



NSW Bureau of Crime
Statistics and Research



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Applied Research in Crime and Justice Conference

4 - 5 August 2025 | Sydney

Handbook Program and abstracts

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Applied Research in Crime and Justice Conference

4 - 5 August 2025 | ICC, 14 Darling Drive, Sydney

DAY 1 - Monday, 4 August 2025

8:15am - 9:00am	Registration	
9:00am - 9:15am	Welcome to Country: Aunty Yvonne Weldon Cockle Bay Room	
9:15am - 9:25am	Formal opening by: Hon. Michael Daley , NSW Attorney General	
9:25am - 9:30am	Michael Tidball , Secretary of Dept. of Communities and Justice	
9:30am - 10:30am	Keynote: Cockle Bay Room - Chair: Jackie Fitzgerald , Executive Director, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research. Jennifer Doleac , Arnold Ventures. <i>Evidence-based strategies to break the incarceration cycle</i>	
10:30am - 11:00am	MORNING TEA	
11:00am - 11:30pm	Session 1A: Cockle Bay Room Chair: Grace Di Giorgio <i>Theme: Young people</i>	Session 1B: Room C3.4 Chair: Alana Cook <i>Theme: Mental health and corrections</i>
	Molly McCarthy , Alfred Deakin Institute, Deakin University. <i>Comparing historical cohorts of justice-involved young people: what social and ecological risks are associated with growth in high frequency and high harm youth offending?</i>	Darcy Coulter , Curtin University. <i>The relationship between diagnoses of mental illness and substance use disorders, and reincarceration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults</i>
11:30am - 12:00pm	Steve Yeong , NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research. <i>Should you delay your child's entry into kindergarten? Quasi-experimental evidence on the effect of delayed school entry on education and crime</i>	Julian Trofimovs , University of New South Wales. <i>Impact of post-release community mental health and disability support on reincarceration for prisoners with intellectual disability and serious mental illness in NSW, Australia</i>
12:00pm - 12:30pm	Carleen Thompson , Griffith University. <i>Criminal justice system involvement across adolescence and early adulthood: Elucidating high-risk features of child protection and mental health system contacts</i>	Fiona White , University of New South Wales. <i>Evaluation of an updated service model enhancing prison-to-community mental healthcare for First Nations people in prison</i>
12:30pm - 1:30pm	LUNCH	
1:30pm - 3:00pm	Keynote: Cockle Bay Room - Chair: Steve Yeong Selwyn Button , Productivity Commission. <i>What data insights can tell us about Closing the Gap?</i> Edwina Crawford , Aboriginal Services Unit, NSW Department of Communities and Justice. <i>Beyond the Numbers: Centering Aboriginal Voices in Justice Data</i>	
3:00pm - 3:30pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
3:30pm - 4:00pm	Session 2A: Cockle Bay Room Chair: Stephanie Ramsey <i>Theme: Domestic violence</i>	Session 2B: Room C3.4 Chair: Bonnie Ross <i>Theme: Reoffending and First Nations people</i>
	Benjamin Spivak & Troy McEwan , Swinburne University of Technology. <i>Why accurate assessment of family violence homicide risk is not possible</i>	Sam Alderton-Johnson , Impact Policy. <i>CoDesign in Practice: Embedding Aboriginal Voices in Justice Research</i>
4:00pm - 4:30pm	Hayley Boxall , Australian National University. <i>Alternative justice for domestic, family and sexual violence: What we can learn from the ACT experience</i>	Hilde Tubex , University of Western Australia, Law School. <i>Mind the gap: A study on the reintegration needs of returning prisoners</i>
4:30pm - 5:00pm	Apriel Jolliffe Simpson , The University of Waikato. <i>Understanding types of poly-victimisation</i>	Kimberlie Dean , University of New South Wales. <i>Understanding barriers to mental health court diversion and impact on re-offending for First Nations peoples in NSW</i>
5:00pm - 6:30pm	Networking Drinks	

