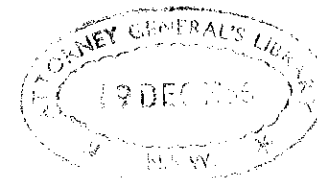


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statistical report **17**



crime, correction & the public

published by the nsw bureau of crime statistics & research with the authority of the minister of justice t vinson director august 1974

Introduction

Correctional workers are divided on many issues. One point, however, on which there is general agreement is that the effectiveness of prison rehabilitation programmes is dependent upon community backing. Trade, vocational and other forms of prison training are of little benefit if the discharged prisoner returns to a hostile, unaccepting community.

Few people working in the correctional field would dissent from these views. In fact, they are among the standard cliches heard in public discussion of correctional issues. It is all the more surprising, therefore, that so little reliable information has been gathered on public attitudes towards crime in Australia and the social institutions designed to deal with it. Without such data it is difficult to take account of the attitudes, knowledge and beliefs which filter information transmitted by correctional and after-care agencies to the general public.

We need to know how much confidence the public has in the effectiveness of the Police, Courts and Prisons. How should different types of offences be dealt with? What are the main objectives of contemporary prisons? What should they be? A person's judgement on these matters is likely to be influenced by the ideas he has concerning the causes of criminal behaviour. Therefore, we need to know what people consider to be the key factors behind the development of criminal behaviour.

In probing these issues it needs to be clearly recognised that we are dealing with opinions which may or may not be well informed. Indeed, the issues canvassed in the present study continue to exercise the minds of the most experienced and able practitioners and researchers. There is no suggestion that we should now substitute popular opinion for

hard-won, reliable information as a basis for social policy. The value of public opinion data is simply that it provides insights into the mental climate within which policy decisions must be taken and correctional programmes administered.

Changes in public opinion

If it is important for administrators to take account of the prevailing climate of public opinion, it is equally important to know what factors produce changes in public attitudes. The social researcher has often attempted to investigate this problem under laboratory conditions. Another approach is to see whether an apparently significant event in the community is accompanied by a shift in public attitudes. This latter strategy involves the familiar idea of a 'before' and 'after' photograph.

The Bureau had planned to base its report on the findings of a single survey conducted in January-March 1973. For a number of reasons, the preparation of the report was delayed. Then in February 1974 a series of disturbances in the State's prisons attracted wide coverage from the media. Specifically, Bathurst gaol was almost destroyed by fire and there was a reported 'mutiny' at Goulburn. What effect did these events have on public opinion? Did the destruction of public property and airing of prisoners' grievances cause people to become more or less supportive of prison rehabilitation programmes?

Anyone attempting to sort-out this question on the basis of the public statements made at the time, could hardly have come to a firm conclusion:

"No doubt we will be subjected to the reformists ravings that the Bathurst Gaol riot was the fault of the prison authorities and politicians and that no blame can be placed on the prisoners"
(A correspondent, Daily Telegraph 11/2/'74).

"Prison is certainly not supposed to be a holiday camp; but neither in the twentieth century is it supposed to be a place where degradation reaches Dickensian proportions" (Editorial, The Australian 5/2/'74).

"There will no doubt be a display of emotionalism by various organisations and individuals who will be content to ignore the acts of wanton destruction ..." (Editorial, Western Advocate 5/2/'74).

To try and find out just how the public did react to the prison disturbances, a compressed version of the questionnaire used in the 1973 study was administered to a second sample of Sydney adults. After rating the job the police, courts and prisons are performing in dealing with crime, respondents were questioned about their preference for a rehabilitative or punitive emphasis in the handling of offenders, especially within prisons. The second survey was conducted during the month following the prison disturbances.

The Sample

Both samples consisted of people eighteen years or over, and every household in the Sydney metropolitan area had an equal probability of selection in both cases. Since the 'before and after' approach assumes the comparability of the two samples used, it is important to note any differences which might help account for alterations in public attitudes.

Sample I contained a slightly higher proportion of people in the age range 21-40 years but this difference was not statistically significant. Moreover, the age structure of both samples resembled that known to exist in the Sydney metropolitan area. The same comment applied to the number of men and women in the two samples and the representation of different occupational categories.

The technically minded reader can check the details in Appendix A. For the moment, the important point is that we can proceed on the basis that the two samples were similar and reasonably representative of the wider community. The 1193 people in Sample I included 509 (42.7 per cent) men and 684 (57.3 per cent) women. Sample II was somewhat smaller: 372 (45.7 per cent) men and 447 (54.3 per cent) women, a total of 824 respondents. The age distributions were as follows:

Age in years	Sample I (N=1193)	Sample II (N=824)
	%	%
18-20	9.3	9.2
21-30	26.2	23.2
31-40	23.0	19.6
41-50	18.4	20.5
51-60	11.1	13.2
61+	11.9	14.2
Not established	0.1	0.1

Throughout the present report, reference is made to four occupational categories. These are groupings based on a scale of occupational prestige in Australia developed by Congalton.* The categories range from A ('high') to D ('low') - for details see Appendix A.

* Congalton, A.A., Status and Prestige in Australia, Melbourne: Cheshire 1969.

PART I - THE 1973 STUDY

Causes of Crime

The beliefs which individuals hold concerning the causes of crime may colour their attitudes towards law enforcement and corrections. In fact, the vast majority of those interviewed in the present study attributed criminality to various psychological and social factors. Whether or not those who hold this view would prefer programmes which attempt to rehabilitate rather than merely punish offenders, was examined in later questions.

