of the user and the responder.

### Alarm activations

The number of alarm activations notified to the Victoria Police Communications Section (D24) in 1983 was approximately 40,000. In 1987 this increased to approximately 47,000. The current criterion to classify a call is that if no criminal activity is detected then the call is classified as a false alarm.

The police have recorded the results of a survey on calls received at D24 from the metropolitan area as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

#### Alarm Calls and Victoria Police Resources Expended 18 to 24 March 1984 inclusive

No of Silent Alarms		776
Genuine Calls	(2.6 per cent)	20
False Calls	(97.4 per cent)	756
Police Units Attending		1001
Police Personnel Attending		1963
Manhours Expended		5534
Kilometres Travelled		5557

(These figures do not include audible alarms which were reported directly to police stations by the public. They are estimated to number approximately 200 per week.)

The user, the installer and the responder all have differing areas of responsibility.

The user is usually not fully aware of what is being purchased and, after assessing his own security risk, installs what he is willing to pay for. There is generally little or no instruction given in the use of the

equipment or an assessment made of the user's ability to operate it. The whole situation is directed towards false activation from commencement.

Without the police response, the present organisation of alarm protection would collapse and would have to be replaced by something quite different and much more expensive. If this were to occur, risks would probably be left unprotected or with inadequate protection, at least for a time. It is not intended to over-dramatise the police response role, but it is considered that for confidence in the reliability of systems to be maintained police response is essential.

Bank installations meet the installation specification of the Australian Standard 2201 and modern technology ensures virtually false free alarm systems. The equipment costs may have been met but the cost of incorrect use by staff could be very high in terms of life loss and trauma, either as a result of an armed robbery or a responder accident.

The installer is often blamed for many faults. The Victorian Security Institute was so concerned at the standard of security in Victoria that a submission was made to the State Government to extend the provisions of the Private Agents Act 1966 to incorporate the security industry. Some of the major concerns were the methods of selling, installing and maintaining alarm systems. The submission was supported by the Victoria Police based on their increasing operational costs due to the false alarms and the lack of regulatory control for the installation of security systems.

There are a number of problems associated with alarm companies:

- (a) One national alarm company reported 855 alarms in a thirty-day period - fifteen were genuine, 840 false. This company consistently states that there are no problems with their systems, and the fault is with the user. Alarm companies make little or no effort to rectify the situation. They charge a \$20 service fee for attendance at alarm activations even if the police attend and their servicemen do not.
- (b) Many companies have reduced their false alarm totals by having a 'delay' factor built into the system. This is usually between thirty and forty seconds and enables the alarm activator to call and inform the central station operator of the false alarm before the police are notified. This 'culling' does nothing to upgrade the system.
- (c) A number of smaller companies are installing cheap alarm systems connected to telephone dialling systems which automatically ring nominated numbers when the alarm is activated. Some of these companies are nominating the local police telephone number although that is discouraged by the police. However, a potentially dangerous situation could arise if a business owner attends alone at his premises and surprises offenders with possibly tragic results.

- (d) The majority of alarm companies endeavour to 'oversell' equipment for alarm systems, thereby increasing the probability of false activation.
- (e) The installation of equipment which is not appropriate for a particular location.
- (f) Faulty and obsolete equipment is installed.
- (g) Equipment is installed incorrectly.
- (h) Lack of supervision by management of both staff and installations.
- (i) The system is serviced irregularly by the installer.
- (j) There is no program of instruction for customer training.
- (k) Company overhead expenses are reduced with a relative reduction in standards.
- (l) Some clients refuse to provide keys to alarm companies because of lack of security confidence.
- (m) The selling of 'police time' by alarm companies using police to respond to alarm calls without their own service vehicles attending. Many companies sell a service well aware that they cannot provide a response service and rely on the police to respond as part of the police service. A customer service fee is usually charged by the alarm company when this occurs.
- (n) In some areas police will now not respond to premises which have repeated false alarms. One security company has a particular alarm which the police will not attend unless the alarm is verified by the company. As the company cannot respond, it necessitates a telephone call to the client thereby increasing the vulnerability if it is a genuine call.

### **The responder**

There are generally three response groups to alarm activations: the police, the alarm company and the property owner.

The police respond as part of the service provided to responsible members of the public. High grade equipment, properly installed and supervised, causes little fault and gives the police confidence in the company and the systems. Responding to continually false-alarming equipment creates an apathetic and dangerous approach which could well be fatal. The false alarm indirectly creates the danger of road accidents as police vehicles proceed to answer the call.

The alarm company serviceman responds to some calls for alarm activation. A fee is charged for this service and should the serviceman be unable to 'seal' the premises and the owner will not attend, a guard is provided at an hourly rate payable by either the owner or his insurance company. Usually this response falls short of an acceptable level of security.

The property owner usually attends as a result of an activation of a low quality system connected to a telephone dialling device. This is a hazardous operation and advice regularly given to owners is for them to contact the police before attending. Should there be a delay in police attending, many owners lose patience, ignore the warning and attend anyway.