DAY 2 - Tuesday, 5 August 2025

8:30am - 9:00am	Registration	
9:00am - 10:00am	Keynote: Cockle Bay Room - Chair: Suzanne Poynton Cathy Humphreys , University of Melbourne. <i>Exploring the intersection between DFV and substance abuse and the policy responses that can be put into practice</i>	
10:00am - 10:30am	MORNING TEA	
	Session 3A: Cockle Bay Room Chair: Malindi Sayle <i>Theme: Domestic violence</i>	Session 3B: Room C3.4 Chair: Megan Zappia <i>Theme: Policing</i>
10:30am - 11:00am	Fan Cheng , NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research. <i>Evidence-based typology for the perpetrators of domestic and family violence in NSW</i>	Ranae Jabri , University of Sydney. <i>Algorithmic policing: Local effects of police presence on crime and racial disparities</i>
11:00am - 11:30pm	Kristen Sobeck , Australian National University. <i>The impact of domestic violence on the employment, educational and mental health outcomes of young women</i>	Rebekah Chapman & Deborah Kelso , Queensland Police Service. <i>Reframing relationships and reducing crime: The long-term evaluation of a Queensland Police Service protective security initiative for First Nations communities</i>
11:30am - 12:00pm	Don Weatherburn , University of New South Wales. <i>Stress, risky alcohol use and violence against women: An analysis of 21 waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) Survey</i>	Andrea Giovannetti , Australian Catholic University. <i>A theory of competition and cooperation between organized crime groups</i>
12:00pm - 1:00pm	LUNCH	
1:00pm - 2:45pm	Keynote: Cockle Bay Room - Chair: Dr Garner Clancey Jackie Fitzgerald, Anne Hollonds, Peta MacGillivray, Superintendent Greg Moore, Judge Nell Skinner <i>Discussion on trends in youth crime and implications for practice and policy</i>	
2:45pm - 3:15pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
	Session 4A: Cockle Bay Room Chair: Nicole Adams <i>Theme: Youth offending and domestic violence</i>	Session 4B: Room C3.4 Chair: Dominic Furneaux-Bate <i>Theme: Sexual violence, technology and prisons</i>
3:15pm - 3:45pm	Dietrich Oberwittler , Max Planck Institute for the Study of Crime, Security and Law, Freiburg, Germany. <i>The International Youth Crime Drop - Evidence and Explanations</i>	Ashley Pearson , University of the Sunshine Coast and the Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council. <i>Community views on the seriousness of sexual offending and comparison to sentencing outcomes</i>
3:45pm - 4:15pm	Jonathan Gu , NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics & Research. <i>Did a High Court decision on doli incapax shift court outcomes for 10-13 year olds?</i>	Richard Wortley , University College London. <i>The contacting of adolescents on social media by suspicious accounts</i>
4:15pm - 4:45pm	Jake Graceffo , NSW Treasury. <i>The impact of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders on domestic violence assaults: A study of NSW</i>	Julie Barkworth , Corrective Services NSW. <i>Evaluating the roll-out of digital tablets in NSW correctional centres and their contribution to rehabilitative prison environments</i>
4:45pm - 5:00pm	Wrap Up: Jackie Fitzgerald Cockle Bay Room	

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Keynote speaker abstracts

Evidence-based strategies to break the incarceration cycle

Jennifer Doleac

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Arrest and incarceration are important, costly intervention points that give communities a chance to help turn someone's life around. But we miss that chance, far too often. As a result, people cycle through the criminal justice system, harming families and communities in the process. It doesn't have to be this way. This talk summarizes the best research on what works to put the justice-involved population on a better path, as well as how taking an iterative approach to policy and practice – aiming to fail fast rather than not fail at all – will help us find more solutions quickly.

What data insights can tell us about Closing the Gap?

Selwyn Button

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over-representation in the justice system remains one of the most urgent and persistent challenges facing NSW and Australia more broadly. Despite the commitments outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, progress toward justice-related targets has been slow, even five years into its implementation. This session will critically assess current efforts to address over-representation, identify systemic and structural barriers, and propose practical, community-informed reforms to improve outcomes. The discussion will also explore broader strategies for transforming the justice system, grounded in evidence, cultural safety, and community leadership. A key focus will be the role of the age of criminal responsibility in shaping long-term justice outcomes and its impact on achieving Closing the Gap targets. By centering Aboriginal voices and lived experiences, the session aims to contribute to a more equitable and responsive justice system.

Beyond the Numbers: Centering Aboriginal Voices in Justice Data

Edwina Crawford

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This presentation will explore how justice system data can dehumanise lived experience, overlook critical context, and conceal systemic bias — particularly for Aboriginal people. When numbers become the only story, they risk misrepresenting the truth of those they claim to reflect. So how do we make data tell a fuller, more honest story?

I'll examine what's missing from current justice data and the real-world consequences of policies shaped by statistics rather than the needs and voices of communities. The session will highlight the importance of Aboriginal data sovereignty, meaningful co-design, and embedding Aboriginal perspectives into data collection and analysis. Together, these approaches can bring greater transparency, accountability, trust and ultimately better outcomes for Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system.