Almost two out of every five respondents put crime down to the fact that a child had been reared in a 'defective home environment'. Under this heading were included such factors as lack of discipline, inadequate communication between parents and their children and the familiar explanation 'broken home'. One in three put the occurrence of crime down to 'depressed socio-economic circumstances'. In specifying 'psychological problems' as the primary cause of crime and delinquency, approximately one in seven referred specifically to the harbouring of grudges and destructive effects of poor impulse control:

Table I Factors contributing to crime

Q: What do you think are the major things that contribute to crime - that is, the main reason people become criminals?
Any others?

	Number	Percentage*
Defective home environment	465	38.9
Depressed socio-economic circumstances	398	33.3
Dislike work/prefer life of crime	233	19.5
Psychological problems	180	15.0
Keeping bad company	161	13.4
Boredom/insufficient interests	142	11.9
Society at fault/to blame	128	10.7
Genetic/"born that way"	84	7.0
Influenced by drug/alcohol	83	6.9
Other	73	6.1
Opportunity to commit crime	48	4.0
Don't know	38	3.1

* Does not add to 100 per cent because of multiple responses.

Not everyone accepted the 'psycho-social' interpretation of criminality. One in five appeared to lay the responsibility at the feet of the individual, claiming that the delinquent did not want to work, wanted 'easy money' and simply preferred a life of crime. But this was a minority view: almost as many exonerated the individual delinquent from any responsibility by placing the blame on society or defective inheritance ('they're born that way').

Generally, there was not a great deal of variation in the attitudes expressed by the different age groups. A clear exception was the tendency to attribute crime to depressed social and financial circumstances (including poor education and unemployment). The younger the respondent the more likely he was to interpret delinquency in socio-economic terms:

Socio-economic basis

	Percentage
Under 21 years (N = 110)	50.9
21 - 30 years (N = 312)	38.1
31 - 40 years (N = 274)	37.2
41 - 50 years (N = 219)	26.0
51 - 60 years (N = 132)	27.2
61 years+ (N = 142)	17.6

There were no major differences of attitude between men and women. With regard to the occupational groups, the only discernible trend involved the attitude of holding society responsible for delinquency. One in four of the 'A' group (professional/managerial) expressed this belief compared with one in ten of the semi-skilled and unskilled groups ('C' and 'D'). However, it must be kept in mind that this view was expressed by just 10.7 per cent of the entire sample.

Handling Crime

Answers to the previous question indicated a substantial number of people in the community believe that the roots of crime are to be found in either the 'poor' social circumstances or wrong psychological conditioning of certain individuals. Where then should society place the emphasis in its efforts to reduce crime? Should it favour (i) trying to stop criminals before they begin or (ii) Strengthening the police force in order to 'crack down' on crime?*

*Q: "Leading authorities on crime feel there are two ways to reduce crime. One way is to head off crime by working with young people to show them that nothing can be gained through a life of crime. Another way is to strengthen our law-enforcement agencies to make it hard for criminals to get away with crime. While both ways might be desirable, if you had to choose, which one would you favour: (1) trying to stop criminals before they begin or (2) strengthening the police force to crack down on crime?"

Seven out of ten (69.6 per cent) of those interviewed believed the primary emphasis should be placed on prevention. Men and women were equally inclined to hold this view. People of high occupational prestige favoured the preventive approach but those with semi-skilled and unskilled backgrounds were more inclined to strengthen the police force's ability to 'crack down' on crime:

'Crack down' approach

			Percentage
Occupational group	A	(high)	17.1
"	"	B	26.9
"	"	C	29.0
"	"	D (low)	35.1

Either through inability to verbalise detailed arguments or perhaps simply because they lacked relevant experience, approximately two-thirds (63 per cent) of those favouring a preventive approach supported their stand with the general statement 'Prevention is better than cure'. One in eight implied the special need to support and guide parents of pre-delinquent children. A further one in six of those favouring a preventive approach believed that the remedying of emotional problems could reduce the likelihood of people embarking on criminal careers.

Reasons for favouring prevention

	Number*	Percentage
Prevention better than cure	491	63.1
Educate/support parents	95	12.2
Sympathetic hearing/sorting out can prevent crime	125	16.1
Need help in setting lawful goals	44	5.7
Futility of punishment approach	23	2.9
	<hr/> 778	<hr/> 100.0

* In 52 cases the respondent could not state a supporting reason.

In contrast to the above opinions, one in three of those favouring a 'crack-down' on crime considered that no amount of talking could help. They stressed the futility of any approach other than a forceful demonstration of the unacceptability of criminal behaviour. Other arguments advanced by those urging the suppression of crime amounted to variations on the same theme, namely, the relative effectiveness of a 'show of force' (see table next page).

There were no major differences of attitude among the sex and age groups. The general proposition 'prevention is better than cure' received greater support among the higher occupational groups:

Reasons for favouring 'crack down'

	Number*	Percentage
Futility of any other approach (no amount of talking will help)	120	34.4
Visible presence of police force only effective deterrent	80	22.9
Show of force (police/courts/ prisons) can frighten potential criminals	66	18.9
Need to make it harder to commit/ get away with crime	44	12.6
Other	39	11.2
	<hr/> 349	<hr/> 100.0

Prevention better than cure

Occupational group			Percentage
A	(N=41)		58.5
"	"	B (N=97)	44.2
"	"	C (N=583)	40.5
"	"	D (N=211)	37.9

* In 14 cases the respondent could not state a supporting reason.

Functions of Prisons

According to the evidence already presented, a majority of members of the community believe that society should direct its efforts towards the prevention of crime. However, only half of our respondents in phase I of the study appeared to be convinced that contemporary prisons are 'mainly trying to be corrective'. One in three considered they are 'mainly punitive' and approximately one in seven remained undecided as to their major function (see the table opposite).