It is acknowledged that violent crime and hostage-taking are increasing in our community. The challenges facing response forces in such situations are both delicate and critical because human lives are at stake. If there is no proper planning and training, or if response actions are impulsive and unco-ordinated, lives may be unnecessarily lost.

There are four points which must be taken into account when considering an appropriate response group. Firstly, there is a lack of professionalism in the security industry. Many of the problems are caused by competing organisations reducing costs thereby causing a compensatory reduction of standards which, although acceptable to the organisations involved, are not acceptable to the Police Department of Victoria and the Victorian Security Institute.

Secondly, there is a high operational cost to police caused by the large number of false alarms each month. The monthly average is approximately 4000 calls and the majority originate from the central stations of security companies. The monetary cost is extremely difficult to calculate due to the differing periods of time spent at the alarm location and the number of police attending. It has been conservatively estimated that excluding ancillary costs approximately 1500 operational manhours are lost each month due to false alarms. The cost to the public caused by the non-availability of police services due to these attendances is another factor which must be taken into consideration.

Thirdly, the police department is concerned at the proliferation of organisations specialising in security. The employees of these companies are likened to private police. The standard of accountability expected of police is high and it is reasonable to expect that a comparable standard should be expected of the security industry as both groups should be working for the welfare of the citizens of the State. Should this standard be attained, there could be an interfacing of compatible services.

Fourthly, concern has been expressed that persons with criminal records have been able to obtain employment in the private security industry or establish businesses such as locksmithing, installation of surveillance protection equipment and devices, patrol and guard services and security advisory services. By these means, dishonest persons can

gain 'inside' knowledge of the location, nature and means of storage and protection of valuables under the pretence of providing a service or advising on security protection.

Determining the viability of operation of a response group involves an analysis of the response need, the demands of staff and the response itself. There is ample justification for an urgent response to alarm activations at bank establishments:

- . increasing attacks on bank establishments;
- . increase in violent crime;
- . increasing acts of violence towards bank employees;
- . assurance to staff that when the alarm is activated, assistance is near;
- . increasing health problems of staff due to uncertainty of security;
- . increasing bank union demands for upgraded security;
- . danger of hostage-taking to assist offender to escape or ensure that assistance is given in hold-up.

The demands by staff are closely related to the 'needs', although they are of a more personal nature. Each person has a different tolerance to stress and performs at a different level. This tension, coupled with the violence of crime which may be directed at these persons, makes the assurance of rapid assistance very real. Bank programs have been implemented to satisfy these demands.

Response to alarms cannot be planned as they have a factor of uncertainty - when and where are they going to occur? Speculation that armed robberies may increase substantially once criminals become aware of the reduced police role would seem to be unfounded if the probability of apprehension remains essentially unchanged and would-be offenders perceive no significant change in risks associated with bank robbery.

The type of response that an alarm generates is an important part of an intrusion system. Unless the response is appropriate to the circumstances at hand, the investment in an alarm detection system will not be effective.

## **RESPONSES IN THE FUTURE**

There are three possible response forces to alarm activations - an internal security group, an outside security organisation or the police.

### **Internal Security Group**

The function of an internal security group is to identify and deal with risks and advise on how to overcome them by the use of carefully selected staff. This group should also serve as a private service to management. It must also have adequate resources to attain objectives. Response vehicles would not have emergency vehicle protection.

The internal security group could be likened to a private police force controlled by the bank. It would not be regulated by legislation as its members would not be covered by the Private Agents Act 1966. The cost of formation and operation would be expensive and the response it would provide would be less than desired by the bank. The inability to plan, because it is not known when a robbery will occur, and the huge area to be covered, would give poor response times and, if a situation of confrontation or hostage-taking occurred, the police would need to be called. The main function of this group would be an initial response.

### **Security Organisation**

The uncontrollable quality of response creates great concern for security managers and the industry. At the 1975 United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders it was stated that security officers should not operate in the public sector but only in the private area. As police cannot fulfil private security, those people fill the void. Because of its wider base this group has the ability to provide quicker response but the quality would be doubtful.

### **The Police**

The current responders to alarm activations at bank premises are the police forces. The police normally commit at least two vehicles to each bank call, although police availability may be restricted due to budgetary constraints, manpower shortages and other calls to false alarms. Nevertheless as a matter of policy, they will continue to respond when requested, although the response may take longer than they would like. However, banks will always secure a priority response.

To compensate for delays in assistance and to improve their own protection, bank employees must adopt a professional attitude in the use of the security equipment provided for their protection. By making the 'target harder' the criminal will either be deterred and transfer his attention elsewhere or, the criminal will be delayed sufficiently for the response to be effective. The comment has been made that if lucky, all will be well but as someone once observed: 'Luck is the residue of careful planning and proper preparation'.

### **CONCLUSION**

The probability of police being the responders to crime calls is rapidly disappearing due to their increasing workloads and personnel shortages. The banks must be prepared to support their own staff by providing the response to their calls for assistance. This will be costly but, when compared to a human life, fades into insignificance.

As the banks travel in this direction, they must endeavour to increase the professionalism of their personnel. Their efforts will support bank staff and, to a small degree, will reduce the pressure on the police, although in the event of a major confrontation, their services will still be needed.

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