Exploring the intersection between DFV and substance abuse and the policy responses that can be put into practice

Cathy Humphreys

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All the evidence from the past 30 years shows that the severity, intensity and frequency of domestic and family violence (DFV) increases when Alcohol and Other Drugs are present. This finding does not imply that substance use causes DFV, but it does suggest that the intersection of DFV and substance use is highly relevant for policy and practice. Severity counts! Australian statistics on intimate partner homicide indicate that the offender was substance affected in 60% of cases. Substance use coercion is an aspect of coercive control. This presentation will explore a more nuanced approach to the role of substance use as an aspect of the tactics of violence and abuse used by the person using violence. Survivors (adult and child) experience these issues as entwined, yet our policy and practice settings silo and fragment the response. There are now many examples of the different sectors beginning to work together. The presentation draws from a 3 year ARC funded project to discuss the emerging evidence of the problems and possibilities for sustaining collaborations to develop a more effective response to substance use coercion.

Panel discussion on trends in youth crime and implications for practice and policy

**Dr Garner Clancey¹, Jackie Fitzgerald², Anne Hollonds³, Peta MacGillivray⁴,
Superintendent Greg Moore⁵, Judge Nell Skinner⁶**

¹ University of Sydney, ² NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research,

³ Australian Human Rights Commission, ⁴ Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership,

⁵ NSW Police Incident and Emergency Management Command, ⁶ Children's Court of NSW

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The panel of experts will discuss youth crime in what is a turbulent time. Various Inquiries have been and are being conducted; frequent media stories raise alarm about youth crime in different parts of Australia; orthodox strategies to prevent youth crime are under intense scrutiny at a time when rates of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are worsening and diversion rates are declining. This panel will discuss trends and context around young people's participation in crime, issues and concerns about current responses to young people who offend, and suggestions for improved policy and practice.

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Session abstracts

CoDesign in Practice: Embedding Aboriginal Voices in Justice Research

Sam Alderton-Johnson

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Our Aboriginal research team will share through this case study our approach to CoDesign, engagement, consultation and communication with presenters Sam Johnson - Djaara/Yuin man, Sean McCarthy – Gumbaynggirr/Bundjalung man and Maddie Rose – Gomeroi woman.

Participants can expect to take away practical examples for how to consider and include CoDesign in the development of future research and evaluation design to strengthen participation, agency and Cultural strength of research projects that impact Aboriginal people and communities.

Through the cultural lens of Aboriginal researchers, we will explore the codesign of the aims and method for the qualitative evaluation of the Walama List as a case study for how to embed the voices of lived experience in crime and justice research and design.

Whilst the Evaluation has yet to have been completed, this abstract focuses on what codesign in practice looks like in the research design journey. It aims to share how the use of CoDesign in research and evaluation can strengthen the participation of Aboriginal people and those with lived experience and provide critical insights from a Cultural lens to consider in qualitative evaluation.

Evaluating the roll-out of digital tablets in NSW correctional centres and their contribution to rehabilitative prison environments

Julie Barkworth

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People in prison have traditionally had limited access to digital technology, leading to experiences of 'digital exclusion', which has consequences for their ability to thrive in the technologically developed outside world. There is increasing recognition that providing people in prison with opportunities to develop and maintain the skills and confidence to use digital technologies could have important implications for their successful reintegration to society. Since 2020, Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) has implemented a staged rollout of digital tablets across NSW correctional centres, with the aim to transform rehabilitation. As part of this rollout, Corrections Research Evaluation and Statistics (CRES) has undertaken an agenda of evaluation examining the implementation of digital tablets. Drawing on self-report survey data, face-to-face interviews, and CSNSW administrative data, we examine people's views, experiences, and related outcomes of having access to digital tablets while in prison. Results identify that digital tablets have been important for strengthening relationships, supporting autonomy, enhancing wellbeing, increasing participation in behaviour change programs, and reducing incidences of violence and assaults. The findings highlight the importance of tablets for transforming the experiences of people in prison, contributing to rehabilitative prison environments, and supporting people with reintegration to society.

Alternative justice for domestic, family and sexual violence: What we can learn from the ACT experience

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Amid growing calls for alternative justice responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, restorative justice has re-emerged as a promising but contested pathway. This presentation shares findings from an evaluation of Phase Three of the ACT Restorative Justice Scheme, one of the first programs in Australia to formally expand its remit to include DFV and sexual violence matters. Drawing on interviews, surveys, and administrative data, the evaluation highlights both the potential and the complexity of restorative justice in this space. For many victim-survivors, the process supported feelings of safety, validation, and recovery, even where perpetrator accountability was limited. Importantly, participation was associated with a reduction in reoffending among adult participants. However, challenges such as ideological resistance, program resourcing, and the delicate management of risk were also evident. This presentation considers the lessons from the ACT experience and the critical ingredients needed to safely and effectively expand restorative justice options for DFV and sexual violence matters.