The higher the occupational status of the respondent the more likely he or she was to perceive the actual function of prisons as being mainly punitive:

			Mainly punitive %
Occupational group	A (N= 41)		48.8
"	" B (N=197)		40.1
"	" C (N=583)		34.3
"	" D (N=211)		33.2

Table II - Main function of contemporary Prisons

Q. Do you feel that most prisons today mainly try to be corrective - that is, try to make criminals into useful citizens - or mainly try to be punitive - that is, punish the criminal for having broken the law?

	Number	Percentage
Mainly corrective	600	50.3
Mainly punitive	410	34.4
Don't know	183	15.3

More women than men believed that prisons are playing a predominantly corrective role (women: 55.7 per cent; men: 42.4 per cent). There were no clear trends with regard to the age groupings.

Recommended function

When attention was directed away from today's prisons to the type of institution which people say they would like to see exist, a very clear preference emerged. More than eight out of ten (84 per cent) said prisons should be essentially corrective. (Five per cent were unable to express a preference):

Table III Recommended function of Prisons

Q. Do you feel prisons should be mainly corrective, trying to rehabilitate criminals or mainly punitive, punishing them for their crimes? (N=1193)

	Percentage
Mainly corrective	83.9
Mainly punitive	11.0
Don't know	5.1

A classic argument advanced by correctional workers in support of their role is that in almost all cases the prisoner will be returning to society. It is argued, therefore, that it is in the interests of society to help equip the prisoner to cope with the demands of the outside world.

This line of argument apparently carries convictions for a substantial number of people. Almost two out of every five of those who supported a primarily corrective role for prisons justified their position in these terms: 'the prisoner is going to return to society so it is only sensible to equip him to make a better show of things in future' (see the table on the next page).

One in six of those emphasising the need for correction rather than punishment pinned their hopes to the idea that everyone has some positive qualities. The essential task of the prison is to identify and cultivate these attributes. An almost equal number made the somewhat similar claim that not everyone in prison is a 'real' criminal. With proper care and guidance it should be possible to rehabilitate many of those who are not truly criminal.

A quite different type of justification was advanced by one in ten of those emphasising the corrective role of prisons. This group based their argument on the rights of the individual prisoner rather than the needs of society or the offender's capacity for change. They simply declared that, as a matter of social justice, the prisoner deserves another opportunity.

Two thirds of those favouring a punitive role, did not refine their argument beyond asserting that punishment is an indispensable element in the handling of law breakers. The remaining third of this group believed that punishment is the only choice available to society. Other approaches are futile.

Older respondents were more likely to emphasise the importance of punishment: 6.4 per cent of those under twenty-one years responded in this way compared with 13.4 per cent of the subjects who were over sixty years of age.

Table IV Reasons for favouring corrective or punitive role

Reasons for supporting corrective role	Number*	Percentage	Reasons for supporting punitive role	Number*	Percentage
Returning to society so should equip them	387	38.6	Punishment a necessary element in society's response to crime	82	62.6
Cultivate prisoner's positive qualities	165	16.5	Futility of any other approach	49	37.4
Many not 'real' criminals/ redeemable	156	15.6		131	100.0
Matter of social justice - another opportunity	93	9.3			
As a human being, prisoner deserves 'decent' treatment	58	5.8			
Crime sometimes psychologically based	24	2.4			
Often extenuating circumstances	5	0.5			
Don't know	32	3.1			
Other	82	8.2			
	1001	100.0			

* Sixty one cases were excluded because the respondents were unable to answer the previous question.

Help Given to Ex-Prisoners

We have already seen that one in seven of the phase I sample were unable to offer an opinion concerning the primary objective of contemporary prisons. It should not be surprising, therefore, that six out of ten (61.3 per cent) respondents could give no answer to the question, "What kind of help, if any, is given to ex-prisoners?"

Of the 463 who answered, one quarter (24.4 per cent) stated that no help was available for ex-prisoners, or that at best only limited help was available. An additional 36 people (7.8 per cent) considered that because of social prejudice ex-prisoners had an uphill battle to find employment or to rehabilitate themselves. The majority of the remainder mentioned some form of organised aid:

Table V Forms of assistance

	Number	Percentage
No help or limited help		
No help available	43	9.3
Limited help available	70	15.1
Limited help because of social prejudice	36	7.8
No help other than self-help	14	3.0
Help not worth providing	4	0.9
Prisoners don't want help	4	0.9
		...

Organised help

	No.	%
Probation or parole officer, or social worker	65	14.0
Prisoners' Aid Organization	62	13.4
Churches and church organizations	50	10.8
Help with employment	59	12.7
Rehabilitation centres	36	7.8
'Half-way' houses	20	4.3
TOTAL	463	100.0

Even where people mentioned various forms of organised assistance, it is difficult to know whether their answers were based on specific information about the organization in question or a general assumption, for example, that 'the Church' is active in the field of after-care. The work of Probation, Parole and Prisoners' Aid Officers has received attention in literature, films and other media. To some extent, then, references to the role played by these helping agents may have stemmed from such indirect sources.

Regardless of the accuracy of this interpretation, one thing is clear from the findings. Despite the extensive involvement of many community organisations over a period of more than twenty years, few people are aware of the basic scheme which exists in New South Wales for providing after-care services. Perhaps one in ten are aware that Government officers or the staff of subsidised agencies work in cooperation with the representatives of community organisations to arrange after-care assistance (work, clothing, counselling etc.).*

*Estimate based on the number of references to probation or parole officer, social worker or prisoners' aid organisation: (127/1193).

This low level of awareness may indicate the need for a more vigorous and specialised education programme, especially since community support is so essential in the field of after-care. That the challenge is a formidable one has already been demonstrated by the results of the present survey. However, to illustrate further the public's limited acquaintance with seemingly well publicised developments in the correctional field, let us examine responses to a further question:

"Can you name two major changes which have been introduced in the prison system in New South Wales during the past twenty years?"

Approximately six out of every ten people interviewed (57.4 per cent) could not answer this question. The 127 (10.6 per cent) respondents who referred to the abolition of the death penalty or the 'reduction' in the number of cases where it has been applied, were partly right. The last hanging in New South Wales took place in August 1939!

Of the rehabilitative measures introduced in recent times, periodic detention seems to have captured the greatest public interest. One in seven (14.2 per cent) mentioned that offenders can now be sentenced to weekend goal. Approximately one in ten referred to the general improvement in prison conditions during the past twenty years. A further 6 per cent were aware of the fact that more minimum security institutions had been created and seven per cent acknowledged the extension of educational and vocational training programmes.

Table VI Changes in prison system

	Number (multiple responses)*	
	Number	Percentage
Weekend detention	170	14.2
Work release	38	3.1
Not as much/No capital punishment	127	10.6
More vocational/educational training	89	7.4
Availability of counselling help (The 'Board')	15	1.2
Better living/work conditions	110	9.2
Creation of Prison Farms/minimum institutions	74	6.2
After-care programmes	16	1.3
More unrest between prisoners/warders	6	0.5
There haven't been any	8	0.6
Other	66	5.5
Don't know of 1 change	685	57.4

* Adds to more than 1193 because multiple responses in 211 cases.

Personal interest in after-care work

Obviously, the number of volunteers involved in prisoner rehabilitation, is bound to be very small. Faced with the many practical difficulties inherent in this work, many an interested citizen may decide to express his humanitarian concern by participating in some other less taxing form of social welfare.

The fact that approximately one in ten (9.8 per cent) of those interviewed said they were 'very interested' in doing voluntary work with prisoners or ex-prisoners, can, therefore, only be regarded as a general indication of potential interest. Nevertheless, the survey has helped indicate those sections of the community which are likely to respond favourably to an invitation to participate in after-care work. It has helped identify the potential 'market' for voluntary organisations and government agencies promoting the cause of prisoner rehabilitation.

There appears to be at least one glaring discrepancy between the characteristics of that potential market and the composition of existing after-care organisation in New South Wales. Recently, the Bureau undertook a survey of the membership of the Civil Rehabilitation Committee, one of the major rehabilitation movements in New South Wales. If the sample of C R C members contacted at the time of the survey is a reliable guide, then the after-care movement has yet to tap the good-will of that section of the community professing the greatest interest in prisoner rehabilitation. In the earlier study we found that only one of our eighty respondents was under twenty-five years of age. The average age of members was forty-nine years. The present survey suggests that the younger the person's age the more likely he is to express interest in voluntary work with prisoners:

"Very interested" in voluntary work
with prisoners or ex-prisoners

Age group	Percentage
Under 21 years (N=110)	13.6
21 - 30 years (N=312)	13.1
31 - 40 years (N=274)	10.9
41 - 50 years (N=219)	8.2
51 - 60 years (N=132)	7.5
60 years+ (N=142)	2.1

Penalties

In the eyes of the lawyer, the determination of an appropriate penalty should follow careful consideration of the features of each individual case. The general public is sometimes less discerning. The legal classification of an offence is often all that is required to trigger strong feelings about the punishment which should be meted out to the offender. To the extent that these stereotypes colour and possibly influence the course of public debate and affect the prospects of rehabilitation programmes, they need to be analysed and understood.

In the present study it was possible to examine the public response to just eight types of offences (see the accompanying table). Respondents were asked which broad type of penalty they would impose in each case. In the majority of cases the use of the residual category 'other' referred to a course of action other than punishment (for example, some form of welfare service). Some notable exceptions to this rule are discussed below.

Table VII Recommended Penalties

Q: Generally speaking, what is the best way to deal with the following types of adult crime? (N=1193)

	Armed robbery	Car stealing	Public drunkenness	Selling narcotic drugs to minors	Murder	Prostitution	Fraud	Vagrancy
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Fine	1.7	6.6	35.7	0.6	—	18.5	8.1	13.4
Probation/Bond	2.3	17.8	23.2	0.8	0.5	16.9	9.4	25.9
Imprisonment	92.2	69.9	7.6	91.4	86.7	12.7	75.7	9.9
Something other than punishment	3.2	5.0	19.5	6.9	11.5	19.6	4.5	32.2
Take no action	0.3	0.2	12.9	0.3	—	29.5	0.9	16.5
Don't know	0.3	0.5	1.1	—	1.3	2.8	1.4	2.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Murder, robbery, 'drug pushing'

One fairly simple way of gauging the seriousness with which an offence is viewed is to consider the percentage of respondents who said the 'best way to deal with it' is to imprison the offender. Slightly more than nine out of ten of those interviewed said that robbery and 'drug pushing' should be punished by imprisonment. Almost the same number would deal with murder in the same way. However, it was in dealing with these three categories of offences that a substantial number of people gave 'other' responses, many of which referred to more severe forms of punishment than an orthodox prison sentence. For example, in the case of murder, despite the way the question was structured, 106 respondents (8.9 per cent of the total) said the defendant should be executed. In 28 cases (2.3 per cent) it was stated that the murderer should receive psychiatric treatment. There were six other miscellaneous responses.

The attitude towards drug pushers was almost equally punitive. Forty-seven people (3.9 per cent) said this type of offender should be given the death penalty and a number of others suggested drastic punitive measures:

'Other' penalties for drug pushing

	Number
Execution	47
Whipping	8
Harsher conditions of imprisonment	8
Work with withdrawal patients	5
Force to take drugs themselves	4
Give them help	4
Other	6
	<hr/> 82

The remaining offences fall into two distinct categories: (i) offences for which a substantial number of people think imprisonment is an appropriate penalty (namely, fraud and car stealing), (ii) offences for which the majority apparently feel imprisonment is inappropriate (drunkenness, vagrancy and prostitution).