Reframing relationships and reducing crime: The long-term evaluation of a Queensland Police Service protective security initiative for First Nations communities

Rebekah Chapman & Deborah Kelso

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A new approach to protective security and community safety in the First Nations community of Palm Island was introduced in 2020 by the Queensland Police Service (QPS). This initiative sees local community members employed in QPS Protective Services Officer roles, providing security services to government facilities on Palm Island. A short-term evaluation of the initiative found reductions in reported offences, increased perceptions of community safety and enhanced sharing of intelligence with police. In 2024, the QPS Research & Evaluation unit commenced a long-term evaluation of the initiative, to understand key successes and challenges associated with ongoing operation and to identify sustained benefits. A mixed methods approach, incorporating in-depth interviews with First Nations Protective Services Officers, community representatives and stakeholders, police officers, and Protective Services leadership, as well as security incident and crime data, enabled exploration of key evaluation areas including safety and crime prevention, employment, role perceptions, recruitment and training, and governance and sustainability. The findings of this research will inform future implementation of this initiative as it expands into other First Nations communities across Queensland. This presentation will focus on key evaluation findings and provide context to the challenges and benefits of conducting research with First Nations communities.

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Evidence-based typology for the perpetrators of domestic and family violence in NSW

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Domestic and family violence (DFV) remains a critical social issue in Australia, yet interventions often lack specificity due to the heterogeneous nature of perpetrators. This study classifies DFV perpetrators into distinct groups based on their demographic characteristics, risk of reoffending, risk of revictimisation, and interactions with the New South Wales criminal justice, child protection, housing, and homelessness systems, using administrative data for 196,697 individuals charged with at least one DFV offence between 10 March 2008 and 1 January 2023. The analysis employs a two-step statistical approach: first, Factor Analysis of Mixed Data reduces the wealth of available information into four principal components that explain approximately one-quarter of the observed variation, with these components primarily reflecting prior involvement as a defendant in criminal courts, police contact as a victim, engagement with the child protection system as a child, and experiences of diversion under the Young Offenders Act 1997 (NSW) or childhood abuse; second, K-prototype clustering integrates these principal components with demographic characteristics—including age, gender, Aboriginality, and socioeconomic status—as well as reoffending and revictimisation rates, to categorise perpetrators into eight distinct groups. The results reveal that three of these groups consist predominantly of female perpetrators while four consist predominantly of males, highlighting important gender dynamics; groups with a higher proportion of individuals from low socioeconomic areas also feature a larger share of Aboriginal people and demonstrate higher rates of both reoffending and revictimisation, whereas groups of female perpetrators present a higher risk of revictimisation and a lower risk of reoffending compared to male perpetrator groups. This typology provides critical insights for the design and delivery of targeted interventions aimed at reducing DFV, and the findings underscore the value of integrating multi-system administrative data to inform evidence-based policy and practice in this domain.

The relationship between diagnoses of mental illness and substance use disorders, and reincarceration among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults

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Background: Mental illness, substance use disorder (SUD), and their dual diagnosis are highly prevalent among incarcerated populations. While many studies have demonstrated associations between these diagnoses and future justice system contact, few studies have demonstrated the temporal relationship between diagnosis and reincarceration in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults.

Aim: In a sample of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults (n=967) released from prisons, we aimed to: (1) determine the temporality and strength of any association between mental illness, SUDs, or dual diagnosis and reincarceration, and 2) quantify the concentration of reincarceration among people with these diagnoses.

Method: We conducted multivariable Andersen-Gill Cox regressions, using reincarceration as the outcome. We ran separate analyses with lifetime and 12-month diagnoses as predictors, controlling for potential confounders.

Results/conclusions: We recorded 1154 reincarcerations with a median time at risk of 774 days. Diagnoses of mental illness (HR=1.5 [1.1–1.9]), SUD (HR=1.6 [1.4–1.9]), and dual diagnosis (HR=1.5 [1.2–1.7]) in the 12 months prior to reincarceration were associated with greater risk of reincarceration. We found similar associations for lifetime diagnoses of SUD (HR=1.4 [1.1–1.7]) and dual diagnosis (HR=1.3 [1.1–1.6]). We discuss reasons for our findings and their implications for policy.

Understanding barriers to mental health court diversion and impact on re-offending for First Nations peoples in NSW

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Mental health court diversion improves mental health and reduces re-offending. However, diversion is not equally accessible to all eligible people and barriers experienced by First Nations people may be furthering over-incarceration rates. The **aim** of the current project is to utilise a mixed-methods approach to better understand these barriers and the subsequent impact on recurrent justice contact. **Method:** Qualitative interviews were conducted with First Nations people with lived experience, magistrates, mental health clinicians and other professionals/stakeholders. Quantitative analysis was undertaken for a cohort assessed as eligible for diversion by NSW Statewide Court & Community Liaison Service (n=16,217; 2008 - 2022; 26.7% First Nations). **Results:** The overall rate of diversion (57.9%) amongst those deemed eligible was lower for First Nations people (49.2%). Those unable to access diversion were more likely to be male, have a primary diagnosis of personality or substance use disorder, be charged with a minor/non-violent offence, and live in a disadvantaged area. Qualitative interviews revealed a range of reasons and potential solutions for the identified reduced diversion access and poorer outcomes experienced by First Nations people. **Conclusion:** Current barriers to mental health court diversion faced by First Nations people in Australia mean that over-incarceration is fuelled rather than improved. There is an urgent need to address identified barriers and improve outcomes for First Nations people.

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A theory of competition and cooperation between organized crime groups

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Urban landscapes around the world feature the coexistence of stable drug markets and violence. However, the correlation between volumes of drug dealing and violence is frequently inconsistent across areas and time. In this work, we hypothesize that such inconsistency is due to the spurious nature of the relationship, and we pose that an important missing link in the transmission chain is given by organized crime groups (OCGs) dynamics. Our starting point is that when an illicit market is controllable, with multiple groups potentially competing in the same area, OCGs may resort to cooperation as a mechanism to mitigate the risks of unbounded competition. Therefore, when cooperation falls apart, business opportunities (i.e. drug dealing) will be eroded and violence will rise. We test our theory on a novel dataset made of the complete crime dataset of OCG-related offenses of Merseyside, U.K., integrated with neighbourhood-level socio-economic data. We show that, net of urban and socio-demographic factors, a 1% increase in inter-OCG cooperation is simultaneously and strongly associated with a 1.4% future increase in drug dealing and a 1.5% decrease in violence at a monthly level for each neighborhood. We complement this result with sharp prediction on the emerging structure of the OCG cooperation alliances.

The impact of COVID-19 stay-at-home orders on domestic violence assaults: A study of NSW

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Introduction of stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic led to immediate disruption of individuals' daily routines with confinement to their households and changes in risk factors of domestic violence. Utilising data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR), I estimate the causal impact of stay-at-home orders on domestic violence assaults in New South Wales. Since adoption dates for these restrictions varied across LGAs, I implemented a staggered difference-in-difference (DiD) specification. I find a 21% decline in daily domestic violence assault incidents during stay-at-home order periods compared to pre-restriction incidence levels. These results are robust under weekly frequency and extrapolated fixed effects models. I further utilise google search term data as a proxy of consistent reporting rates and unemployment data to identify household power dynamics. Analysis of both data sets support estimates of declines in domestic violence during the stay-at-home order periods.

Did a High Court decision on doli incapax shift court outcomes for 10-13 year olds?

Jonathan Gu

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Aim: This paper aims to examine whether recent trends in criminal proceedings in the NSW Children's Court for defendants aged 10-13 years have been influenced by the High Court of Australia's 2016 decision *RP v R* ('RP'), which affected how courts assess the criminal guilt of 10-13 year olds.

Method: We described trends in court outcomes in the context of RP, using court data for finalised court appearances between 2010 and 2023 in the NSW Children's Court, and a national data extract from the Australian Bureau of Statistics for Children's Court outcomes across Australia.

Results: The proportion of 10-13 year olds in NSW with a proven outcome has fallen sharply, dropping from 76% in 2015-16 to 16% in 2022-23. At the same time, the proportion with all charges withdrawn increased from 12% to 53%, while outcomes for 14-17 year olds have been stable. Other Australian jurisdictions had similar trends, but less steep. The shifts coincide with the RP decision, which may have made it harder to convict 10-13 year olds by strengthening the presumption of doli incapax.

Conclusion: RP may have contributed to a decline in proven charges for 10-13 year olds, but with little impact on whether criminal proceedings are initiated against children.

Algorithmic policing: Local effects of police presence on crime and racial disparities

Ranae Jabri

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What are the policy-relevant impacts and trade-offs involved in directing police presence to targeted places? This paper examines the impacts of local police presence induced by predictive policing on crime, and how it affects racial disparities in outcomes. Predictive policing algorithms are increasingly used by law enforcement agencies in the United States. These algorithms use past crime data to generate predictive policing boxes, specifically the highest crime risk areas where law enforcement is instructed to patrol every shift. Using a novel dataset on predictive policing from a major US jurisdiction and natural experiment research design, I estimate that algorithm-induced police presence decreases serious violent and property crimes but exacerbates racial disparities in arrests in traffic incidents and serious violent crimes. The evidence suggests a threefold increase in arrests of Black motorists when a neighborhood is targeted in comparison to when it is not.