Fraud

The table which appeared on the previous page showed that three out of four respondents favoured imprisonment for fraud. Nine per cent favoured the imposition of a bond or period of probation; a slightly smaller number thought a fine would be the appropriate form of punishment. Most (42/54) of those who urged a course of action other than an orthodox form of punishment recommended that the offender be required to repay the person who suffered as a result of the fraud.

Car Stealing

Seven out of ten people would punish car stealing by imprisonment. However, approximately one in six would impose probation or a bond.

Drunkenness

Few people saw imprisonment as an appropriate way of handling public drunkenness. Just one in thirteen would imprison the drunk. Instead, approximately one in three would impose a fine, one in four probation or a bond and one in eight would take no action at all. This latter figure is something of an understatement because the 'other'

category contained a large number of responses (189/232... 81.5 per cent) which implied that no punitive action should be taken against drunks and that they should be treated as being 'sick'. This means that a total of 343 respondents (28.8 per cent) said either that no action should be taken or that some form of treatment should be given to drunks.

Vagrancy

Penalties considered appropriate for vagrants were similar to those recommended for drunks. One in ten of those interviewed thought a term of imprisonment should be imposed; one in four considered probation or a bond to be the appropriate way of dealing with the problem. But almost half of our respondents recommended either that no action be taken or that a course of action other than punishment be adopted.

The 'something other than punishment' category mainly comprised suggestions that vagrants be given 'treatment' or 'help': 316 people (four out of five of those in the 'other' category) made this recommendation. Another 54 respondents simply decreed that vagrants should be 'sent to work'. One person offered the advice: "Put them in the Army".

Prostitution

Almost half of those interviewed (49.1 per cent) thought that no action or, at least, no punitive action should be taken in the case of prostitution. In fact, 151 people (12.7 per cent of the total) declared that prostitution should be legalised. Seventy five respondents thought efforts should be made to 'treat' or 'rehabilitate' prostitutes. Five said they should be 'taught a trade',

four would give them a 'severe warning' and two people recommended that they be placed on 'farms'.

Variations in attitude

In cases like robbery, murder and selling narcotic drugs to minors, people of all ages and occupational backgrounds tended to favour the imposition of a prison sentence. Because opinions on what should be done to the defrauder and car thief were more varied, these two categories of offence provided better opportunities for detecting differences in the attitudes of various groups.

The differences were not particularly marked but people of low occupational status were more likely than those of higher status to recommend imprisonment in the case of car stealing:

Number urging imprisonment

			Car stealing %
Occupational group	A	(N= 41)	56.1
"	"	B (N=197)	65.0
"	"	C (N=583)	70.8
"	"	D (N=211)	72.5

Young people were less inclined than their elders to recommend the use of imprisonment. This was especially the case with regard to car stealing. People over 21 years of age were 1.7 times more likely than younger respondents to urge the imprisonment of the car thief. On the other hand, those under 21 years were more than twice as likely to recommend probation or a bond:

Car stealing

	Recommend imprisonment %	Recommend probation/bond %
Under 21 years (N=110)	42.7	39.1
Over 21 years (N=1083)	72.6	15.7

The difference of opinion between the age groups was less pronounced in the case of fraud. Nevertheless, there was a tendency for the use of imprisonment to be favoured more by the older members of our sample:

Recommend Imprisonment

	Fraud %	Car stealing %
Under 21 years (N=110)	62.7	42.7
21 - 30 years (N=312)	70.5	65.4
31 - 40 years (N=274)	78.5	74.8
41 - 50 years (N=219)	78.5	77.2
51 - 60 years (N=132)	82.6	78.0
60 years+ (N=146)	80.9	71.8