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Comparing historical cohorts of justice-involved young people: what social and ecological risks are associated with growth in high frequency and high harm youth offending?

Molly McCarthy

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One of the most notable criminological phenomena in recent decades has been the unprecedented decline in the prevalence of youth offending behaviour across many Western countries over the last 20 to 30 years. Alongside this decline, a number of international jurisdictions, including Nordic countries, the U.S. and Australia, have noted recent trends of growth in high harm or high frequency offending among smaller numbers of young people, often characterised by backgrounds of marginalisation and cumulative disadvantage. Little empirical work has attempted to understand drivers of this growth in high frequency and high harm offending, which reflects relatively small groups of young people but often a large volume of offending. Our study examines longitudinal youth justice data from Queensland, Australia, comprising 15 consecutive birth cohorts (1993-2007), to explore the changing profile of justice-involved young people. Drawing on life-course developmental theoretical perspectives (Wikstrom, 2020), this study examines whether changes in exposure to particular social and ecological risks can explain changes in high frequency and high harm youth offending patterns. Findings will be discussed in relation to crime prevention and desistance strategies that may be suitable for diverting at-risk or justice involved young people from long-term involvement in crime.

The International Youth Crime Drop – Evidence and Explanations

Dietrich Oberwittler

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Youth crime has been declining in many countries over the last two or three decades until very recently. This crime drop took experts by surprise, and a recent research overview lamented the fragmented knowledge and lack of explanations. Using long-running national and international youth survey programs that cover delinquent behaviour as well as many aspects of adolescents' every-day life experiences, some recent studies were able to show that youth crime dropped as part of a larger, unitary trend of changing routine activities and risk behaviours. Studies from the US, Scandinavia, and other European countries produced surprisingly similar results that offer a better understanding of the declining trends. The presentation will give an overview on this research, including new findings from the 20-year study 'Health Behaviour of School Children' which covers more than 30 nations. In conclusion, we discuss the most recent trends since the Pandemic which might signal the end of the crime drop.

Community views on the seriousness of sexual offending and comparison to sentencing outcomes

Ashley Pearson

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The Queensland Sentencing Advisory Council (QSAC) recently reviewed sentencing practices for rape and sexual assault, referred by the Queensland Attorney-General and Minister for Justice. The review aimed to determine whether penalties imposed for these offences adequately reflected community views about the seriousness of this offending. The University of the Sunshine Coast (UniSC) conducted focus groups with 89 participants to gauge these views. Participants were asked to rank offence seriousness in pairs of short, fictional scenarios depicting a range of sexual and non-sexual offences and were given the opportunity to discuss their reasoning for their ranking decisions. QSAC analysed Queensland court data (July 2020 - June 2023) to compare the median custodial sentence of the scenario offences with the focus group seriousness rankings to determine whether the longer custodial sentence aligned with offences that were ranked as more serious by the community. In most pairs (17/26), the offence ranked as most serious also had the longest median custodial penalty. However, although the child rape scenario was ranked as most serious, it received a lower median custodial sentence (3.3 years) than some comparison offences. In this review, QSAC recommended a new aggravating factor for rape and sexual assault offences against children.

Understanding types of poly-victimisation

Apriel Jolliffe Simpson

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Aim: Poly-victimisation is a poorly understood phenomenon whereby people experience victimisation from multiple types of crime. Identifying what combinations of crimes poly-victims experience may help uncover characteristics or routines that increase vulnerability to poly-victimisation.

Method: We identified New Zealand Crime and Victims Survey participants who had experienced poly-victimisation ($n = 6,540$) and used latent class analysis to find groups of people who experienced similar combinations of crimes ($n = 31$) before describing the sociodemographic characteristics of each group.

Results: Seven groups of poly-victims could be distinguished by the crimes they experienced (e.g., fraud, cybercrime, and trespass vs. assault, sexual assault, and harassment). These groups also differed by sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, sexual identity, employment status, and ethnicity). A small group of poly-victims had a high probability of experiencing most crimes, in addition to high rates of psychological distress and financial stress; reinforcing the need for strategies to safeguard people at greatest risk of experiencing poly-victimisation.