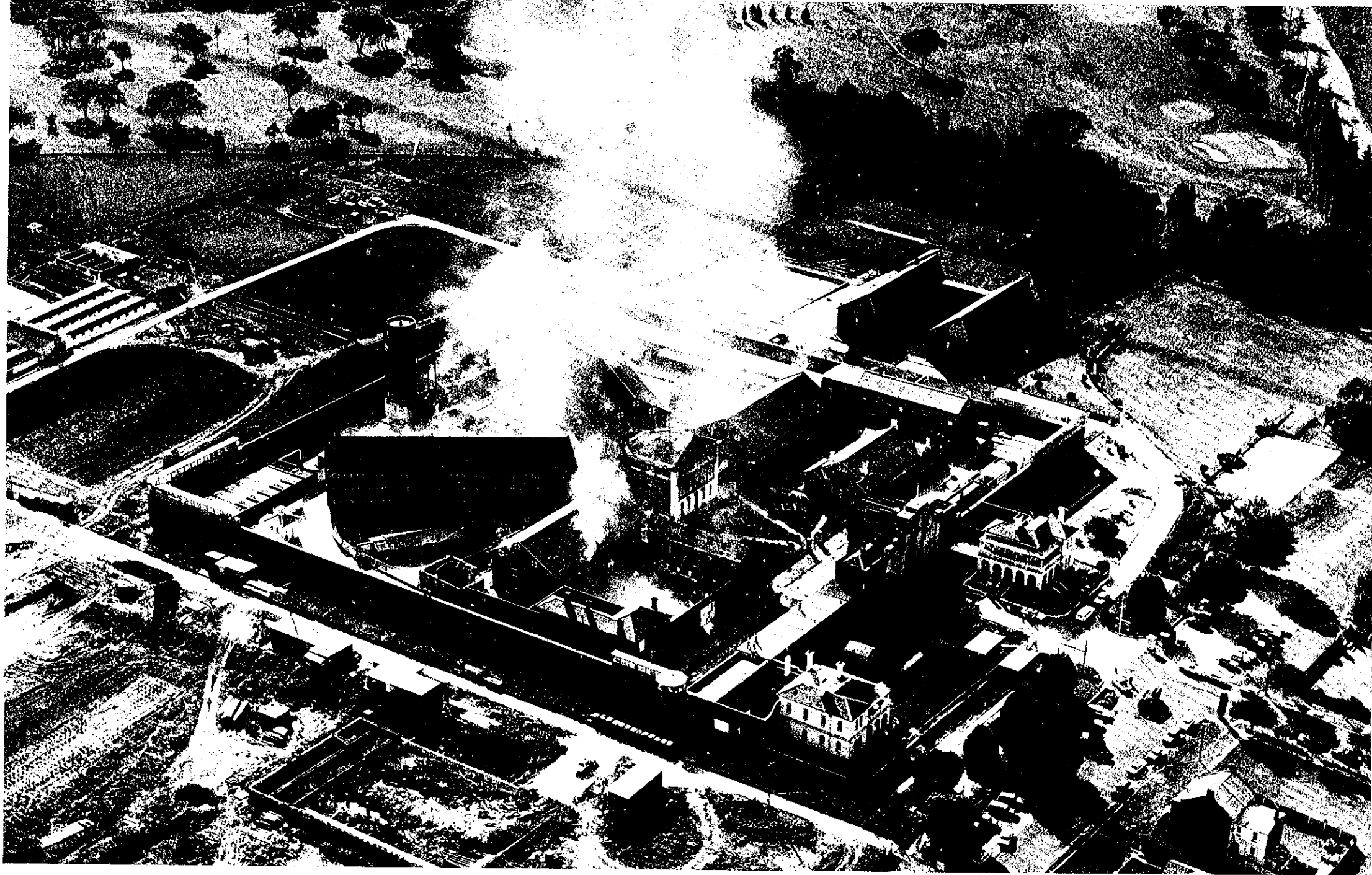
Law Enforcement

In view of the widespread feeling that crime is on the increase in our society, it is important to determine the standing, in the eyes of the public, of the machinery of criminal justice. How highly do Australians rate the work of the police, courts and prisons in dealing with crime? What, according to the public, are the relative strengths and weaknesses of these institutions?

To a considerable extent these questions have already been examined in other recent Bureau publications (see statistical Reports 12, 13 and 14 prepared by Congalton and Najman). However, similar questions in the present surveys serve a somewhat different purpose. They help us to see whether prison disturbances are associated with changing evaluations of the work of the police, courts and prisons. The presentation of this data properly belongs, therefore, to Part II of the report.

The Crime Rate

It is often said that crime is increasing at an alarming rate. The present survey offered an opportunity for assessing whether this feeling is widespread among Sydney people. Because our primary concern here is with methods of handling crime the discussion of the crime rate is presented separately in Appendix B.



PART II AFTER THE RIOTS

Our general approach to the study of the impact of the prison disturbances has already been discussed in an introductory note. It is now appropriate to indicate the ways in which the second survey presented opportunities for assessing the short term effect of the disturbances on public opinion.

Four sets of questions were involved in this assessment:

(i) Respondents again were asked to indicate what they considered to be the 'best way of handling crime';

(ii) More specifically, respondents were questioned about the main function of contemporary prisons and

(iii) the type of institution which they would like to see exist;

(iv) A general rating was made of the effectiveness of the work performed by the police, courts and prisons.

Handling Crime

General attitudes towards the handling of crime appear to have been unaffected by the disturbances in the State's prisons. Most people remain convinced that the best way to reduce crime is to 'stop criminals before they begin' rather than by 'cracking down' on offenders (see part I for the details of the question).

In the first survey, seven out of ten (69.6 per cent) of those interviewed believed the primary emphasis should be placed on prevention (see page 3). In the weeks following

the disturbances an almost identical number (71.0 per cent) indicated the importance of preventive action. Again, people of high occupational prestige were more likely to favour the preventive approach.

In similar fashion to the first survey, more than half (53.7 per cent) of those who stressed the value of prevention could only support their view with the general contention 'prevention is better than cure'. The differences between the two sets of results were generally marginal. Compared with the earlier study, a greater number indicated the futility of punishment in dealing with crime. However if this shift was in some way a reaction to recent happenings in the prison system, it was matched by a corresponding increase in the number of people who believed offenders should be helped to set 'lawful goals'.

Reasons for favouring prevention

	Study I (N=778)*	Study II (N=499)**
	%	%
Prevention better than cure	63.1	53.2
Educate/support parents	12.2	9.0
Sympathetic hearing/sorting out, can prevent crime	16.1	15.0
Need help in setting lawful goals	5.7	12.7
Futility of punishment approach	2.9	7.0
Other	-	2.6

* 52 people were unable to offer a supporting reason

** 86 people were unable to offer a supporting reason

Of the 239 (29 per cent) favouring a 'crack-down' on crime, an even higher proportion than in the first survey considered that no amount of talking could help. Almost half (47.6 per cent) stressed the futility of any approach other than a forceful demonstration of the unacceptability of criminal behaviour. A similar response had been given by approximately a third (34.4 per cent) of those favouring a 'crack-down' on crime in phase I of the study:

Reasons for favouring 'crack-down'

	Study I (N=349)*	Study II (N=208)**
	%	%
Futility of any other approach (no amount of talking will help)	34.4	47.6
Visible presence of police force only effective deterrent	22.9	18.3
Show of force (police/courts/ prisons) can frighten criminals	18.9	18.3
Need make it harder commit/ get away with crime	12.6	5.8
Other	11.2	10.0
	100.0	100.0

*14 people were unable to offer a supporting reason

**31 people were unable to offer a supporting reason

Major Function of Prisons

Half of the respondents in phase I of the study appeared to be convinced that contemporary prisons were 'mainly trying to be corrective'. One in three considered them to be 'mainly punitive'.

There appears to have been no dramatic change of attitude as a result of the prison disturbances. Their main influence appears to have been to remove the doubts of a relatively small group who previously said they didn't know the main function of contemporary prisons. They now considered that function to be 'mainly punitive'.

The net result was to bring into a more even balance the numbers who believed the main function of contemporary prisons to be 'corrective' or 'punitive'. One in ten still remained undecided:

	Phase I (N=1193)	Phase II (N=824)
	%	%
Mainly corrective	50.3	47.5
Mainly punitive	34.4	42.8
Don't know	15.3	9.7
	100.0	100.0

Recommended function

A different set of considerations was involved in the question of the type of institution which people say they would like to see exist. Public attitude studies in the past have shown that any disturbance of a strong majority opinion entails the danger of a reduction in the size of that majority. Before the riots 84 per cent said that prisons should be mainly corrective. Very few (5 per cent) were unable to express a preference. Virtually identical results were obtained after the riots. There was, if anything, a slight movement towards the punitive emphasis but 81.8 per cent still recommended a primarily corrective role:

Table VIII Recommended main function of prisons

	Phase I	Phase II
	%	%
Mainly corrective	83.9	81.8
Mainly punitive	11.0	13.7
Don't know	5.1	4.5
	<hr/> 100.0	<hr/> 100.0

The reasons given in support of a correctional approach closely resembled those advanced in the initial survey. The most frequently stated argument was that it is in the interests of society to help equip the prisoner to cope with the demands of the outside world. However, this justification was presented by 24.0 per cent of respondents compared with

39.0 per cent in phase I of the study.

The second survey saw a slight increase in the number who said that the essential task of the prison is to cultivate those positive attributes which they believe all inmates possess to some degree (1973: 16.0 per cent; 1974: 21.0 per cent). More than half the respondents who expressed this view added the rider that it is essential to separate the less experienced offenders from hardened criminals. Since this opinion hardly rated a mention in the 1973 study, it may reflect the intimidatory role alleged to have been played by 'hardened criminals' in the riots.

In two other respects, the 1974 results were identical with those obtained the previous year: (i) one in six of those who preferred that prisons should play a correctional role claimed that not every inmate is a 'real' criminal; (ii) one in ten again based their argument on the rights of the individual prisoner rather than the needs of society or the individual's capacity for change.

Rating The Police, Courts and Prisons

Public opinion is sometimes based more on general feelings than well reasoned argument. The three types of questions considered so far in this section have in common the fact that they assume a definite change in position or outlook on the part of the respondent. Perhaps this is why they have failed to reveal any major shifts in attitude as a result of the prison disturbances.

Maybe all that we could reasonably expect to happen in such a brief period is that a change might occur in the general positive or negative feeling a person has towards a subject like prisons. In some cases the 'only short-term effect of a prison riot might be to nudge some people in the direction of acquiring an attitude. If this is so, it would require a more general type of measuring instrument to record the changes taking place. The instrument used to obtain the results which follow, simply required people to rate from 'excellent' to 'very poor' the effectiveness of the police, courts and prisons in dealing with crime.

To what extent do people see the criminal justice system as a unitary whole, without clearly distinguishing the role of the police, courts and prisons? The results obtained in phase I indicate that people do indeed differentiate between these institutions, awarding higher ratings to some than to others, and displaying a higher degree of ignorance of some than of others.

The work of the police received by far the highest approval with 41 per cent of the sample rating their work in dealing with crime as either 'good' or 'excellent'. By comparison, a significant minority of respondents had no opinion at all about the work of the courts and the prisons. Of those who did have an opinion, only one in five rated their effectiveness as 'good' or 'excellent':

Table IX Effectiveness of police, courts, prisons (phase I study)
N=1193

	Police %	Courts %	Prisons %
Excellent	8.0	1.8	1.2
Good	32.4	16.7	13.8
Acceptable	37.2	30.6	26.5
Unsatisfactory	16.3	31.8	17.7
Very poor	4.8	5.5	6.0
Percentage of respondents who had no opinion	1.3	13.6	34.8

The disturbances at Bathurst and Goulburn did not appear to have any effect on attitudes to the police or the courts. This is clear from the pattern of percentages presented in the table below. Thus it would appear that people's attitudes to the functioning of the police, courts and prisons are relatively independent.

Table X Rating of police and courts (phase I/phase II)

	Police		Courts	
	Sample 1	Sample 2	Sample 1	Sample 2
	%	%	%	%
Excellent	8.0	7.4	1.8	2.1
Good	32.4	30.0	16.7	17.7
Acceptable	37.1	37.6	30.6	35.7
Unsatisfactory	16.3	14.0	31.8	29.5
Very poor	4.9	7.8	5.5	9.1
Don't know	1.3	3.3	13.6	5.9
TOTAL	1193	824	1193	824

The Prisons

In the first sample, we asked people, "How do you rate the job the prisons are doing in dealing with crime?" One would expect that if a prison riot had any effect on public opinion, it would be reflected in the answers to such a general question. This is in fact what we observed.

Second, it is clear from Table XI that opinion after the riot swung against the effectiveness of the work of the prisons. The number who expressed a positive attitude (either 'excellent' or 'good') remained virtually unaltered. However, the majority of those who formerly would have registered a 'don't know' answer delivered a negative rating (either 'unsatisfactory' or 'very poor') in the second sample.