Conclusion: Our findings point to there being different mechanisms for how characteristics and routines increase vulnerability to poly-victimisation. The results extend knowledge about poly-victimisation and generate ideas for further work informing support and prevention strategies.

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The impact of domestic violence on the employment, educational and mental health outcomes of young women

Kristen Sobeck

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Drawing on a nationally representative, longitudinal survey on women's health, this paper evaluates the impact of the first time women experience domestic violence as an adult, on their labour market, educational, and mental health outcomes. Using a staggered difference-in-difference approach, the results suggest that while employment rates remain unaffected, paid hours worked decline and difficulties managing on income increase. The share of women precluded from attaining a university degree is also substantial: nearly 10 percentage points fewer women attain a university degree three years following the first reported instance of abuse. The share of women with suicidal thoughts or who engage in self harm also spikes when violence is first reported (7.4 and 5.6 percent, respectively). Since the data permit differentiation by type of abuse (physical, sexual, harassment or emotional) the results reveal heterogeneous effects on women's outcomes by type of abuse and the frequency of abuse. While women's university attainment is negatively impacted by all forms of abuse (captured in the survey), irrespective of abuse persistence, the labour market impacts, relationship dissolution, suicidal ideation and self-harm are impacted differently, depending on the persistence and type of abuse experienced.

Why accurate assessment of family violence homicide risk is not possible

Benjamin Spivak & Troy McEwan

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There have been repeated calls over the past decade for improved identification of cases where family violence homicide risk is greatest, based on the idea that there are 'recognised risk factors' for lethal family violence that can aid detection (strangulation, controlling behaviour, sexual assault, stalking, etc.) This idea has informed public policy in Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere, and is integral to risk assessment in the field of family and intimate partner violence. This presentation will use data from a prospective longitudinal cohort of 39,000 Victoria Police family violence reports to demonstrate why these kinds of 'risk factors' cannot be used to identify cases where lethal violence is more likely. The presentation will discuss how previous research has led to this common misapprehension, and the implications for courts and criminal justice if it forms the basis for criminal justice policy. The presentation will conclude with a discussion of how validated risk assessments can be used to help reduce harm from family and intimate partner violence, if we take a different approach.

Criminal justice system involvement across adolescence and early adulthood: Elucidating high-risk features of child protection and mental health system contacts

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This study examines the links between child protection system (CPS) notifications and criminal justice system (CJS) contacts into young adulthood, with consideration of both lifetime mental health (MH) contacts and the characteristics of CPS contacts. We utilised state-wide longitudinal linked administrative data for all individuals registered as born in Queensland in 1990 (N= 45,153). Data include all CPS notifications and periods of out-of-home care (OOHC) (0-17 years), all official offending contacts from age 10 to 24 years (police cautions, proven offences in court, detention/incarceration), and MH contacts between ages 4/5 to 23/24 years. Findings extend understanding of the complexity of CPS-CJS links. While many CPS-involved individuals remain free of CJS involvement, findings elucidate especially high-risk features of child maltreatment experiences, namely adolescent and persistent maltreatment, neglect, OOHC experienced after age 10, and comorbid CPS and MH contact. Though the CPS-CJS link was especially pronounced for youth offending, increased risk for adult-onset offending was also evident. Results support cross-sector holistic care for maltreated individuals, trauma-informed responses within detention and correctional practices, and increased intervention and support for adolescents in OOHC. Our results provide a reminder that intervention should occur early in a problematic pathway, and not simply early in a life-course.

Applied Research in Crime and Justice Conference

4 - 5 August 2025 | ICC, 14 Darling Drive, Sydney

Impact of post-release community mental health and disability support on reincarceration for prisoners with intellectual disability and serious mental illness in NSW, Australia

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People with intellectual disability are overrepresented in the prison system and experience disproportionately high rates of reincarceration. Co-occurring serious mental illness is a key driver of this cycle, yet the effectiveness of targeted post-release support remains underexplored. This study used linked administrative data to assess whether receipt of community mental health and/or disability support following release from prison was associated with reduced risk of reincarceration. The cohort comprised 484 adults in New South Wales, Australia, with co-occurring intellectual disability and serious mental illness, tracked using data from hospital, mental health, disability, and corrections systems. Over a median follow-up of 7.4 years, 73.7% received community mental health support, 19.8% received disability support, and 18.6% received both during at least one post-release period. Using survival analysis for multiple reincarceration events, we found that those who received community mental health support had significantly lower hazards of reincarceration (HR = 0.58, 95% CI 0.49–0.69, $p < 0.001$), with the strongest protective effect observed in those receiving both types of support (HR = 0.46, 95% CI 0.34–0.61, $p < 0.001$). These findings demonstrate the value of linked administrative data for generating robust, policy-relevant evidence, and highlight the potential for cross-sector service coordination to reduce recidivism among people with complex needs. The results support investment in integrated post-release support as a mechanism for improving justice and health outcomes, and for informing service delivery models grounded in real-world data.