Table XI Rating of the work of the prisons

	Before the disturbances (N=1193)		After the disturbances (N=824)	
	%	%	%	%
Excellent	1.2	1.3		
Good	13.7	14.7		
Acceptable	26.5	34.3		
Unsatisfactory	17.7	29.6		
Very poor	6.1	10.8		
Don't know	34.8	9.3		

Among those who rated prison work as excellent or good, there was a definite trend toward emphasizing the punitive rather than the rehabilitative, function of prisons. In the first sample, 40 per cent specifically mentioned punishment or rehabilitation as the reason for their attitude, with opinion divided equally between the two. In the second sample, people were more than five times more likely to emphasize the punitive aspect of prisons:

Reason for prison rating - excellent or good

	Sample 1 (N=178)	Sample 2 (N=132)
	%	%
Satisfactory or helpful form of punishment	20.2	28.0
Rehabilitative influence and/or training	19.7	5.3

Those critical of the work of the prisons gave a wider variety of reasons for their view. Dominant themes included the fact that prisons exert an inadequate reformatory influence, that they have insufficient resources to cope, or that they are just unproductive institutions.

Appendix A

Comparison of samples

Age composition of samples and
Sydney Metropolitan population

	Sample I (N=1193)	Sample II (N=824)	Sydney (1971 Census)
	%	%	%
18-20	9.3	9.2	7.5
21-30	26.2	23.2	24.3
31-40	23.0	19.6	18.2
41-50	18.4	20.5	18.6
51-60	11.1	13.2	14.7
61+	11.9	14.2	16.7
Don't know	0.1	0.1	-
	100.0	100.0	100.0

The two samples contained approximately the same number of men and women. In neither case did the sex composition depart significantly from the most recent census:

Sex composition of samples and
Sydney Metropolitan population

	Sample I (N=1193)	Sample II (N=824)	Sydney (1971 census)
	%	%	%
Male	42.7	45.7	48.9
Female	57.3	54.3	51.1
	100.0	100.0	100.0

Unfortunately, because of the haste with which the second survey had to be organised it was not possible in all cases to obtain the detailed information needed to place respondents on a scale of occupational prestige. However, when the 'not known' cases were excluded, the number of people from each status group within both samples was very similar:

Occupational status of respondents in the
two samples ('not known' cases excluded).

	Sample I (N=1032)*	Sample II (N=442)**
	%	%
A (Professional/managerial)	4.0	3.4
B (Semi-professional/middle management)	19.1	19.2
C (Sales, small business, clerical, trades skilled)	56.5	57.0
D Unskilled	20.4	20.4
	<hr/> 100.0	<hr/> 100.0

* 161 cases excluded because of lack of information

** 382 cases excluded because of lack of information

Appendix B

The Crime Rate

It is common to read in newspapers and magazines that the crime rate is increasing at an alarming rate and that it is no longer safe to walk the streets at night. Official publications, such as the F B I Uniform Crime Reports, appear to support this view, with the publication of 'crime clocks' ("MURDER - one every 30 minutes") and graphs with ominous titles and steeply inclined gradients. Similar Australian publications, as well as personal experience with housebreaking or shoplifting, may encourage Australians to believe that the crime boom is not restricted to the United States.

How, then, do Australians perceive the crime rate in their area? More than four out of every ten of our respondents (42 per cent) indicated their belief that the crime rate had increased in their area in the past year. A further 43 per cent believed that the crime rate had "stayed about the same". Fewer than one in twenty five (3.7 per cent) thought there had been a decrease in the past year.

Both sexes, all age groups and all occupational status groups were in substantial agreement about the crime rate. The greatest difference in attitude was between the 18-20 age group and those over 60: only 41 per cent of the younger age group thought the crime rate had increased, compared with 51 per cent of those over 60. This difference was not statistically significant.

In the American Presidential report Challenge of Crime in a Free Society*, it is stated that "The existence of crime,

*A report by the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and Administration of Justice. U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. February, 1967.

the talk about crime, the reports of crime, and the fear of crime have eroded the basic quality of life of many Americans". If the percentage of people indicating a belief in an increase in the crime rate is a pointer to this fear of crime then the quality of life of many Sydney residents is being similarly eroded. Comparisons are difficult because the comparable American survey was conducted in 1967. At that time 55 per cent of adults living in American metropolitan centres considered the crime rate to be increasing. The corresponding figure for Sydney was 42 per cent.

	Sydney (1973)	America - Metropolitan Centres (1967)
	%	%
Increasing	42.0	55.0
Decreasing	4.0	4.0
Same	43.0	35.0
Don't know	11.0	6.0

The reason most commonly cited for a belief in an increasing crime rate was "media publicity given to crime". Nearly half the group who indicated a belief in an increasing crime rate gave this as a reason, or simply stated that they were "aware of more crime generally". More than one in four (28 per cent) gave as their reason the incidence of a particular type of offence.

	Number	Percentage
Media publicity given to crime	112	23.3
Aware of more crime generally	109	22.7
Aware of more break and enter	62	12.9
Aware of more property offences	45	9.4
Aware of more attacks on people	31	6.4
Children/young people insufficiently supervised	29	6.0
Other	93	19.3
Total who said there had been an increase in the crime rate	491	100.0

People in the A - B occupational status group (the professional/white collar occupations) were more likely to cite an awareness of property offences as a reason for an increasing crime rate than were their semi-skilled and unskilled counterparts. Moreover, they were less likely to mention the media or an awareness of more crime "generally":

	Occupational status group		
	A-B (N=90)	C (N=230)	D (N=72)
	%	%	%
Media publicity given to crime	15.6	24.8	23.6
Aware of more crime generally	20.0	24.8	23.6
Aware of more property offences	16.7	8.3	9.7

The influence of the media appeared to increase with age. Five out of forty people under 21 (12.5 per cent) mentioned the media, compared with more than one in four (29.6 per cent) of those over 60:

Percentage who mentioned the media:

10-20 (N=40)	21-60 (N=368)	Over 60 (N=71)
%	%	%
12.5	23.1	29.6

The effect of the media on attitudes was also reflected in the American study cited above. In response to the same question, 27 per cent of those interviewed mentioned "What I read and see on television" as a reason for their belief in an increasing crime rate. No other reason was cited more often.