Mind the gap: A study on the reintegration needs of returning prisoners

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This presentation reports on a project investigating the main reasons for return to prison after release in Western Australia (WA). The project used a multi-method approach, combining a quantitative survey completed by people returning to a WA prison (N=169), with qualitative interviews with a smaller sample of returned people in 7 prisons spread over metropolitan and regional WA (N=90), as well as a forum with people with lived experience who successfully desisted from crime. The results report on how people reflected on the programs and assistance they did receive during their previous prison stay, and to what extent they were helpful or did not meet their needs. They provide an overview of the main issues that facilitated or hindered their reintegration and the main drivers of their return to prison. By identifying the critical elements for successful desistance through this project involving those with lived experience, we aim to inform reintegration and rehabilitation practices with the ultimate goal to reduce the number of people returning to prison.

Stress, risky alcohol use and violence against women: An analysis of 21 waves of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics (HILDA) Survey

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Previous studies of the relationship between risky alcohol use and violence against women have mostly been cross-sectional and limited in the range of controls for factors other than alcohol use that might influence the risk of violence against women. An exception is Smith and Weatherburn (2013), who conducted a fixed effect panel analysis using the HILDA survey but found no relationship between changes in risky drinking and changes in violence against women. Smith and Weatherburn (2013) only had eight waves of HILDA. The present study employs data from a cohort of 16,100 women across 21 waves of the HILDA survey (147,620 records) to determine whether there is a causal relationship between risky alcohol use and violence against women. We find strong evidence across a range of model specifications that risky drinking puts women at risk of experiencing physical violence.

Evaluation of an updated service model enhancing prison-to-community mental healthcare for First Nations people in prison

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Individuals with serious mental illness (SMI) are more likely to be arrested and their transition from prison to community is fraught with challenges, particularly when brief periods of imprisonment leave little time for mental health stabilization or service planning. First Nations individuals face even greater risks, with existing transition support services indicating poorer post-release outcomes compared to non-Indigenous populations. Their incarceration rate is nearly 15 times higher than non-Aboriginal Australians and one of the highest relative incarceration rates for any minority population globally. The Moving Forward project evaluates the effectiveness of an updated Community Transition Team (CTT) service model, designed to provide culturally informed and safe transition support for First Nations people with severe mental illness. The outcome of the study can inform decision-making around service delivery and developing policy directives. The research employs qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews with Aboriginal patients and stakeholders. The study also involves data linkage to track outcomes in the post-release period. The significance of the study is that its findings aim to bridge the service delivery gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations, providing insights that will inform the development of more effective transition models for First Nations patients transitioning from custody to community.

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The contacting of adolescents on social media by suspicious accounts

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Aim: Online social networks (OSN) have become the most common internet platform for accessing minors for child sexual exploitation (CSE). This paper investigates features of a minor's online profile that increase the risk of being targeted by 'suspicious' accounts.

Method: Two experiments were carried out involving fictitious accounts, purportedly of 13-year-old children, posted on a popular OSN. Both experiments employed a 2X2 factorial design. Experiment 1 varied the sex (male/female) and ethnicity (British/Indian) of the minor's profile; experiment 2 varied profile image (photo/avatar) and guardianship (parental management specified/not specified).

Results: For experiment 1, of the 207 contacts made to the accounts, 55% were suspicious. Suspicious account holders favoured contacting girls over boys, and British over Indian adolescents. For experiment 2, of the 302 contacts, 66% were suspicious. Accounts with photos and no guardianship received more contacts overall, but there was no difference between contacts by benign and suspicious accounts. For both studies, inspection of the suspicious accounts revealed disturbing cases of extensive contact with unrelated minors and/or explicit sexual content.

Conclusion: The findings have implications for the prevention of CSE, both in terms of the online behaviour of potential victims, and the development of safer online environments by OSN companies.

Should you delay your child's entry into kindergarten? Quasi-experimental evidence on the effect of delayed school entry on education and crime

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In New South Wales, students are required to enter school in the calendar year that they turn five or six. It has been known for some time that delaying a child's entry into school results in better academic performance. This has resulted in an increasing share of students with Delayed School Entry (DSE) over time. Less is known about the effect of DSE on crime. In this study, we examine the (causal) effect of DSE on education and crime using a linked dataset consisting of information for all individuals born in NSW between 1993 and 1996.



Notes

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